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by  
Dorothea  
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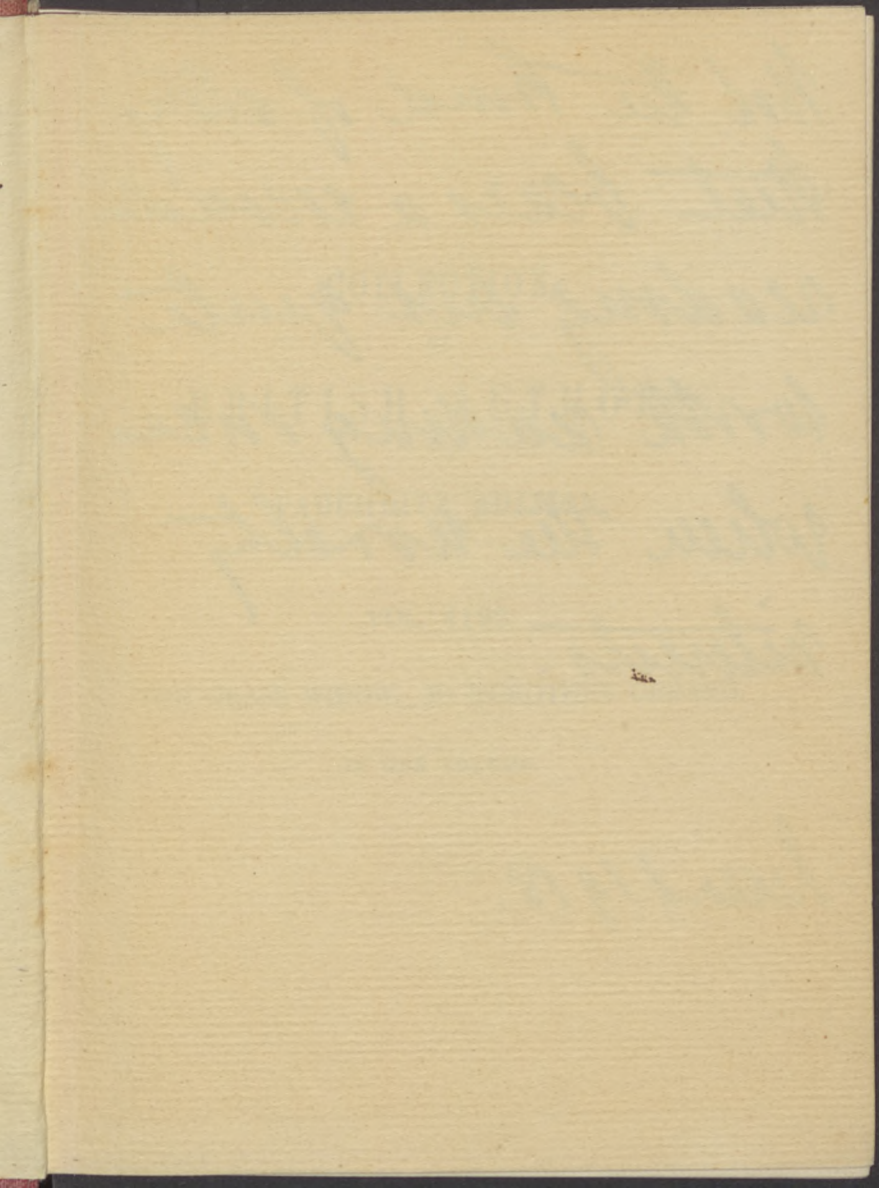
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THE  
GRASS WIDOW


BY

DOROTHEA GERARD

(MADAME LONGARD DE LONGGARDE)

AUTHOR OF "LADY BABY," "ONE YEAR," "ITINERANT DAUGHTERS,"  
"RESTITUTION," ETC.

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1910.



THE  
GRASS WIDOW

WIDOW'S TALENT

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## CONTENTS.

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### PART I.

CHAPTER		Page
	I. The Appointment . . . . .	7
—	II. "Golden Audrey" . . . . .	20
—	III. The Confession . . . . .	32
—	IV. No. 6 Rue G—— . . . . .	52
—	V. Mrs. Selville gets an Idea . . . . .	67
—	VI. The Contents of the Drawer . . . . .	87

### PART II.

—	I. "The Martyrs" . . . . .	102
—	II. Marianele . . . . .	115
—	III. The Willing Prisoner . . . . .	127
—	IV. The Abyss . . . . .	142
—	V. "The Deliverer" . . . . .	155

### PART III.

—	I. In the Realms of the Czar . . . . .	166
—	II. The "Jordan" . . . . .	177
—	III. Petru Swierzo . . . . .	185
—	IV. "The Tartar" . . . . .	196
—	V. Doctor Bonnef . . . . .	208

## PART IV.

	Page
CHAPTER I. The Lecture . . . . .	222
— II. Edward Leafy . . . . .	237
— III. The End of the Quest . . . . .	251
— IV. The Second Grass Widow . . . . .	260
— V. Beside a Stream . . . . .	269
— VI. The Locksmith . . . . .	279
— VII. Recognition . . . . .	291

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# THE GRASS WIDOW.

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## PART I.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE APPOINTMENT.

AUDREY SELVILLE looked shyly about her as she entered Kensington Gardens. The hour being early and the season late, they bore a certain deserted aspect which seemed to meet her wishes. Nothing but children and nurses, and these but sparsely sprinkled—the latter looking crosser, the former paler and peakier than usual, as though in urgent need of the impending transplantation to the country.

In one of the dusty avenues towards which she had gone without any hesitation, as though towards a goal, the girl sat down upon a bench, and, taking from her pocket a miniature volume, made a feint of being engrossed. That it was no more than a feint—a convenient means of cheating the curiosity of any inquisitive passer-by—might be inferred from the fact that after five minutes she had not yet turned a page, though

the pages were small. Over the edge of the dainty volume her eyes went up and down the avenue with a swift, expectant gaze whose excitement she attempted in vain to veil. They were clear, grey eyes, of that peculiar transparency whose candour seems to open a window into the soul within; and in that soul the spectator could not but divine that, although the inevitable dross would not be wanting, there must also be many treasures worth delving for. The August sun struck flashes from the gold of the magnificent hair, which, in defiance of fashion, coiled in heavy plaits above her neck. Nothing is more common than to talk of golden hair, nothing more rare than the genuine article—not the merely *blonde*, or the variously shaded yellow hair, but the true unadulterated gold—free of dross this—and almost metallic in its purity of tint. It was Audrey's one incontestable beauty: for to some the fresh oval of her face was wanting in regularity; and even the clearness of the grey eyes disappointed others, simply for the reason that they were not blue. She was perfectly though for her years almost too soberly dressed, and bore about every movement of her supple body, about every stitch upon her well-groomed person, the indescribable but unmistakable stamp of one of those favourites of fortune, who have never been embarrassed regarding a five-pound note, and to whom hunger and thirst are but names, and likely to remain so.

The book she held in her hand was a classic, one of those exquisite pocket editions which of late years have enriched us, and illustrated by more than a mere illustrator. It was to one of these pages—the representation of a youthful, though bearded Hercules, wrapped

in his lion's skin and stretched asleep beside his spiked club—that her eyes, when not otherwise occupied, constantly returned, kindling as they did so; while in those moments the dawn of a smile, very tender, very secret, curved her vivid lips.

How long ago was it that he—the original of the picture—it could be but that—had come into her life? So long ago that she could scarcely remember the time before it happened—so her heart would have answered; not a month ago, asserted the inexorable precision of arithmetical calculation. Why, it was only this day last month that she had started under Aunt Phœbe's wing for that long-talked-of Paris trip, undertaken in honour of her “coming of age,” and which was to settle her fate. Poor Aunt Phœbe! How little that warm, maternal wing had availed against its decrees!

From the moment when at the Comédie Française Audrey had become aware of a more than usually persistent opera-glass which she could not look into the parterre without encountering, matters had progressed at a rate well deserving to be called breathless. The wielder of the opera-glass had been upon her passage—not by chance, as even her inexperience guessed—when she left the box with her aunt; and from that time onward it would seem that he had not again lost sight of her. How otherwise explain his unfailing presence at every point of the sight-seeing that was being so conscientiously absolved? Upon the platform of the Eiffel Tower he reappeared as surely as in the galleries of the Louvre, or under the arches of Notre Dame. If Audrey did not feel annoyed, it could only be because, persistence notwithstanding, there was no

thing flavouring of audacity either in his glance or bearing. There was, on the contrary, something that looked almost like reverence and at moments like a great pain. Her amusement had soon deepened to interest, her interest to something to which she did not at once dare to give a name, but which, even nameless, made but short work both of her will and of her commonsense.

In her secluded, though luxurious, country life, she had never seen anybody exactly like this, though she had read of the type in books: the small-headed, mighty-shouldered, almost classical-featured man, whose olive pallor throws up the jet blackness of his hair; in his luminous brown eyes, which had at once some of the wildness and some of the softness of animal eyes, there was an element which she did not know how to explain. Later on she identified it as fanaticism; but for the present its very mystery served but to rivet her interest. Though he wore the small, pointed beard of a Frenchman, she divined from the first that he was not French. His stature alone, towering out of every crowd of Parisians, precluded that idea. Besides, he had none of the vivacity, none of the precision of the French gesture; and he had something in his face which no Frenchman ever has, and which is the property not of nations with a past, but of those with a future. The first words which she heard from his lips—words of broken French—confirmed her impressions.

It was in a strange and uncanny place that those first words fell: the vaults beneath the Pantheon which she was traversing among a troupe of tourists, under official guidance. Her aunt, plagued with the toothache and

afraid of a chill, had resigned herself to remaining above, and was waiting for her charge, at that moment, beside the great iron door of the exit.

"Mademoiselle—these steps are slippery—may I pray you to be careful?"

No words ever heard had thrilled Audrey as did this commonplace appeal, whose trembling eagerness betrayed that it was not spoken for its own sake, but for the sake of other things impossible to put into words just then.

"Thank you," was all she said, endeavouring vainly to command her treacherous colour, and already keenly conscious that the first material point of contact was established. As for the immaterial one, that had had no need of words.

During the rest of the tour through the vaults he had never been far from her, though never too near either, visibly intent upon awakening no apprehensions, now and then only hazarding some remark about the monuments, to which she replied with fast-beating heart. The weird surroundings, the fantastically distributed light, the hollow-sounding voices, were adding to her excitement by the intrusion of other emotions. She seemed to herself to have been abruptly removed to an unknown world, quite different from the world above-ground, and in which the conventional rules of that world could have no validity. Even the American tourists and the French provincials around her seemed to have taken upon themselves a touch of the visionary. Neither Audrey nor the black-bearded stranger had listened with more than one ear to the discourses of the guide, as he rattled off his string of biographies before



the historical tombs. Here, among the abodes of the dead, Life, and that which gives to Life its highest price, was moving too strongly within the two young people to let them even remember that they were mortal.

At one moment only did the attention of the stranger appear to be violently called back to his real surroundings. It was before the tomb of Jean Jacques Rousseau, and while the usual eulogy of the great preparer of the revolution was being spoken, that Audrey noticed with a sort of surprise that he was among the most enthusiastic of those who cried "*Vive Rousseau!*" That French republicans should wave their hats, as these were doing, did not astonish her; but this alien! She felt that it required an explanation.

When they came up again out of the bowels of the earth Audrey found her aunt in distress, for a sharp thunder shower was pelting the pavement outside, and no taximeter within sight. It was while they stood hesitating under the portico that the stranger made his second move by offering—in broken English this time—to fetch a conveyance. He brought it himself and assisted them to enter, during which operation, for one passing moment, Audrey's hand had perforce touched his.

"An extremely well-mannered young man," the anything but Argus-eyed Mrs. Selville had said as they left the Pantheon behind them. A remark to which Audrey gave a vaguely guilty silence, although the approval in her aunt's tone was a distinct relief, as laying the foundation of a sort of self-justification which she began to foresee as likely to become necessary—a double relief too, since it argued a blindness which could not fail to have its conveniences.

It was Versailles that was planned for next day, and already she began to wonder whether *he* would be there again, and how he contrived to follow their movements.

Of course he was there. It was scarcely a surprise, and yet it was almost a shock when, coming into the first sculpture gallery, Audrey saw the broad-shouldered, small-headed figure, whose silhouette she was getting quite expert at identifying, slowly promenading before the statues. This time even Aunt Phœbe was visited by a ray of recognition.

“Dear me, that is the polite young man who got us the carriage yesterday, is it not, Audrey?” she exclaimed so spontaneously that the man himself could not but hear it. Nor was he slow to avail himself of the advantage thus offered. A tentative bow having been hazarded and returned, together with an encouraging smile—for Mrs. Selville, being constitutionally incapable of logical deduction, was for ever rushing into those places on which, proverbially, angels are afraid to tread—an introduction almost unavoidably followed.

It was a Slavic-sounding name which the stranger mentioned: Dobrowicz—a Russian name, as Audrey, during the tour of the palace, found out; it being only natural, or, at any rate, made to appear natural, that the new acquaintance should accompany the English ladies on their round, supplementing the items in the guide-book by such information as he possessed. This, however, proved so insufficient, that Mrs. Selville, a little disappointed in him and very keen upon making the most of her day, soon fell victim to one of the troop of guides ever lying in wait for the tourist.

From that moment onward the young Russian had a clear field before him and made the most of it. As the two young people followed the absorbed Aunt Phœbe, whose attention was pretty equally divided between her guide-book and the uniformed cicerone, opportunities occurred too golden to be missed by any but a bungler; and this man was evidently no bungler.

He was a stranger at Paris—so he told Audrey; and this, as he now confessed, was his first visit to Versailles. Was he studying? she asked shyly, for despite his well-grown beard his youthfulness was palpable; to which, after a moment's hesitation he had replied, with a somewhat sardonic smile: "Yes, I am studying—hard." A moment later he added—

"I am studying mechanics. It is a subject which interests me immensely."

This struck Audrey as rather disappointing. Somehow she would have liked to discover that he followed some more artistic profession. That light in his eyes tallied so little with so cut and dry an occupation as mechanics. There were other things about him, besides his eyes, which she did not know how to explain. As, for instance, when standing before a life-sized picture, in which a golden-haired woman figured largely, he seemed to fall into a reverie so deep as to be almost a trance. When he roused himself it was to ask abruptly:

"Why do women not always wear their hair in this fashion? Is it not absurd to hide away such wealth as this under their hats?"

"But think of the mess they would get it into?" objected Mrs. Selville. And with that inopportunity in which she excelled, she added:

"Just imagine my niece with her hair down her back! Why, it would be worse than a mat before evening!"

"I am imagining it!" murmured Dobrowicz, detaching his gaze from the picture in order to fasten it upon the coils at the back of Audrey's head.

Catching the look Audrey coloured, not quite knowing what to make of it; for it was not a glance of *banale* admiration, not a glance of admiration at all, so far as she could judge, but expressed several things which seemed to have no proper place there, such as irritation, displeasure, and, most conspicuous, an anxious perplexity, as of one struggling with a problem.

At another moment, too, he astonished and rather disquieted Audrey. This was when, in Louis XVI's bedroom, Mrs. Selville was indulging in a plaintive wail over the unfortunate monarch.

"Poor, dear man! To think that after sleeping in a bed like this, he had to come down to a prison mattress!"

By the strange side-look which Dobrowicz gave her aunt Audrey knew, even before he spoke, that he was going to say something unexpected.

"And how about the millions of people who have lived like pigs upon straw while he and his fathers revelled in this palace?"

"To be sure—yes; it is sad to think of, but they were used to it, you see, which makes a difference."

"Does it? Perhaps it does. But even pigs—the two-legged sort, at least—may have enough of the straw some day."

"I suppose so—yes, I suppose so," murmured Mrs.

Selville, feeling rather at sea, and moving on in the less troubling company of her cicerone.

For the rest no more than indifferent remarks had followed, until at last in the partial privacy created by the vast proportions of the *Salle des Glaces*, Dobrowicz had found the opportunity of unburdening his heart of that which for a week past he had been carrying about with him. Here, with the shades of History around her, and with her own image beside his thrown back to her on all sides, Audrey listened, palpitating, to the first words of love she had ever heard. Of so burning an eloquence were those words, so heavily fraught with passion, so unmistakably stamped with the impress of sincerity, that at the very first of them she felt her instinctive resistance tottering—the more so as, despite the ardour, there was nothing to alarm her womanly pride—nothing but that almost religious look of reverence to reassure, together with the suggestion of a hidden pain to disarm her.

“Oh, I don’t know—I don’t know,” was all she could stammer in reply to his urgent question as to whether she could love him in return. And yet she knew already that she could—and better probably than was wise.

When just before the moment of parting she consented to name the hotel at which, with her aunt, she would be staying in London, it seemed to herself like the making of an appointment; and when two days only after the return to England she received a note signed Demetr Dobrowicz, and in which she was urgently entreated to meet him at a certain entrance of the neighbouring Kensington Gardens, the thing seemed almost

inevitable. Reasons for this clandestine proceeding had not been given, but indicated. The gravest causes—a question of life and death—made it impossible for him to woo her openly; all he craved for was ten minutes, in which to put his fate into her hands. The wording was so cloudy and at the same time so suggestive that Audrey's imagination fell captive on the instant. No one—not even she herself—had ever suspected what a fund of the commodity she possessed, nor how it had been fed large by the very monotony of the country life she had lived since childhood. One of the peculiarities of comfort and ease is—with a certain stamp of character—to produce a surfeit of itself—a longing for its opposite, or, at any rate, for a taste of it. Punctual dinner-gongs and well-raked walks, and the curtsey of the lodge-keeper at the gate were pleasant things in themselves, but scarcely stimulating. Exactly because she was hedged round with care and amiable conventions, a strong desire to look over the hedge and see what there was at the other side, was almost inevitable.

“Will nothing exciting ever happen?” she had sometimes asked herself despondently. What wonder, then, that her cheeks burned as she held Demetr Dobrowicz's note in her hand? Here was excitement with a vengeance! Should she put it from her because of the possible danger? Why, it was in the danger itself that the chief allurements lay. The only sort of danger which might have scared her off was non-existent here, since even those few meetings had sufficed to tell her that Dobrowicz was at least her equal in culture and probably in social standing.

The mental struggle was neither sharp nor long;

*The Grass Widow.*



and next day, at the hour named, in a mixture of trepidation and curiosity, she kept the appointment in Kensington Gardens.

Here, under the no longer green trees, the avowal begun at Versailles was completed, and supplemented. Nor did the words glow any less intensely in the English atmosphere than they had done in the French. And this time Audrey no longer attempted to say—"I don't know." She knew, and she confessed that she knew that for the first time in life the blind god—on this occasion even a little blinder than usual—had celebrated his entry into her heart. The longing she had brought with her was satisfied, but not the curiosity; for again nothing was explained though much was hinted at.

"May I really not tell my aunt?" she had pleaded in the first joy of the mutual understanding; "you do not need to be afraid of her opposition, since I am my own mistress. I became twenty-one only the other day."

"That is all the better," he said with evident satisfaction. "It will make things easier. And I am not afraid of your aunt, but still you must not speak. I cannot tell you why. My mouth is closed for the present. I can only ask you to trust me. All I can say is that if our engagement becomes public just now, my life would not be safe for a day. Can you trust me, my golden love—only for awhile?"

Of course she could, and told him so with generous devotion in her eyes, with maiden shame upon her cheeks. On the whole, she was not even sorry of this necessity of secrecy, which could not but greatly enhance the romance of the situation,

It was only after the abatement of the first raptures that attendant circumstances had a chance of being discussed. She now learned from Dobrowicz that his father had been a professor of literature at the University of Moscow, highly distinguished in his especial field, and that his mother had been Greek—which at once explained to her that classic mould of features, so unusual in a Slav. They were both dead now, and he alone in the world. "Except for my comrades," he added with one of the brilliant lights that were apt to pass like lightning through the brown of his eyes—"my dear and true comrades."

Audrey, though frankly anxious to know more about these "comrades," which she could only suppose to be his fellow-students—began to think that it was her turn to give some account of herself. Was it not her duty to inform him of her position, of her fortune? But at the very first word he stopped her, almost sternly.

"It is nothing to me how much money you may have or not have. For me the gold you wear upon your beautiful head is all the gold that counts."

And his eyes went again towards the massive plaits coiled above her neck, whose brilliancy seemed to draw them as might a lodestone.

The unthinking magnanimity of the words was exactly the thing to appeal to her. Her heart leaped in response. To be loved for herself had always been her strong desire; to be wooed for her fortune, her standing dread. This man would not even listen to its mention; and her instinct divined this disregard to be sincere. It was evidently not that which interested him.



Since then she had met him three or four times on this same spot, though only for minutes at a time, snatched during the *séances* which Mrs. Selville was enduring at her dentist's, and for the sake of which this London fortnight had been inserted between Paris and Lockwood Hall, whose leafy shade beckoned invitingly to the dust of "empty" London. But not to Audrey; for to that shade Demetr Dobrowicz would surely not be able to follow? And without him, would its peaceful retreat be any longer endurable?

A decision of some sort must necessarily be approaching. Only this morning her aunt had told her that there remained but one more tooth to be stopped. It was because she knew that she must to-day take decisive counsel with her lover that Audrey's heart beat so fast as she sat upon her solitary bench, and that she quite forgot to turn the pages of her book. Because of this also it was that the blood mounted so suddenly to her face when one of her furtive glances fell at last upon a figure which was neither that of a nurse nor of a nurse's charge, and which, with every appearance of haste, was striding towards her.

## CHAPTER II.

### "GOLDEN AUDREY."

THE first thing that struck her about him was his attire. Hitherto she had seen him only with one of those soft black felts upon his head whose very unconventionality had pleased her. To-day his jet-black hair was crowned by the correctest of tall hats, and a well-

cut frock-coat showed off the splendid proportions of his figure. Why this ceremonious attire? Audrey asked herself, as with frank admiration she watched his approach, a smile dawning about her lips. Even with all the disadvantages of modern garments, there was no doubt about his being a magnificent figure of a man.

"I am late," he said, as he earnestly pressed the little hand held towards him. "You shall hear presently why. Not from want of impatience. You believe me there, do you not, my golden Audrey?" And he smiled down tenderly upon her.

The imperfect French in which he spoke—easier to him than his still more imperfect English—gained a charm from the melodious depth of the tone, and from the velvet softness imparted by a Slavic tongue.

"I believe everything you say," replied Audrey, as simply as a child, and looking up, shyly, into the brilliant, dark eyes under whose spell she fell anew at each meeting. "If I thought you could lie to me, do you suppose I would be here?"

"I know you would not— It is allowed, is it now?" he asked in the same moment, and waited for her movement of assent before taking place beside her. "Far from being patient, I was even more impatient than usual to-day."

"So was I," admitted Audrey. "I am afraid this is the last time I can come here—you got my note?"

"I did; and I have been thinking ever since; and not only thinking but acting."

"Ah! you have some plan?"

"Indeed I have. But it is one which demands con-

fidence from you; perhaps more confidence than you can give."

His eyes were anxiously exploring her face. About the whole man there was a suggestion of badly-suppressed excitement, betraying itself in nervous movements of his hands and in quick jerks of his eyebrows. Twice already he had pulled out his watch.

"Have I deserved this reproach?" she asked below her breath.

His ruffled brow cleared on the instant.

"No, you have not; but I am in a black mood. It is my head, I think."

"Your head? Oh, you are not ill?"

"No—not ill, only the remains of my accident, I suppose. I told you, did I not, of the accident I had this summer?"

She shook her head, fearfully scanning his face.

"No need to look so startled, my love. It is only that I had a fall in the Swiss mountains last June, while crossing them on foot. It must have been a bad fall in its way, for I did not get back my senses for ever so many days afterwards; but I survived, as you see, and the spot where I struck my head only hurts me at times—as to-day, for instance. Perhaps it is the fault of this hat. But the whole thing is of no consequence. Let us talk of more urgent matters. They are more urgent even than you know. It is not only that you have to leave London; it is also that I am forced to leave England—at once."

"Ah!" said Audrey, in a sharp accent of pain.

"I am called back to Paris, and have no choice but to go. If I was able to tell you all, you would

understand. As it is you must be content with—not understanding."

"Then you have come here to say good-bye?" asked Audrey, strangling a sob in her throat.

He leaned forward on the bench to plunge his gaze into her eyes.

"Not quite, my golden one, not quite!"

For a moment the eager scrutiny persisted, then through the probing eyes there passed a shadow as of a doubt, and with a quick sigh they were withdrawn. With some undefinable suggestion of disappointment, the tense attitude relaxed. It was not the first time that Audrey had noticed the symptom and puzzled over it. In those moments he would seem to be looking in her face for something which he did not find, and although the impression was too fleeting for analysis, in some subtle manner it jarred with the protestations she had heard from his lips. To-day her attention was too much absorbed by other things to let her linger over the riddle.

"You will write to me, of course?"

He appeared to be pulling himself together, to be shaking off some pursuing thought.

"How should I support life without writing to you and without hearing from you? But that is not enough. There must be more. Are you feeling strong enough now, I wonder, to hear my plan?"

"A plan for our future?"

"Yes—for the near future."

She gazed at him, silently questioning.

Not allowing her eyes to escape from his, he asked: "Would the thought of a clandestine marriage frighten you?"

“A clandestine marriage?”

Audrey repeated the words in a somewhat scared tone. And yet the alarm awakened was not entirely disagreeable. Was not the suggestion alone an eminently fitting link in the chain of abnormal events?

Meanwhile he was pressing his cause and urging his reasons: the imperative necessity of his departure—the impossibility of giving her his name before the world. That she should shrink from the exposure of an elopement he could understand; but what was it he asked for, after all? Only that she should become his lawful wife in secret, immediately returning to the protection of her relations, since separation was for the present, alas! imperative. In what was a clandestine marriage more reprehensible than a clandestine engagement? And would not the reasons which justified the one equally justify the other?

Her sense approved the logic, even though she inevitably protested, since the trammels of convention cling fast, even to unwilling limbs.

“Yes—but would there be any necessity for such a step? We could remain engaged for the present, could we not? and later on, when the dangers you speak of are passed—”

“There can be no ‘later on.’ If I leave England now with no stronger link between us than now subsists, my conviction tells me that we shall never meet again, except perchance as strangers. Either we must be bound to each other irrevocably, or else we must be content to say farewell to each other and to go our separate ways. Make your choice, my love. Mine was made long ago.”

A sense of flurry came over Audrey.

"Before you leave—but that would be so soon! Do you mean in a few days already?"

He bent again towards her, with all the compulsion of his eyes bearing down upon her, to say very plainly, though almost in a whisper:

"I mean to-day."

"Ah, but that is impossible," came from Audrey in instinctive protest, while simultaneously she was visited by a flash of enlightenment regarding the reason of the tall hat and the frock-coat.

"Impossible only if you refuse; very possible otherwise and very expeditious too. This country of yours is full of conveniences for lovers. I will do it that justice."

"But surely there have to be preliminaries," objected Audrey, who was trembling now and whose breath was coming fast.

"Very few, and those are made. Have you never heard of marriage by private licence? Look—I have it here in my pocket."

Drawing out a folded document he placed it in her hand. With trembling fingers she unfolded the stiffly crackling sheet whereon her own name and his danced before her eyes through a haze of excitement, and in the midst of some dry and formal-looking lines, which bore at their foot the impress of an official seal.

"This paper authorises us to become man and wife any day within three months. Oh, I have taken my informations—never fear! The office is not five minutes from here. Within half an hour from now the whole thing may be over. What say you, my golden Audrey?"

She said nothing, but still sat staring at the por-

tentious document with a heart which was beating more stormily every minute; and still his entreating voice spoke in her ear.

"If you mistrust me, then tear up that paper and let us say good-bye; but if you do not—"

"But—but it would not be for long, would it? I mean the time would come when I could tell my aunt—and my cousin; when I could be your wife in the face of the world, and not only in secret?"

In Audrey's mind an attraction and a repulsion were struggling. For in so far as secrecy was deceptive, it was hateful of course, while in so far as it was romantic it was delightful.

"It will come—I cannot say when, but it will come. To take you with me just now is impossible; but in time I will return to claim you. We will make a home for ourselves."

He broke off suddenly, with a blank gaze fixed not upon her but upon the bushes straight across the way, and slowly carrying his hand to his head. His ruffled brow, his whole aspect, showed that trance-like absorption which she had noted first in the picture-gallery at Versailles, and more than once since.

"Do you believe in soul-transference?" he asked abruptly.

"In *what?*"

"Soul-transference. The theory of previous existences. What the Buddhists teach, and the theosophists."

"No, of course I do not," she said quickly, bewildered by the change of topic, as well as of its choice at such a juncture. "Surely you do not?"

"Sometimes I think I do, only at moments. Without

that how can you account for those impressions—memories I should like to call them—rising up out of the past—isolated landmarks, so to say, with nothing discernible around them. Surely you know what I mean?"

"No—I don't think I do," stammered Audrey.

"Then you do not know what it is—in the very moment of an act or of a sentence, to be visited by a strange sense of repetition—a conviction that you are not doing or saying this thing for the first time, although the memory of that first time quite eludes you. It comes to me at moments; just now, for instance, when I said those words—and yet if I ever said them before, it can only have been in some other state of existence."

His hand was still pressing his forehead, as though in the effort to revive memory, but the deep folds of perplexity did not smoothe. Audrey, gazing at him, astonished, felt one of those slight shivers running over her which are apt to touch us at contact with anything that lies beyond our ken.

"Even you"—he was still speaking in that strange, absorbed tone, while his eyes, full of pain now, turned back hungrily to her face—"even you I seem to have met in that other life, and yet, no—it was not you."

The quick sigh she had heard once to-day came from his lips again, so sad, so forlorn, that a wave of pity swept both wonder and fear aside.

"Demetr," she whispered, stealing her hand into his, "what is it? What ails you?"

At the touch of her fingers he smiled, then having glanced quickly up and down the walk, raised them impetuously to his lips. All the perplexity in his face had turned to yearning tenderness.



"Am I to tear it up?" he asked, taking the paper from her unresisting fingers.

She shook her head, her face rose-red under his triumphant eyes.

"Then you will come with me—at once? It will have to be at once if your aunt is not to miss you. At what o'clock does she expect you?"

And once more he pulled out his watch.

"At eleven."

"A quarter past ten now—only just time. Come!" he said almost imperiously, rising as he spoke.

Audrey, her spirits bounding up suddenly to the level of the moment, followed his example. She was no longer trembling now. Hesitation was dead, craven doubts cast behind her, as she raised her smiling eyes to the man beside her. So great was the glamour of his presence, that what she was going to do seemed to her not only the only desirable but even the only possible course.

At the gate a handy hansom served to shorten the interval remaining. During the brief drive they sat almost silent, though hand in hand. What remained of trepidation was easier stilled by the protecting pressure of those strong fingers.

Once struck by a thought, she asked:

"Are not witnesses required?"

"So they are, but only for the act itself. Any passer-by will do for that. I have made all necessary enquiries."

Then, a moment later:

"You must leave at once? To-day?"

"To-day. I shall send you a card from Dieppe,

and you shall hear from me constantly, of course, though my letters will have to be addressed to 'Miss Selville.' You will not mind that, will you?" and he smiled at her, half apologetically. "I need not tell you that I shall live upon the hope of the replies. Stay—I have not given you my Paris address."

Taking out his pocket-book he scrawled a line into it and tore out the page. Just as the hansom stopped, Audrey stuffed it into her hand-bag.

Often in memory did Audrey return to the course of the half-hour which followed, striving to assure herself that what had happened within that space had been an event of real life, and not an acted scene upon the stage.

The first sensation on crossing the threshold of the Registry Office had been one of painful publicity. What! a secret marriage this, with the light of day on all sides, and the door open to all comers? Must not the whole world know at once that she, Audrey Selville, had married Demetr Dobrowicz? But relief soon followed, engendered by the absence of astonishment on the part of the officials, and of attention on that of the other visitors to the office. Clearly these men and women were all too busy with their own affairs to trouble about hers. As she began to realise that she was not Audrey Selville at all to these people, but a mere feminine unit, as deeply disguised by her unknown identity as by any hood or cloak, some of her discomfort abated. But a sense of incongruity remained. The plain, unadorned space, the matter-of-fact proceedings of what was evidently a mere business transaction, struck her as so entirely out of proportion to the act itself, as almost to make her

doubt of its validity. One couple had passed out with their witnesses and with smiling faces just as Audrey and Dobrowicz entered. Within the office an old gentleman, about to marry his third wife and so impatient to do so that he had come here half-an-hour before the appointed time, was fuming and fretting. Having produced the licence and answered some questions put to him, Dobrowicz, with a gesture of elaborate politeness, turned to the grey-haired bridegroom.

"Would it be demanding too much of a service, sir," he asked in his quaintly-broken English, "if I request you to be our witness? I am a stranger here—without friends."

"All right!" broke in the old gentleman with a choleric laugh. "As good a way as any other of killing time. Your lady is more punctual than mine, it would seem."

And he threw an angry, though approving glance at Audrey.

"You require a second witness," explained an official from behind a desk.

"There are plenty in the street. Just give me two minutes, if you please!"

Having been gone for not much more than that time, Dobrowicz re-entered the office with a short-sighted, long-nosed youth, whom he had picked out of the crowd of passers-by as seeming to him to be rather less in a hurry than the rest, and whom he presented to Audrey with the explanation that this gentleman had been kind enough to agree to serve them.

With these two chance acquaintances at their heels, the couple now penetrated into the inner sanctuary,

where, within a few minutes, in the presence of the Superintendent Registrar, the fearfully simple rite was accomplished.

"William Evans, wine-merchant," was the name which the impatient old gentleman put down in the space reserved for the signature of the witnesses, while the short-sighted youth, whose nose, during the operation, almost touched the paper, described himself as "Edward Leafly, student of medicine."

Within half-an-hour of the time at which they had left Kensington Gardens the two young people had shaken hands with the witnesses, and were out in the street again, where the hansom which had brought them still waited.

"Mine for ever!" whispered Dobrowicz as he helped the agitated Audrey to mount the step.

"And is this good-bye?" she asked through the tears of joy or of grief—she hardly knew which—that were filling her eyes.

"For the present only. I go from here to Victoria Station—*via* my lodgings. To-night I shall be at Paris. You have the address?"

Another rapid pressure of hands—another dumb exchange of glances, and then:

"Parker's Hotel!" said Dobrowicz, stepping back upon the pavement.

For Audrey the passers-by did not exist as she leaned eagerly forward, in order to catch the last glimpse of the black-bearded figure, whose soul seemed striving to follow her through his eyes—those wonderful eyes that were at once so soft and so wild.

When she reached the hotel, only a little behind

time, she was relieved to find her aunt not yet there. It was only a few minutes later that Mrs. Selville, radiant from the final release from torture, entered the room.

"That's a good morning's work, anyway!" she exclaimed, sinking breathless into a chair. "We can go home to-morrow, I've got my ticket-of-leave from Mr. Belters."

Then, her eyes chancing upon Audrey's face:

"What a colour you have to-day, Audrey! Were the bargains at that autumn sale really so wonderful? Anyone could see that you too have done a good morning's work."

"Yes, indeed!" murmured Audrey, finding it convenient, even though Aunt Phœbe's eyes were not keen, to avert her face for a moment.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE CONFESSION.

"DOES it not strike you, mother, that Audrey is looking ill?" remarked Captain Selville, across the breakfast-table one October morning, having first lent an ear to the light footsteps just retiring across the hall.

Mrs. Selville started violently as she emerged from behind the gardening catalogue she was studying.

"Audrey ill?" she asked, staring aghast at her son.

"Well, out of sorts, or unhappy, or something of that kind. Since your return from Paris she does not seem to me to be the same person. Have you really noticed nothing?"

She had not. Mrs. Selville never noticed anything that was not pushed straight under her nose—but, once so pushed, she always drew the extremest conclusions. All her conclusions were jumped at, never arrived at by reasonable and gradual deduction.

“Dear me, Dick, ought I not to take her up to London at once? or perhaps it would be safer to make her go to bed?”

Mrs. Selville's physical characteristics were a long-drawn colourless face, not fine-grained enough to be compared to ivory, but which might fitly suggest its substitute, celluloid, and smooth, yellowish-white hair, matching the skin so closely as almost to melt into it. As for her mental characteristics, enough has been said to betray that she possessed the genius of inopportunity in a highly developed degree. In other words she was one of those excellent persons who are always doing kind acts at the wrong moment, and saying pleasant things at junctures which turn them into unpleasant ones. The sense of fitness, either of time, locality or matter, was, in her constitution, represented by a blank. Although, in theory, she would doubtless have agreed with Solomon as to there being a right time and a wrong time for everything, yet did her practice so little accord with what was—presumably—his, that she was for ever sowing when she ought to have been reaping, working when she ought to have been playing—and *vice versa*—and, above all, not holding her tongue when she would far better have been doing so.

Her only son, a retired infantry captain within measurable distance of middle-age, was one of those persons who, for want of salient features, become almost

indescribable. Except for a touch of tan acquired during his Indian time, and for a remnant of military drill, which served to square his otherwise somewhat lanky shoulders, there was absolutely nothing to take hold of in a descriptive fashion. Both in appearance and in manner he was quite the most inconspicuous person for ten miles round—neither dark nor fair, neither tall nor short, neither sad nor gay, and neither stupid nor clever, as his friends asserted, so that the negative description fitted all round. His mother had only one grievance against him, but that a standing one: his persistent bachelorhood. Ever since the day when he had stepped into his inheritance she had been watching for the hoped-for daughter-in-law—impatiently at first, less and less hopefully since Dick's hair had begun to grizzle about the temples. He had no time to go a-wooing, he assured her; the estate kept him too busy. Considering the size of the estate, it was a wonder rather that he had not been wooed long since by some enterprising maiden of the neighbourhood. But here his retiring manner had come in the way.

“Bescheidenheit ist eine Zier,  
Doch kommt man weiter ohne ihr—”\*

runs one of the shrewdest of German sayings. Barrack life had done no more than superficially correct this unpractical quality in Richard Selville, who from boyhood upwards had never known how to make the most of himself, who had left school without carrying off a single prize, and had gone through two campaigns without being decorated, although it was the private opinion of some of his comrades that the D.S.O. should by rights

\* “Modesty is an ornament, but you get on further without it!”

have figured twice over upon his tunic. To avoid attracting attention seemed, on the whole, to be the object he chiefly aimed at—and perfectly achieved. In the regiment he had been known as one of the “quiet fellows,” of which there always is a small leaven to livelier elements. Eminently quiet, certainly, were his grey-blue eyes, through which spoke a mind which you divined to be accurately balanced, though you would not necessarily divine more.

“Mother, dear,” he smiled now with soothing calm, “before ordering Audrey to bed, would it not be wiser to—”

He broke off at the sound of the opening door, and then bit his lip at sight of Audrey herself come back to fetch the letter she had forgotten beside her plate.

“Audrey, my dear, come here this minute and let me feel your pulse. Here is Dick declaring that you are looking ill, and should be shown to the doctor at once.”

Captain Selville bit his lip a little harder and inwardly marvelled at his own imprudence. Why, knowing his beloved mother and her peculiarities, had he not kept his observations to himself, as he had kept so many other things?

Audrey, colouring hotly, had faced towards her aunt.

“I am not ill at all,” she protested. “What a ridiculous idea!”

“Hum! Well, your pulse *is* going at an awful rate. I do believe Dick is right. Now, I wonder whether it would be better to go to London at once, or to send for Doctor—”

“Leave me alone! Oh, *please* leave me alone!”



cried the girl in a tone of exasperation, wrenching her hand from her aunt's investigating clasp. "I don't want a doctor. There is nothing the matter—nothing the matter at all!"

And with a brusqueness of movement which was not her habit, she flung out of the room, by a supreme effort succeeding in bursting into tears outside the door instead of inside it.

Up the broad staircase she fled to her private sanctuary, there, behind double-locked doors, to indulge in the first really good "cry" which had relieved her for weeks.

And it was high time too, if the strain of a continued suspense was not to unsettle either her health or her reason. Only yesterday she had been wondering how much longer she would be able to keep her heavy secret to herself. To-day she knew that the limits of endurance were reached. "Nerves" had hitherto been things in whose existence she had only conditionally believed; but lately her own set of those articles had been playing her such tricks as to warn her of a time when they might conceivably kick over the traces. The growing irritation of which she was conscious, the daily increasing difficulty of keeping up appearances, the long sleepless hours at night during which the most fantastic surmises circled tirelessly in her brain—all these were warnings. Besides, it was evident that those about her were beginning to guess at something wrong. Decidedly it was time to confide her trouble to somebody. And of course also there was nobody for it but Dick—that elderly cousin of hers, who had always played towards her the part of a very much elder brother, if not of a

second, or rather of a third father—the former position having been filled by the defunct Mr. Selville. When, orphaned at six, the small Audrey had found a new home at Lockwood Hall, it had seemed to her that for the one father lost she had acquired two new ones, it being difficult to realise that the twenty-six-year-old Richard Selville, staid beyond his years, belonged to the same generation as herself. This staidness, however, did not prevent his coming in very useful, during his temporary appearances at Lockwood, to a small girl rather badly off for playfellows, and chronically thirsting for new sensations. His lanky shoulders were not half bad for riding upon, and his strong and rather hairy hands wonderfully deft at fabricating dolls' furniture and Indian canoes for sailing in the river. In the way of planning mock encampments in the woods, or imitation shipwrecks, his imagination was as inexhaustible as was his patience in the matter of apple-pie beds, or the surreptitious transference of his tooth-powder to his shooting-boots, or other pranks of the sort apt to occur to unoccupied minds of tender years. "Can't you think of something new?" Audrey would apostrophise her cousin almost daily, "and as exciting as possible, please!" Upon which Dick would rack his brain, usually with good effect. Neither did he ever forget to bring something "new" with him at each of his visits. Audrey had a small museum of Indian charms and Egyptian curios, all dating from the time of Dick's active service. It was six years now since the death of his father had put an end to that stage of his existence; and so successfully had he turned his sword into a ploughshare, that through the country gentleman the

soldier was only barely discernible now. From that time he had become a standing, instead of an intermittent feature in Audrey's life, without her ever having realised that her position was altered, although it was in his house that she now lived, instead of in his father's.

Yes, of course, Dick was the person for the occasion, Aunt Phœbe being useless in emergencies. Considering the number of scrapes he had got her out of in bygone years, to turn to him seemed almost unavoidable now. How well she remembered the time when, having smashed one of the precious *Sèvres* plates in the glass cabinet in the drawing-room, she had buried the pieces in the garden, not with the object of final concealment—against that her sense of veracity protested—but only pending Dick's expected arrival, in order to interpose him as a sort of blanket between herself and her uncle's expected wrath. "All right, I'll manage something or other!" was his standing and infinitely comforting assurance, not only on such occasions as this, but also in the cases of injured dolls or of strayed kittens.

This time she was not nearly so confident of Dick's power of "managing," but was aware that sympathy, if not counsel, would be assuredly forthcoming. What was the use of having an elderly, staid, not to say humdrum cousin, if you could not make use of him as a confidant?

To her quickly-formed resolve of seeking a *tête-à-tête* with Dick, Fate seemed kindly inclined. A little after lunch she found him in the hall getting out his fishing-tackle.

"Oh, are you going to the river?"

"Yes—to have a try at the salmon. They ought to be rising in this weather."

"May I come with you?"

"Come along! It's too good a day to be spent in the house."

Without another word Audrey ran upstairs to fetch her hat; and within a few minutes the cousins were tramping side by side through the park. By Dick's thoughtful brow Audrey guessed that he was half prepared for the reception of some confidence, and felt glad of the smoothing of the difficult way, just as she had been glad of the immunity from further questionings on the part of her aunt. Evidently Dick had done "something or other" which kept his mother quiet.

Meanwhile Audrey held her tongue, or used it only for the making of indifferent remarks. She was waiting for the peacefulness of the river-bank, with all its familiarly soothing surroundings, before saying what she had to say.

Presently they had reached it, and, despite her pre-occupation, Audrey, as she looked around her, could not but draw a long breath of admiration. The season was on the decline; but, like the Spartans of olden in the battle-front, the mighty beeches had decked themselves most splendidly to die. In crimson and golden armour the leafy giants stood there, their flaming tints repeated in the glassy stream—again and ever again, until not earth alone, but the very water seemed on fire. In the painted shadows, deep down between the stones, the trout lay lean and wan, out of condition, and as much out of fashion as the summer flowers once spangling the banks, and with whose brightness their speckled sides

had vied. But their place is not empty—taken by the lusty salmon—the weightier and therefore more seasonable fruit of the river.

To see his well-tryed rod bend under one of those most desirable fruits, was in ordinary times happiness enough to last Dick Selville for at least twenty-four hours; but to-day he was thinking little of the salmon as, with a care that was more mechanical than reflecting, he adjusted his line. Audrey, sitting upon the bank, and plucking at the bracken beside her, watched him critically. It was not until he had thrown his line twice that with fast-beating heart and a slight catch in her voice she began:

“What made you think that I was ill? It was you who put that idea into Aunt Phœbe’s head of course.”

Captain Selville jerked his line out of the water before he replied, while making a minute and quite superfluous examination of his fly.

“Well, you have struck me lately as not being quite yourself. You don’t eat properly, for one thing.”

“Have you been watching what I eat? What a funny idea!”

Without offering any opinion on this view of the case, Captain Selville once more threw out his line. As a rule he was rather pedantic in the matter of silence during operations; but to-day he seemed to have forgotten how easily salmon are scared off by the sound of the human voice.

“I have told a lie to-day,” observed Audrey abruptly.

“I think I know when that was.”

“When?”

"When you said that there was nothing the matter."

"Just so!" (It was very strange, certainly, how Dick managed to guess things.) "Yes, there is something the matter, Dick."

"I thought there was."

He looked at the water, waiting for more.

"Dick," said Audrey, after another pause and with a sort of mental plunge—several more handfuls of fronds having been stripped from the bracken—"do you think that a secret marriage is always a wrong thing?"

"A—secret marriage?"

The angler made a quick movement, which presumably was a start, since it caused him to slip upon the wet stones and nearly to lose his balance. Before he had done more than repeat the words with a sort of gasp, Audrey went on speaking rapidly.

"Yes, Dick; don't be alarmed, please, and don't be shocked. I have made up my mind to tell you all. I must tell it to someone if I am not to go mad; and there is nobody but you. Here is the worst at once: yes, I am married. I was married more than two months ago—in secret—at a Registry Office. It was while we were in London—for Aunt Phœbe's dentist, don't you know."

While she spoke, in breathless haste, Audrey, without looking at her cousin, had a sort of sidelong vision of his face, turned full towards her now, and looking, somehow, rather ghastly, though this latter impression was more of a latent than of an active nature. Having made her confession she covered her eyes with her hands, and in a mixture of impatience and terror, waited for the words of condemnation which were bound to come.

For what seemed to her quite a long time nothing came. The purling flow of the water alone filled her ears. When at last she looked up, astonished, Dick was again busy with his fly, and his shoulder was towards her.

"You are shocked?" she asked almost humbly.

"Shocked? No, what would be the sense of being shocked?" It was very nearly his ordinary tone, though the words came a little laboriously. "But of course I am very much surprised. Can you tell me more? You have not said who—"

"I will tell you everything, Dick; and perhaps you can help me. His name is Demetr Dobrowicz. He is a Russian. I met him at Paris during our trip. I think he noticed me first in the theatre, and he began to follow us. Once he spoke to me in the Pantheon, but not at all impertinently; then at Versailles he took an opportunity of introducing himself to Aunt Phœbe, and it was there too, while we were making the tour of the palace, that he first told me that he cared for me. Even then I knew already that—that I cared for him too; but I was too much taken by surprise to say anything. Then he followed us to London, and begged for a meeting in Kensington Gardens. After that things went awfully fast. And the very day before we left London he took me to a Registry Office—he had got the licence ready, and—well the thing was done. I had not been prepared for it at all, but, you see, there was no time to consider."

"I see."

Captain Selville, rod in hand, had been listening, rigid with attention.

"Yes, I see. But what I don't understand is the

need for secrecy. You are your own mistress now. Why could you not tell us what you were about, and marry him in the ordinary way?"

"Because there are reasons, Dick—very weighty reasons, which he was not at liberty to specify, for not proclaiming the marriage. He told me that if the thing became public at present his life would not be safe for a day. He would not even hear of my telling Aunt Phœbe."

"Strange!" said Captain Selville, frowning perplexedly at the pool before him.

"Yes, I suppose it sounds strange. But if you had heard it from his own lips you would somehow have felt convinced of the necessity."

"And how long is this concealment to last?"

"That is what I don't know, and am feeling so desperate about. For now I am coming to the real point, Dick—the point where you can perhaps help me. It is not only that I am married, but also that I am beginning to wonder whether I am not already a widow. Since the act at the Registry Office I have not again seen Demetr Dobrowicz, and for two months I have not heard from him, although we had arranged for constant correspondence. Something must have happened; but I cannot imagine what. I kept quiet as long as I could, but I cannot sit still longer. He may be dead, or he may be dying—and I not with him! Oh, Dick, you can't imagine how wretched I am! Can't you—can't you do—something or other?"

She was sobbing, with her head almost upon her knees and her face in her hands.

Having taken in the picture, Dick resolutely laid



down his rod—mentally consigning all the salmon of the river to unmerited perdition—and sat down upon the bank beside his cousin, though without making any active attempt to dry her tears.

“Tell me more about this, Audrey,” he said in an almost business-like tone. “It strikes me that there is a lot of clearing-up wanted here. On what day exactly did you part from him?”

“On 9th August, my—my wedding-day.”

“And where?”

“At the door of the Registry Office in —— Street. He put me into a hansom as we came out.”

“And you have actually not seen him since? Not even once?”

“Not even for a minute. The last I saw of him was as I looked out of the hansom while he stood on the pavement, watching me start.”

“And what account had he given of his future movements? Was he to stay in London?”

“Oh, no! He was starting back for Paris that same day. That was really the reason of the hurry about the marriage.”

“And since then?”

“I have had nothing but one post-card from Dieppe, merely to say that he was so far on his way and would write from Paris.”

“Well, and from Paris?”

“Nothing—not a sign of life; and that was more than two months ago.”

“But have you no address?”

“Yes, and I have written, oh, I don't know how often—both to Paris and to London, for I got some

wild idea that, for some reason or other, he might have come back to England. But nothing ever comes, and I rack my brain in vain. Oh, Dick, do you think he is dead?"

"Nonsense!" said Dick, rather impatiently. "Something unforeseen has happened, of course; possibly he may be ill—but why jump at once to the blackest conclusions?"

The little hand which had thrust itself into his was being soothingly stroked, in a very elder-brother sort of fashion.

"Don't worry more than necessary, Audrey; but just try and remember all he may have told you about himself, in case it may furnish a clue."

"He did not tell me much," confessed Audrey, and proceeded to bring out the meagre items he had imparted.

"A student of mechanics, son of a professor of literature—Russian subject—studying in Paris—age twenty-five," summed up Captain Selville reflectively. "Not much to go upon, certainly, but better than nothing. You are sure he is a Russian subject?"

"Quite sure. He told me so. At the Registry Office they explained to him what he would have to do in order to get the marriage legalised in his country."

There was another pause. Then:

"I suppose," said Dick, a little jerkily—"it's a stupid thing to ask—but I suppose you care for him a good deal?"

"Dick!" Her reproachful eyes were upon him. "Would I have done what I have done if I did not care for him very much?"

"Of course, of course," said Dick with apologetic haste; "I knew it was a stupid thing to ask."

"Ah, if you saw him, you would understand. Such a splendid face! So grand a look!"

She launched into a verbal portrait, her heart almost bursting with the relief of unburdening itself of the fearfully precious secret—and to sympathetic ears, as she knew Dick's to be. As he sat there beside her, his cap a little pushed up upon his forehead, his grizzled temples well displayed, she could see that he was listening attentively, even though occupied in shying pebbles into the river, in reckless disregard of the repose of his favourite pool.

"I am sure you would like him if you saw him!" Audrey finished, in a glow.

"I should try to, anyway," said Dick simply. "But before liking him I should have to find him; and I'm just wondering how to set about it."

She pressed his hand gratefully.

"Oh, Dick, I knew you would do something!"

"Hold hard there! I haven't done anything yet, and it remains to be seen whether I can. It's at Paris he must be looked for, I presume. I could run over, to begin with, and make enquiries at the address you have."

Audrey moved uneasily upon her grassy seat.

"Yes, Dick, but you don't know him by sight, you see. And, besides, how about your French?"

"I see," said Dick, catching up the drift of the remark with an intuition that was almost feminine, for the gift of that indefinable quality called "tact" had somehow, by mistake, fallen to his share, instead of to

his mother's. "No doubt it would be safer and quicker if you went yourself. Let's see how it can be managed without astonishing mother too much. I fancy it will be better not to disturb her mind just yet, will it not?"

"Much better," said Audrey, seeing another of her thoughts divined.

And then they fell to plotting, while the rod lay idle beside them and the shadows of the gorgeous beeches stretched farther and farther across the water.

It was only as, still plotting, they tramped back through the park, that it occurred to Audrey that she had not heard a single word of reproach, not even the tiniest criticism of what, in the abstract, she herself could not but qualify as a rash act. A cousinly lecture upon imprudence was the least she had expected. What a mercy that Dick had not thought himself called upon to deliver it! A mercy, too, that his turn of mind was not sarcastic enough to prompt him to the utterance of any of those "nasty things" for which the situation offered such ample opportunity!

The dessert had just been handed round that evening and the family butler had barely withdrawn when the first-fruits of the afternoon's consultation came to light.

"Do you know what I've been discovering, mother?" began Captain Selville as he cracked his nuts; "that the corn harvest has put me a hundred pounds to the good. And do you know what I'm going to do with the surplus? Have a fling!"

He leaned back in his chair, with a mock assumption of jauntiness, while his eyes laughed across the table at his astonished mother.

"A fling, Dick? But you never—"

"That's just why I think it's time to begin. And it's not to be an ordinary English fling, but a Parisian one. Audrey's descriptions have so fired my imagination that I feel I cannot do much longer without investigating the French capital. After all, it's something of a disgrace that I should know it only as a railway-station."

Mrs. Selville's celluloid face began to show signs of a living circulation beneath the skin.

"Oh, Dick, what a pity you could not have gone there with us! It would have been so much nicer to have you, but you know you wouldn't move."

"How could I, with the haymaking going on and the new stables building? But there's a respite now. I could get off quite well for a week or two."

"It will be dreadfully lonely without you," said Mrs. Selville, growing more agitated.

"There's a remedy to that."

"Is there? I am wondering—"

"The same thing that I am, perhaps—viz.: what earthly objection there could be to your coming along with me. Could there be a better opportunity of putting in the second half of your trip which that horrid toothache cut short. I'm sure the change would do Audrey all the good in the world—you know we have agreed that she is looking pale. And, besides, October is a much better month for sight-seeing than July. Don't you agree with me, Audrey?"

"Quite!" said Audrey, smiling gratefully and a little wonderingly at her cousin. She had often before marvelled at a certain touch of wiliness in Dick's char-

acter. "I think it's a splendid idea. Dick shall be our courier, and we shall be his interpreters and guides."

"Oh, well, if you really think so," beamed Mrs. Selville, in whose bosom the interrupted trip had left a quantity of unsatisfied desires, and only too glad of the united coercion bearing down upon her. "I must say I *should* enjoy another day at Versailles—without the toothache too! And—well, I suppose there is no especial reason for delay?"

"None whatever!" agreed Dick, exchanging a rapid glance with Audrey. "What do you say to Monday?"

Before they rose from table Monday had been fixed upon.

"So far, so well," thought Captain Selville, as he smoked his solitary after-dinner cigar. To get to Paris presented no difficulties. But after that?

In his own mind he was not quite clear as to whether he was more afraid of discovering nothing there or of discovering too much. Already on the river-bank, while listening to Audrey's broken account, strong misgivings had arisen, though he had kept them to himself. To his sober, English commonsense the whole affair had too pronounced a flavour of the adventurous to be congenial. What if Audrey had fallen victim to one of those unscrupulous fortune-hunters of which he believed the world to be full. The very thing which to guard against he had looked upon as the task of his life! The higher part of the task would have been to help her to the very best and worthiest husband that could be produced by the united kingdom—since, of course, none but an Englishman could be

worthy of her. Was it then to be marvelled at that he had looked rather ghastly when she so abruptly announced her accomplished marriage, and that the further details revealed had filled him with an apprehension that was quite impersonal?

It was not a hope, it was scarcely even a dream which had died that afternoon upon the river-bank. There are not many men whose love can remain sweet—turning neither bitter nor sour—without the ingredient of hope, but Dick Selville was one of the few. Even to the little girl who had ridden on his shoulder his heart had been drawn with a compelling warmth which foreshadowed the future, and from the moment when, returning home, he had found her decked with the flower of adolescence, he had begun to guess that for him there was to be no other woman in the world. But not for this did his elder-brother attitude change for an instant, except to take on, with the dignity of guardianship fallen from his father's shoulders to his own, a more pronounced shade of paternity. Of course she was not for him. The twenty years between them yawned in his eyes as a gulf unbridgeable. The mere thought of seeing her budding youth tied to his mature years and anything but brilliant presence, awoke in him an indignation as genuine as though he had been an impartial spectator instead of an interested principal. The best proof, surely, of the incongruity of such a thought was that even to his mother, despite her desire of seeing him "established," such an arrangement had never occurred as feasible. With the cousinly affection which Audrey gave him he must be content, and the first condition for not losing it was to bury

deep down in his heart any hint of another sort of affection. Between being to her a brother or a stranger, surely the lesser evil was to be her brother. So her brother he accordingly remained.

To-day's revelation made him feel as though somehow he had failed in an elder brother's duty. The first shock over, the actual fact was not quite so astonishing to him as it might be to one less well acquainted with Audrey's individuality. Yes, that was just the sort of thing that she could be imagined doing—the little girl who had always wanted "something new," and had rejected so many of his propositions because they were "not exciting enough." Well, in all probability she would have her fill of excitement now; but in what shape would it come? Materials for forecasts lacked conspicuously. The fortune-hunter theory sounded plausible enough in the abstract, but difficult to apply here. For how should a chance acquaintance met in a strange town, a foreigner too (oh, bitter thought!), have any knowledge of the handsome fortune she had inherited from her mother, and into whose full possession she had only recently entered? Some cautious questioning had brought answers which showed plainly that the Russian had betrayed no interest in the money question. That might be a blind, of course; but an adventurer of the type he was thinking of, would have been pretty sure to make enquiries regarding settlements. Must it be concluded, then, that this was a case of genuine passion? It almost seemed so. But why this concealment? And what a strange sort of lover was this who parted from his bride at the door of the Registry Office, and kept out of her sight and ken for months to follow?



Where did the gain come in, either material or sentimental?

With a baffled shrug of his shoulders Captain Selville tossed away the stump of his cigar. He had certain vague suspicions in his mind, awakened by the mention of the man's nationality, but he would wait to formulate them until he had seen what Paris could do in the way of solving the riddle.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### NO. 6 RUE G——

"YOU will be sure to be back in good time for dining in peace before the opera?" asked Mrs. Selville of Audrey and Dick, just making ready to leave the hotel sitting-room. "I don't know what would be more of a pity—to have to hurry's one's dinner or to miss the overture."

"You will not have to do either, mother," assured Captain Selville. "We'll be up to time, never fear!"

"And don't let Audrey go too near the edge of the platform; and *please* be careful in getting in and out of the lift! And if she feels giddy—"

"All right, mother, leave it to me!" And with another supremely reassuring smile he joined the impatient Audrey, the point of whose shoe was already tapping the passage floor in a fever.

All that could be done to assuage the fever was being done. They had been only one night in Paris, and already means had been found to secure a few hours of immunity from Mrs. Selville's solicitude and

therewith the occasion for taking the first step in the so urgent search. The Eiffel Tower figuring as the ostensible object of the afternoon, had been carefully selected for the purpose. Considering Mrs. Selville's propensity to giddiness, it was almost unavoidable that when Dick declared his intention of taking a bird's-eye view of Paris before beginning to explore it, his mother should, in view of to-night's dissipation, elect to finish resting from yesterday's sea-sickness.

"No. 6 Rue G——" said Captain Selville to the driver of the taximeter summoned by the porter.

The long breath which Audrey drew as the horse bounded forwards was tremulous with a mixture of relief and agitation. This, at least, was action, instead of the deadening paralysis of the last two months. With unseeing eyes she looked about her, scarcely aware of those street pictures which in July had made upon her so delightful an impression of novelty, and which had greatly gained in liveliness by the advance of the season. The American tourist was now less to the fore, the French *bourgeois* very much more so—fresh from health resorts, with sunburnt face and a new store of vivacity. Blocks of carriages at what had then been comparatively deserted corners; ten motors for every one that had made the crossings unsafe. That characteristic overflow of life onto the pavement, which is so pre-eminently Parisian, had in this mild October weather suffered no stoppage as yet. Now, as then, smart *cafés* and humble wine-shops alike disgorged the surplus of their guests onto open-air establishments, in which, according to their respective characters, either marble-topped or deal tables, either gilt-iron or cane chairs figured. Now, as then,

in afternoon hours there was a *concièrge* in shirt-sleeves and newspaper in hand upon a chair at the door of about every second house—beside him a usually ample female, stitching or knitting diligently; now, as then, servant-girls with hair as perfectly dressed as any Bond Street *coiffeur* can achieve, tripped along, bare-headed, exchanging bright glances with that particular small, insignificant, sallow young man, with ill-fitting clothes and black hair brushed up straight from his forehead, who seems to form the staple of the Parisian population. That profusion of gesticulation and the omnipresent sparkle of black eyes which had so struck Audrey at first sight, had necessarily multiplied, but struck her no longer now. It was Dick's turn to be impressed. During the long drive he looked steadily into the street, absorbed, it would seem, by the novelty of all he saw—to Audrey's extreme relief, since her tumultuously beating heart would have been a serious impediment to conversation. Was she, within the next hour, to see Demetr Dobrowicz again, or was she, within that space, to learn that she should never see him more? The chances seemed about equally balanced.

Dick, on his side, was weighing those same chances in his mind. During the passage through London he had taken the opportunity,—unknown to Audrey—of paying a visit to the Registry Office in —— Street. If by any chance he had entertained doubts—or were they to be called hopes?—regarding the validity of the marriage, they were speedily put to rest by the sight of the entry on 9th August. “Audrey Selville—Demetr Dobrowicz”—there it stood, black upon white, duly registered, duly witnessed; all the regulations complied

with. Not a cranny through which a doubt could slip. Sure enough, according to the law of the land, she was tied up hand and foot. In a painfully mixed mood Captain Selville came away from —— Street; but out of the mixture presently there emerged a sensation which soon unmasked itself as a determination. If that man was alive anywhere within the confines of the globe, he would hunt him down—would bring him to Audrey's feet, where it was his place—and his privilege—to be; and if he was not alive, he should equally be hunted down, in order to put Audrey in possession of her personal freedom, if nothing else. In other words, he had got to be found—alive or dead. It was characteristic of this—except in agricultural matters—extremely unpractical person, that Captain Selville quite honestly hoped to find the creature alive—simply because the distress in Audrey's eyes was rather more than he could with any show of decency bear.

As, having crossed the Seine and left the Champs de Mars behind them, the look of the streets began visibly to deteriorate, the anxiety upon Captain Selville's face as visibly deepened. In the suburban *ruelle* to which the taximeter ended by carrying them, even passers-by had died away.

"Is this it?" asked Audrey in a startled whisper, as the vehicle stopped and the driver turned on the box with almost the same words on his lips.

"Est-ce bien cela?"

He asked it incredulously, as incredulously as he had received the original order. Guests of the Hotel N—— did not usually own acquaintances in this quarter.

The *concièrge* of No. 6 who, armed with the evening

paper and flanked by his wife, had just established himself beside the entrance, looked equally incredulous. Captain Selville's tall hat seemed to astonish him quite as much as the look of Audrey's tailor-made costume evidently astonished his consort. Without waiting to be addressed, he presented himself, smiling greasily, by the side of the taximeter, as on a vantage ground, from which his lively black eyes could more readily satisfy their curiosity.

"In what can I serve monsieur and madame?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to lead negotiations," whispered Dick apologetically, for the first time in his life regretting the many French lessons so successfully shirked in tender years.

Emotion had caused the squat figure of the *concièrge* to disappear behind a sort of cloud which had laid itself over Audrey's eyes. It was only after a moment that it began to emerge.

"Monsieur Dobrowicz?" she managed to say. "He lives here?"

The fat *concièrge* slapped his thigh resoundingly before exclaiming:

"The third time!—or is it the fourth? Madeleine," spinning round upon his heel in order to appeal to his better and also fatter half, "is it the third or fourth time that someone has been here after that Russian?"

"The third time," she decided, eyeing Audrey critically, and obviously divided between the desire of examining her at close quarters and the dislike of heaving her person into the perpendicular. In her Gallic vivacity was confined to the eyes alone, but so well up

to their business were these, that after a brief struggle she evidently decided to stay where she was.

“He is not here, then?”

“But no, he is not here! Have I not said so already?”

“And can you tell me—can you tell me where he is?”

“In London, I take the liberty of supposing, since it was for London that he started. It was London that was written on the luggage labels, was it not, Madeleine?”

Madame Madeleine nodded, too busy between the inspection of the young lady and the hem of her handkerchief, for speech, her diligence being evidently on a par with her curiosity, and her needle as keen and nimble as her eyes. A stitch—a glance—a stitch—a glance—the alternative activity ran without check.

Captain Selville, watching his cousin's face, saw the colour retreating from it by another shade, and felt in his pocket for the bottle of smelling-salts he had taken the precaution of purchasing that morning. He had a general sort of idea that smelling-salts were a good thing to have at hand in moments of feminine nerve attacks, though without any very clear knowledge of the practical application.

But Audrey's nerves were screwed up too tight to give way just then.

“When was that?”

“In August; no—in July. Was it August or July, Madeleine?”

“Last week in July,” pronounced the conjugal oracle.

"And you mean that since then you have not seen him?"

"Not so much as the point of his nose! And such a beautiful nose as the Russian gentleman has! *Parbleu*, I wouldn't be likely to forget it, would I? If madame knows him," and the little black eyes became more than ever like gimlets, "she must know what a nose that gentleman has. But *tiens!*"—this apparently as a result of the further exploration of the face before him—"there comes to me a thought!" Then, with a doubtful glance at the dumb gentleman in the tall hat, and sinking his voice to a discreet murmur: "Was it perhaps madame who wrote those letters that came from England? Quite a packet of them I have lying upon my *commode*."

Audrey, gazing earnestly at the man, as at her one precious informant, seemed scarcely aware of the remark.

"You are quite sure that he was not here on 10th August?"

The *concièrge* first slapped his long-suffering thigh again, then again turned to his wife.

"You hear that, Madeleine? I am asked if the Russian gentleman was here on 10th August, and after I have told monsieur and madame that I have not set my eyes upon him since the last week in July. Am I a sort of idiot, or do I know what I am saying?" he lamented, brandishing, as he spoke, his unfolded newspaper, in guise, presumably, of a flag of distress.

"Ask him whether the rooms were given up or kept on when Dobrowicz left," prompted Captain Selville, whose remains of French knowledge were just sufficient

to keep him informed of the general current of the remarks.

“Kept on! Kept on!” assured the outraged man, using his newspaper freely in reply to Audrey’s question. “A quarter’s lease paid in advance, else his things would have flown out by the door long ago, you understand. And that’s what they will probably do in another week or so. I’ve given him law till 1st November, because of that payment in advance, you understand, but if by the 1st he has neither come back nor paid up, then, name of an animal! out they go! A man has to live, you see.”

By which words the speaker disclosed himself not as a simple *concièrge*, but as a landlord and a *concièrge* rolled into one.

“Then he has got things here, it seems,” commented Captain Selville. “Ask the man whether he would let us see the room. There is no saying whether some clue or other may not be picked out of it. Explain that we are friends of Dobrowicz’s, and anxious about him.”

Audrey having complied, the landlord-*concièrge* stopped slapping his thigh and began scratching his head.

“Open the room to monsieur and madame? *Hé*, Madeleine—how about that? The gentleman took away the key with him, you see, and said most particularly that he did not wish to have his things disturbed. Not that I will be for denying that I have been in, all the same—*parbleu*, there are ways and means. One has to let the air in sometimes and the dust out, you understand, and, *finalement*, the house is mine. But as



to opening the door of a lodger's apartments to strangers, that is another thing; for I have my feelings of honour, you understand; which is just what I said to the two gentlemen who were here before you, with the same request."

"Who were those other gentlemen?" asked Audrey, snatching at the possibility of new discoveries.

The mobile shoulders went up swiftly to the very protruding ears.

"Can I say? Rather strange-looking gentlemen, to say the truth. Russians, I imagine, like Monsieur Dobrowicz, for they spoke the same jargon; but not *comme il faut* like he was, and with hair which had never been properly cut. There was something about their hair and their clothes which did not let me feel justified in unlocking the door for them."

"And they enquired after him?"

"Not that, rightly speaking. They seemed to know all about him, without enquiring. What they wanted was to get into his room. They were friends of his, they said, and had come to fetch something for him which he required—he being prevented from coming himself. 'Good!' I say to them, 'bring me a note from Monsieur Dobrowicz, saying that you are empowered by him to take away his things, and I open the door at once.' But they could not do that, they said. He was prevented from writing, just as he was prevented from coming.

"'Then, my fine gentlemen—out you go!' I said, and they went—in a bad humour—ah, in a *sacré* humour, ha, ha!"

"And do you not know who they were? Did they

not name themselves?" asked Audrey, on whose face the agitation had increased with almost every word spoken.

"Not they! They were his friends—his comrades—anything you like—but as for names—oh no!"

"But if they were his friends, you must have seen them here before, surely?"

"Not I! Monsieur Dobrowicz received no visits all the time that he was here—which was only about ten days altogether, seeing that he took the room on 15th July—it was advertised, you understand. And during those ten days he did no more than sleep here—not always even that—so where was the time for visitors?"

"And what were those gentlemen like?"

"Like nothing so much as a pair out of a child's fairy-story, to say the truth. One of them big like that—*tenez!* and the other small like this—*tenez!*" indicating first a level well above his own head and then one below the height of his shoulder. "'Monsieur le Géant, and Monsieur le Nain,' I called them in my own mind. And the *géant* must have been in battles too, and had left one of his arms and one of his eyes there. Only half a man, in truth—but what a big half! First Monsieur le Nain comes alone, and when he gets nothing from me, he comes back a second time with the big one. But that could not move a man who has his feelings of honour, you understand, and who does not like the looks of certain people. Not that there would be much worth carrying off in the room upstairs, as I have convinced myself: papers and rubbish and again rubbish and papers; and just

one box with a *sacré* good lock, and which one can't get open with any ordinary key—can one, Madeleine?"

"Ask him whether he likes our looks well enough to make an exception in our favour," said Captain Selville, having listened attentively to the hurried translation of the intricacies of this speech. "We only want to look round us, tell him. He can be present all the time. And look here, we may as well try bribery," added Dick, barefacedly producing from his purse a piece of twenty francs.

At the first glitter of the gold the face of the landlord-*concièrge* became ostentatiously virtuous.

"The other gentleman tried that too," he explained, doing wonders in the way of a dignified elongation of his squat figure. "But I never could take the gold of people who were to me *suspecte*."

"But if we do not seem to you *suspecte*," urged Audrey, in an agony of impatience.

A hurried consultation was already taking place between husband and wife, both pairs of black eyes fastened meanwhile upon the coin in Dick's hand, as though tacked there. By the intensity of that gaze it was not hard to gauge the effort which the refusal of that other proffered bribe would have cost this relatively honest couple.

"Monsieur and madame are welcome," finally pronounced the fat Frenchwoman, actually rising in her readiness to show the way.

"Had I not better tell them that I am not 'madame?'" whispered Audrey, as her cousin helped her to alight.

"But you *are* madame! At any rate you are not mademoiselle, you know."

"To be sure! but not *the* 'madame' they are thinking of. Oh, what a muddle!"

"Let it pass, for respectability's sake," said Dick, with a rather unsuccessful smile.

To which she replied indifferently:

"Oh well—it doesn't really matter, of course."

The house, a shabby mansion, whose single storey and small, square windows proclaimed its want of modernity, was entered by an extremely dirty *porte-cochère*, whose width had apparently been calculated for nothing much broader than a wheel-barrow. Up a flight of carpeted stairs the visitors were now personally conducted by the landlord, still armed with his paper, and the landlady still stitching away with fat, wonderfully agile fingers at the hem of her handkerchief.

"*Voilà!*"

As with a dramatic gesture the man flattened himself against the wall in order to leave the passage free, an atmosphere of stale tobacco smoke and of enclosed air met the visitors. It was a large, square room with two windows onto an inner courtyard, decently but scantily furnished in the humbler lodging-house style, and with a certain sprinkling of objects which bore the personal note. As Audrey, standing in the middle of the painted wooden floor, looked round her at the four plaster walls, at the small washhand-stand, at the iron bedstead, at the shabby writing-table with its untidy load of papers, ash-trays and writing-materials, a sort of shyness was upon her. This then had been Demetr's

home, if but a transitory one; the place to which he returned at night during that troubling week in which he had come into her life. Upon that pillow perhaps he had dreamed of her. How many love-sick sighs had these walls heard? and would they yield up the secret which perchance they held?

Captain Selville, meanwhile, was making a critical survey of the apartment. "Papers and rubbish," as the landlord had said—that about summed up the situation—*plus* the layer of dust which had been thickening there for close upon three months. *Plus* also the wooden box in the corner, whose lock, according to the landlord-*concièrge*, was so *sacré* good. With the point of his boot Dick gave it one vigorous push. Heavy, decidedly. It was a rather vindictive look which he cast upon the "good" lock. There was no denying that the inside of that box would probably be more interesting than the outside.

His next station was the writing-table, over which his scrutinising glance slowly passed. A somewhat intense cigarette smoker, evidently, to judge from the character of the appliances, as well as from the ashes still whitening upon trays, and which neither the fat man nor his wife had considered themselves called upon to remove. Dick took up one of the books that lay there: Duhamel's manual of analytical mechanics, with many pencil-marks in the margins. Then he picked up a stray paper: only a shoemaker's account—a receipted one, too. Alongside, there lay a pair of almost new gloves, which perhaps might not have been lying there any longer if they had not happened to be about two sizes too large for the virtuous landlord.

"It certainly looks as if he had meant to come back," mused Dick. "Audrey, ask him what Dobrowicz said about the length of his absence?"

"Monsieur spoke of being away for a short time—a few weeks at most," was the reply.

Captain Selville was trying the single drawer of the table. It was locked.

"There might be papers in there," he said, or rather thought aloud.

"*Des papiers?*" echoed the man, catching up the word. "But yes, it is stuffed full with papers in there. Every lock is not so strong as that of that animal of a box. But it's all that Russian *jargon*, which no Christian man can grapple with."

"Ask him whether he would let us have a look at them, in his presence?"

After a slight show of demur a bunch of keys was produced and the drawer opened. The spectacle presented was that of a paper-chaos: letters, bills, pamphlets, all higgledy-piggledy, with here and there a battered pocket-book emerging from the troubled sea.

"It will be no breach of confidence, I fancy, if *you* look over these," said Captain Selville, a trifle stiffly, as he made place for Audrey.

With trembling fingers she took out the first bundle that came to hand and began a cursory examination. Hieroglyphics, or what was to her as sealed a sign as hieroglyphics upon every page. Ah, here a line in French—but no more than a word of thanks for something received—a *brochure* of some sort, it would seem.

"It would take hours to look through these," she said despondently.

"So I am thinking, and we have not got hours now. Time is getting on, and mother's suspicions must not be roused. But we could return. Another twenty-franc piece will settle that, I take it. And if we return often enough, we may yet get to the inside of that box in the corner"—with another resentful look in its direction. "Unless—I am wondering——"

"What?"

"If you prove to the man that you are Dobrowicz's wife, he would, no doubt, let us take the things away with us at once."

"No, no," she protested, "that cannot be. He spoke of a danger, remember. How do I know what consequences——"

"All right. Then explain that we shall return, and I'll pave the way—with gold, meanwhile."

This being done, and another glance having been thrown round the room, they prepared for departure. Just at the last moment Audrey, thinking herself unobserved, took up a tiny paper-cutter, which she had caught sight of among the "rubbish" of the table—a small, wooden thing, such as are brought home by tourists from mountain countries, and with a fern carved upon the handle. Silently she slipped it into her pocket. Not even Dick need see that she could not leave the apartment without carrying away with her some small token of the presence which had once filled it. Had she not the right to this worthless *souvenir*?

No one had observed the quick movement—no one, that is to say, but Madame Madeleine, who, stitching away modestly in the corner of the room, had still plenty of attention over for the golden-haired young lady, the

meaning of whose movements were considerably exercising her mind.

"If the Russian is her lover," she observed to her spouse while he was still profusely bowing to the back of the taximeter, "then she has a very obliging husband; and if he is her husband then she has a very stupid lover. But I think he is her lover, else what would she want with the paper-cutter?"

And not long after, Mrs. Selville, ready dressed and radiant at the prospect of the evening, was exclaiming:

"At last! I was beginning to think that Audrey had fallen over the parapet of the Eiffel Tower, or that the lift had got stuck or something. And now, quick into your white dress, my dear! Brand has been fussing about it for an hour. There is not a moment to lose!"

## CHAPTER V.

### MRS. SELVILLE GETS AN IDEA.

"FRENCH girls are so much more interesting than English ones; don't you think so, Dick?"

Mrs. Selville was already sweeping her opera-glass over the brilliant house, as she spoke.

"Thank you, auntie, for a charming compliment!" smiled Audrey, a little listlessly.

"Oh, my dear, of course *you* don't count! I'm speaking of the common herd. But here even the common herd are so—well, *uncommon*. And I have been positively assured that in spite of knowing how to dress so perfectly, they are not a bit what the novels make them out to be, but possess quite a lot of domestic qualities."



The cousins' eyes met with a look of amused understanding. It was not the first song, by any means, since their departure from English shores, which they had heard sung to French female virtue. That upon the novel soil of the Parisian trip a new hope had sprung up in the maternal breast—or, rather, a new shoot of a very old hope, was patent to both. For years past no fresh apparition in the way of a marriageable young woman had dawned on the horizon of Lockwood without being answerable for some such revival. But the Lockwood coverts were drawn dry by this time. Considering the optimistic cast of Mrs. Selville's mind it was therefore scarcely to be wondered at that she should, under the circumstances, have transferred her trust to France, having successfully jumped to the conclusion that Dick's continued celibacy could only be ascribed to the blindness of her own countrywomen. French girls, being proverbially quicker, would surely not be so dense as to let such a prize escape them. The Selvilles' want of acquaintances at Paris did not help to clear up the manner in which the desired event was to come about; but Mrs. Selville's optimism was proof even to this discouraging circumstance. That a desirable French heiress should be touched by the *coup de foudre* in the street, at sight of the ex-captain—who, needless to say, was in the eyes of his mother anything but unremarkable—appeared to her not only a possible, but even a very probable event. In the hotel dining-room her enjoyment of French cookery did not prevent her keeping a sharp look-out to see what feminine heads were turned in their direction. Just now in the *entr'acte* she was scanning the house critically, and with a cer-

tain exultation; for that the women who were looking in this direction might possibly be trying to find out whether Audrey's hair were real or false did not occur to her. And Audrey, meanwhile quite oblivious of the female inquisitors, was likewise scanning the house, with very different intent. The face she was looking for she would of course not find there; but there were other possibilities. Half unconsciously, with no calculated expectation, she was looking out for a big man and a little man—a giant and a dwarf. The thought that those two men possessed news of Demetr Dobrowicz—recent news—that, in all probability they were initiated into the secret of his disappearance—would leave her no peace. Once, when her eyes fell upon a one-eyed man in the *parterre*, her heart gave a jump. Ah, if he would but get up, so that she could judge of his stature! And then she remembered that the giant was one-armed as well as one-eyed, and her scrutinising gaze intensified—only for a moment. In the next, with a sigh of discouragement, she laid her glass aside. No need to wait for this man to rise, since he had two perfectly unimpaired arms, and she therefore had no further use for him.

“Do have some chocolate *bonbons!*” Mrs. Selville's voice broke in upon her dejected reflections, and as she held towards her niece an open box.

“Dear auntie—but after the chocolate pudding we have just been eating—”

“But they are *so* good, Audrey! French chocolate, mind!”

“I know they are good—but not just now, thank you, auntie.”

Mrs. Selville sighed and put another chocolate into her own mouth. That "not just now" of Audrey's always savoured to her somewhat of a mystery. Her own idea was that a thing being good in itself must be good at all times, in all places, under all possible circumstances. It was this peculiarity which made of her so trying a member of society. Diamonds are excellent things in their way, no doubt, but anyone careful of his teeth would scarcely care to find them baked in his bread, and even the most striking quotation from Shakespeare would not have much chance of being appreciated during a rough Channel passage. For sheer unfitness, Mrs. Selville's doings could often have borne comparison with these examples. The curtain having just now risen upon Act III. of *The Huguenots*, there was, accordingly, nothing astonishing in her considering this the right moment for discussing to-morrow's plans.

"Shall it be Versailles or the Louvre? What do you say, Audrey?"

"Oh, not Versailles!" whispered back Audrey with a pang of recollection. Versailles and the *salle des glaces* were too closely connected with her brief spell of happiness to be visited just now with anything like equanimity. "But we will talk about that later; not just now, auntie."

Upon which Mrs. Selville sighed again, and again consoled herself with a chocolate.

It was the Louvre finally that was decided upon.

"We will see what can be done in the afternoon," Dick explained to Audrey, in a hurried aside; "but the forenoon will have to be given to mother, I think." And, perforce, Audrey agreed.

Once safely launched in the maze of the galleries, next day, Captain Selville made the apparently quite sudden discovery that his hair wanted cutting.

"You won't mind if I run over to a hairdresser's, will you? I noticed one close by. Really I don't want to continue disgracing you with these flowing locks."

"But the pictures, Dick! I thought you were so anxious to see the pictures?"

"Of course I am, but I will look at them with an easier mind if I am feeling respectable. Besides it won't take long. Where shall we meet? Let's say in the square room in half an hour, or make it three-quarters."

"Don't be long, please," urged Mrs. Selville who had already noticed several most desirable-looking prospective daughters-in-law, and had had time to reflect upon the admirable opportunities likely to occur while loitering through the galleries.

On reaching the street Captain Selville, instead of making for the hairdresser's, took out his pocket-map of Paris and carefully studied it. The problem to grapple with was fortunately a simple one, and the distance to be traversed short. Having rapidly walked down the *quai* and crossed a bridge, he caught sight of a waving flag upon the top of a low and insignificant building, standing almost in the shadow of Notre Dame—and made straight for it. Glancing up at the ubiquitous "Liberté," "Égalité," "Fraternité," surely nowhere more appropriate than above this entrance, he again consulted his map. No doubt about it. He stood before that ill-famed Morgue, read of and heard of so often, and pictured so much more imposing than the reality. With a

slight tightening of the teeth, as though to brace his nerves, the man who had gone into a dozen battles without a tremour, mounted the slippery steps and went in by the damp and greasy-looking doorway which here, in the heart of life, led to the place of death.

When he came out again, a quarter of an hour later, he was looking grave but relieved. Having carefully scrutinised the two corpses exposed to-day behind the glass screen, having painfully spelled out the handbills containing minute personal descriptions of other nameless victims who within the last weeks had perforce been buried without identification, he had ended by drawing a long breath. No, there was nothing here that could interest Audrey. No need, thank God, to bring her to this dreadful place, or even to suggest to her the ghastly possibility, which among other possibilities, had occurred to him.

When he rejoined his mother and cousin in the *Salon Carré* it was no doubt fortunate that both ladies were too absorbed—the one by the pictures, the other by her great preoccupation—to notice that his hair was exactly the same length it had been three-quarters of an hour ago.

“How about the afternoon?” Audrey took the first opportunity of asking him, having isolated him before a glass case in the *Galerie d'Apollon*. “Can't we go back to the Rue G——?”

“I don't think *we* can, but I daresay *I* could. We cannot well leave mother alone again without letting her into the secret, and you know what that means. She was talking of shopping. Supposing you resign yourself to that, and leave me to begin the investigation at

Number six?—with your authority, of course,” he added punctiliously.

“Well, I suppose it will have to be so,” assented Audrey, rather grudgingly. “But if you don’t find out anything to-day, then I must certainly go back there to-morrow. If there are any French papers there, you would take so long to make them out, don’t you see? And besides, I must—I *must* see for myself. Remember, Dick, you’ve got to find some way of disposing of auntie to-morrow, either fore, or afternoon.”

This was said with a certain dictatorial glance which he knew of old—it dated from the time when he had been told that he had to find a way of helping her to escape from lessons—and, as of old too, came the answer:

“All right! I’ll manage something or other.”

That afternoon Mrs. Selville made large purchases at the *Bon Marché*, becoming the happy possessor, amongst other things, of a white lace hat which would certainly have fitted Audrey’s twenty-one years far better than her sixty, and of a Chinese gong, for which, considering the presence of a faultless article of the sort at Lockwood, she could not possibly have any rational use. As they drove back to the hotel in a taximeter bristling with packages, Audrey’s eyes, restlessly pursuing the search begun yesterday, were fixed upon the stream of pedestrians. The hope of alighting upon the strangely-assorted pairs he had yesterday heard described scarcely seemed to her too wild a one. Surely a one-eyed, one-armed man should not be hard to pick out of even a Parisian crowd—and a giant, too! In spirit she could already see herself springing to the ground, and, regard-

less of conventionality, precipitating herself upon the "comrade," crying to him: "Where is Demetr? What have you done to him?" All the way back she sat well forward upon her seat, with the word of arrest to the driver trembling upon her lips. But there was no need to speak it. The drive remained eventless. Nor was Dick at the end of it to soothe her curiosity with fresh information. It was not until an hour later that he came in, and another half-hour passed before the cousins could attain undisturbed speech.

"Well?" asked Audrey breathlessly, for his pre-occupied air had made the waiting all the harder. "Tell me quickly: any result?"

Before the urgent gaze of those grey eyes, hungry for his news, Dick winced perceptibly, but quickly had himself in hand again.

"No positive result; only surmises: and these not directly bearing upon the disappearance."

"Oh, don't speak in riddles, please!" said Audrey, merciless in her suspense. "Can't you see that I am on thorns? What do your surmises bear upon, if not upon his disappearance?"

"Upon his occupation—his position. I had thought of it before. It seemed to me not improbable that he should stand in some connection with the Russian revolutionary party, and from the look of the things I saw to-day—the things in the drawers, for I have not managed the box yet—I feel almost sure that it is so. The pamphlets are in Russian, of course, but they are most remarkably like my idea of political fly-leaves, and most of the letters are dated from Moscow and Kiev—(I

managed to make that out) and both are hot-beds of the revolution, you know."

His look was one of apology for a disclosure which his very British and very conservative instincts led him to suppose must be extremely unwelcome. But upon Audrey's face no particular consternation was to be read.

"You mean that he is a socialist, or an anarchist, or something of that sort?"

"I don't know anything certain. I only fancy that perhaps—"

"I daresay you are right. That would not astonish me at all. He certainly had a look about him as of somebody who is very keen about something or other. And I am sure his ideas are—well, very modern. When we were at Versailles I remember his speaking most bitterly about Louis XVI., and—yes, that would also explain why he waved his hat in the Pantheon vaults before Rousseau's tomb. At the time I wondered at it; but now I understand."

"Ah!" said Dick, looking at his cousin with the very vivid conviction of his utter inability to understand women. He had feared to shock and distress her, whereas she was gazing back at him almost triumphantly, even more elated than alarmed at the thought of being married to a possible anarchist, either with or without the blood of fellow-creatures already upon his hands. That the discovery, or at any rate the strong surmise of his true position should, instead of blackening the thought of him, have put a new, even if somewhat lurid halo around the vanished hero, was a fact which lay beyond the grasp of his masculine ken.

But, watching her face, he saw the strange exulta-



tion vanish, swallowed up by a new terror. The tone in which she said the next words, clasping her hands hard upon her knee, showed that she had been following up in thought the deductions of this new view.

"Oh, Dick! But, if this is so, then may they not have got hold of him already—the police, I mean? and would that not explain everything? Dick, Dick, supposing he is in prison all this time!"

She clutched at his sleeve, her terror-stricken eyes fixed wide upon his face.

"You must make enquiries at once, Dick! The Russian police may have communicated with the French—they do help each other in that way, do they not?—and they may have sent him off to Russia. Good Lord! he may be in Siberia by this time! Dick, please go at once to the police!"

Dick, without moving, smiled his usual soothing smile, whose patience was inexhaustible.

"That is just where I have come from. I went there straight from the Rue G—— and took an interpreter with me. I had thought of that explanation, you see. It looked plausible, but it doesn't seem to hold water. Nobody of the name of Dobrowicz, or even answering to his description (for it is conceivable that he should not be known to the authorities under his real name), has had any dealings with the French police lately; nor has any arrest been made at the request of the Russian police within the last two months. This surmise then falls to the ground. Wherever he is, he is *not* in a French prison, nor on his way to a Russian one."

Audrey's fingers let go her cousin's sleeve, while upon her face the tension of terror relaxed.

"Ah—at least that! But where can he be, then? Where can he be?"

"It has occurred to me," said Dick, with some hesitation, "that he might have gone back to Russia—of his own free will, I mean."

"Without warning me? He could not do that."

"He may not have wanted to alarm you and, besides, one must count with the possibility of strayed or intercepted letters."

Upon Audrey's face the uneasiness reappeared.

"That would mean that—anything may have happened. In Russia he would probably not be safe for a day."

"Tut, tut, Audrey, this is going much too fast. You forget that all this is mere surmise. He may yet prove to be the most law-abiding, humdrum citizen that ever lived."

"Oh, not humdrum," protested Audrey, almost touchily.

"Well, hard-working, let us say. To-morrow we must manage another visit to the Rue G—— together, and this time I mean to take a small crowbar with me. I think the landlord is ripe for it now, and I shall have no peace until I have seen the inside of that box. Meanwhile rack your brains, like a good girl, for anything that could give us a possible clue to his movements. You are sure he never spoke of an early return to Russia."

"Never," said Audrey, after a moment of reflection. "We had so little conversation altogether. Our meetings were so rare, you know, and when we did meet we—we—"

"Spoke of other things—I understand," said Dick, encouragingly, and carefully looking past her flushed face.

"I don't think we spoke either of the future or the past; the present was enough, you see. Yes—once he did speak of the past—that is to say he asked me whether when doing or saying a thing, I never felt as though I had done it or said it before—a sense of repetition, he called it. He said he had that feeling sometimes, and it almost made him believe in soul-transference, and of having gone through certain actions in a previous existence. He spoke so strangely that time, that it almost frightened me. And sometimes, too, he would look at me strangely—a sort of long gaze into my face, as though he were looking for something, and then he would look away again and sigh, as though he had not found it. That was not the way I explained it to myself at the time—it was all too intangible, somehow—but when I think it over now it seems like that."

"Anything else?" asked Dick, who was listening intently.

"No. Only that he complained of his head at moments, and said it hurt him sometimes on a spot where he had struck it, for he had an accident in the Swiss mountains this summer, he told me."

"H—m," said Dick, mentally considering the advisability of paying a visit to the chief Parisian lunatic asylums next day. He sat there reflecting, with contracted brow. The prospect of seeing the supposed anarchist resolve himself into a possible maniac was not particularly alluring.

Next morning Mrs. Selville and Audrey were finishing breakfast in their own apartment when Dick came in, bringing with him a somewhat damp whiff of the October morning. He had been out for an early constitutional, as he explained; but even before catching his eye—and somehow it was very difficult to catch to-day—Audrey felt sure that he had news of some sort. In this she was mistaken, for what he brought was no news, but only another surmise, this time a very ghastly one. He had not been to the lunatic asylums, but he had been again to the Morgue, pursued by the suggestion which had sent him there yesterday. Supposing—thus he had put the case to himself—the vanished man had belonged to one of those secret societies with which Russia just now abounds, might not the “comrades” who evidently held the secret of his disappearance, likewise be the cause of it? Private executions, sometimes on the mere suspicion of treachery, were anything but unheard of. And what more convenient place for the disposal of the victim than the Seine, which often did not for weeks yield up its prey? Up to now he had carefully kept this thought from Audrey, but after to-day’s visit he felt that he could do so no longer. The picture which, upon the banks of the river, she had drawn for him of her lost husband, was still vivid in his memory, and to-day, through the fateful sheet of glass, his horrified eyes had fallen upon the figure of just such a tall, black-bearded, magnificently proportioned man as Dobrowicz was said to be—one too, whose features, though sodden with long immersion, could well be reconstructed into something above the average of manly beauty. Had he the right to keep

the discovery and its unavoidable suggestion to himself? All the way back from the Morgue he had been fighting out the point within himself. With cruel pangs of pity the only right decision had been reached. To take Audrey to that place of death would be to distress and shake her, without doubt, but also would either put to rest the horrible surmise, or else end this torturing uncertainty by mercifully killing hope.

"We must go out alone this morning," he said to her hurriedly, seizing the moment when Mrs. Selville had gone into the next room in order to fetch and exhibit yesterday's lace hat. "Luckily it's raining, so mother will not mind staying in. I'm taking you to Notre Dame, mind, where you are particularly anxious to have another look at the embroidered vestments in the sacristy.—Upon my word, mother—this *is* stunning! Whatever will Lockwood say to that hat?"

According to Mrs. Selville it was folly to go to such a chilly place as Notre Dame in this weather; but having long given up attempting to counsel young people, she resigned herself with great cheerfulness to spending a solitary forenoon in the rapt contemplation of yesterday's purchases.

"Where are you going to take me to, since, of course, it is not Notre Dame?" asked Audrey, as soon as they had effected their escape. "To the Rue G——, I suppose?"

"No, not to the Rue G——. I *am* going to take you to Notre Dame, or at least to its immediate neighbourhood. But I should like you to tell me first that you are feeling quite well, quite strong. For, Audrey,

it may be—I hope it will not—but it may be that you will need your strength.”

The fresh pink of her cheeks began to fade at once.

“Tell me quickly, Dick. Don’t keep me waiting. Is he dead?”

“I hope not. It is only a wild idea of mine. It is possible, you see, that some accident might actually have happened to—your husband. You have thought of it yourself.”

“Thought of it! I think of nothing else. And have you found out——”

“Nothing at all. Only it struck me that possibly—Tell me, Audrey, you have of course heard of the Morgue?”

She turned a little whiter; all her features contracting painfully.

“Of course I have. Is it—is it there you are taking me?”

Under an impulse of repulsion she stood still, although they were in the street already, among the stream of pedestrians.

“Not unless you want to. But I have been there to-day, and among those unfortunates there is one who, quite in a general way, answers to the description you gave me. I thought I ought to tell you this, if only to put the doubt to rest. And, after all, is not any sort of certainty better than this suspense?”

“Yes,” she said, beginning to walk on again. “Take me there quickly!”

“Only if you are feeling strong enough, Audrey.”

“I am strong; I shall be strong. Only be quick. How shall we get there soonest? By the boat?”

"We had better drive," said Dick, instinctively dreading the thoughts which the closer sight of the turbulently greedy Seine might stir in Audrey.

Not a word more was spoken while they took their course along the *quais*, adorned, even in this fine drizzle, with the usual rows of patient fishermen, this being apparently the one occupation in the exercise of which Gallic vivacity becomes temporarily eliminated. Of all the summer sights familiar to Audrey from her former visit: the floating bathing establishments, the swimming-matches, the dog-toilets being performed upon the banks—these indefatigable fishermen and those miniature steamers, known as *bateaux-mouches* (very draggled insects they looked in this weather), had alone survived the change of season. Audrey had never seen the former catch anything—indeed it was not quite clear what they could possibly catch beyond drowned cats and rotten apples. On his first day in Paris, Dick had watched these staunch votaries of "le sport" with a certain commiserating "fellow-feeling," his piscatorial sense both moved and outraged by the look of their tackle. But to-day he did not even see them, as over their heads he peered towards the insignificant, dark building which he had left an hour ago.

"La Morgue!" announced the driver as he stopped, and with an introductory flourish of his arm, calculated for such obvious tourists.

"Are you sure you can do it?" asked Dick, looking apprehensively at his cousin.

She merely nodded, afraid, it would seem, to unlock her teeth.

"Take my arm," whispered Dick, having helped her to alight.

She obeyed, and almost blindly stumbled up the few wet steps that led to the wide-open doorway. Within, Audrey found herself confronted by a common-looking bit of planking—a wooden partition serving to shield the exposed victims from the gaze of the street, and decorated with printed notices. Still holding on to Dick's arm she allowed herself to be guided round one end of this partition and immediately was standing in front of a huge sheet of plate-glass, behind which four human figures, muffled to their chins, lay, or rather reclined upon what at the first glance made her think of bath-chairs—as immovable as any wax-work figures seen in Baker Street and nursery days. Then, just as she was summoning her strength for the ordeal of scrutiny, a mist seemed to gather upon the plate-glass—or possibly in her own brain—and took a full minute to disperse. Now only she became aware that what she had taken for bath-chairs were massive iron slabs, sloped at an angle which afforded a full view of the bodies exposed, and that it was their own clothes that these were muffled in, as though in blankets.

From one face to the other her eyes went with terrified apprehension. Three men and one woman—strangers, no doubt, in life—were sharing the intimacy of this narrow space, the nameless heroes of four tragedies, whose acts would never be sung or heard of. At the woman Audrey scarcely glanced, receiving only the vague impression of an almost mulatto-like duskiness of complexion, caused, though she was spared the knowledge, by commenced decomposition. In the back-



ground lay an old man with ragged hair and beard, tired and broken-looking, seemingly thankful to be at rest. More to the front, and close beside the dusky woman, one of those insignificant, sallow youths, whom she had seen by dozens in the streets, only that his black hair, instead of being brushed straight up from his forehead, as doubtless it had been in life, now lay lank upon his leaden skin.

It was upon the fourth figure, the one closest to her, that Audrey's eyes rested longest. This man alone, splendid in stature, with flowing coal-black beard and massive eyebrows, worthily maintained the majesty of Death. No nameless tragedy could wish for a better hero. His three neighbours in the glass cell could not even here, rise above the hopelessly commonplace. He alone could be truly said to *look* his part.

Beside Audrey, as with strained eyes she gazed into the dead face, women and men, aye, and children too, were chattering in unconcerned fashion. One little girl, while widely eyeing the figures through the glass, was with unimpaired appetite biting pieces out of a slice of ham.

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed another, "how she puts her head to one side, that one! just as though she wanted to lay it on his shoulder!" A remark which was greeted by an approving titter.

Captain Selville felt the hand that rested upon his arm beginning to tremble, and looked fearfully into his cousin's face. The colour seemed to have been wiped from it, and the effort of close scrutiny was visible in the distended eyes; but the convulsion he had feared was not there.

"Take me out!" she said at last very low, and tottering a little under the sudden relaxation of a great strain.

Quickly he took her past the placarded partition, upon which, among newer notices, there were also some dating from as far back as three or four years, with rags of clothing and wisps of hair preserved under glass for purposes of possible identification. So deadly sick did she look and so heavily did she weigh upon his arm that there was nothing for it but to lift her into the taximeter which still waited, and immediately to produce the smelling-salts, which had, at any rate, not bided their time in vain. Dick blest his own foresight when after a minute she looked up into his face, with her unsteady lips trembling into a smile.

"It is 'No,' is it not?" he asked earnestly.

"It is 'No'—thank God! Oh, Dick, what a horrible way to find him it would have been! Did I make a very great fool of myself? I hope not."

"No. But it seems to me that I have—in bringing you here. I might have spared you this, it strikes me."

"Oh, well, you could not know," was all she found to say, and only then discovered that his supporting arm was still around her.

"I think I can manage without a prop now," she smiled, with an utter absence of confusion which in itself was a sting.

In the hotel they found Mrs. Selville blissfully ranging her acquisitions, her guileless fancy freshly tickled by a recent incident.

"Back already? I suppose the damp was too much for you, after all! I have had a much better time of it,

I am sure; and I have heard something so funny! The *garçon* brought up the parcel with those shoes you bought yesterday, and said it was *pour la jeune madame*. And when I made a remark about it to Brand, she told me that the housemaid also had taken for granted that you two were married. Isn't it funny?"

"Oh, very funny," acquiesced Audrey indifferently; "but I am quite used to it by this time. Dick and I are called *monsieur et madame* almost everywhere we go."

"Which shows that French perspicacity is greatly overrated," remarked Dick with a somewhat harsh laugh. "If they were half as sharp as they are said to be, they would be more likely to take us for father and daughter—or at the very least for uncle and niece."

"Oh, not that, Dick, surely!" protested Mrs. Selville, maternal instinct springing to arms. "It's ridiculous to talk of yourself as if you were so old. What is forty-one, after all? The prime of a man's life! I can quite understand the mistake. And really, now that I come to think of it—"

She broke off abruptly, her colourless face transformed by something which possibly might be related to an inspiration, and with wide, wondering eyes going from her son to her niece, and back again to her son, in an astonishment as patent as though this was her first sight of either of them.

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## CHAPTER VI.

## THE CONTENTS OF THE DRAWER.

THAT night Mrs. Selville slept badly, owing probably to an abnormal activity of her brain molecules, or perhaps because the thing she had recognised as an "inspiration" had acted the part of a too rich fare, by provoking severe mental indigestion.

Dick and Audrey! How was it that she had never thought of it before? Turning restlessly upon the hotel bed she strove to find an answer to this question. It was the difference of age, she supposed, which had blinded her, and the fact of having seen Audrey riding upon Dick's shoulder, times out of number; the fact, too, perhaps, of his semi-paternal position as guardian, but chiefly the fact of her having only quite lately realised that Audrey was actually grown up. There were a dozen explanations at least, but not one which would stand upright, under close scrutiny. As though lots of men were not twenty years older than their wives! In fact there *could* be no graver mistake than too great proximity of age. There she had been scouring the horizon for years, and overlooking the treasure which lay so close to hand. How absolutely perfect for Audrey to be the mistress of Lockwood, where, unavoidably, from the moment that Dick took another

wife, her position would become a little awkward. In all probability, Audrey's own feelings were already enlisted. Now that the scales had fallen from her eyes, Mrs. Selville remembered all sorts of circumstances which favoured this suggestion. The cousins had always been good friends, of course, but lately they certainly seemed to have much more to say to each other than usual. During the afternoon just passed, and in which she had started observations, Mrs. Selville had, more than once, caught them whispering in corners. And what could all this mean but one thing? Perish the French heiresses, together with all their domestic virtues! Their chances were evidently gone for ever; nor would Mrs. Selville send one tear after them. A foreign daughter-in-law would, after all, have been but a *pis aller*, whereas this arrangement was absolutely ideal. It was with the firm intention of furthering it to the best of her powers that Mrs. Selville finally hugged herself to sleep and into blissful dreams of the future.

This attitude of mind, if it did nothing else, greatly facilitated the cousins' arrangements for next day. For the visit to the Rue G—— which, in consequence of the emotions of yesterday morning, Dick had insisted on postponing, was planned for this afternoon. During the earlier part of the day Mrs. Selville had so assiduously carried out her resolution of last night as seriously to perplex Audrey and painfully to embarrass Dick.

It was in the Bois de Boulogne that the morning had been spent, passing in review the cream of Parisian equestrians and the pick of the most *assommante* motors. The pains which Mrs. Selville had there taken to further a *tête-à-tête*, by going astray at convenient turnings, had

been defeated only by Dick's vigilance. On the whole she was not dissatisfied with her morning's work, having observed several very earnest, undertone conversations, and having twice surprised a signal made by Audrey and answered by Dick.

When, therefore, during a luxurious *déjeuner* taken at the robbers' den known as the Restaurant de la Cascade, Dick artfully suggested that possibly his mother would be feeling too tired for a second excursion that day, and might therefore not object to resting in her room while Audrey and he had another go at the galleries, his no less artful mother positively jumped at the idea.

"Exactly what I was on the point of suggesting myself! Of course I am much too tired to go out again, and besides I have letters to write. You and Audrey don't need me a bit for the galleries, do you? And three is such an awkward number, don't you think?"

"I think it depends upon who the third person is, aunty dear," said Audrey, conscience-stricken at the thought of a possible neglect, and at the same time puzzled by the elation of the tone—not at all that of a person who feels herself slighted.

"Ah well, of course, a gooseberry does come in useful sometimes, does it not, Audrey?" smiled Mrs. Selville, whose career, needless to say, was one long record of things that would better have been left unsaid, or, at the very least, have been said differently.

In a sort of incredulous wonder Audrey gazed back at her aunt. Certainly she had been rather perplexing all morning, and that suggestion of two being

company and three none had not fallen for the first time since breakfast. Yet it was only when, glancing at Dick, she saw upon his face a look of displeasure which almost amounted to irritation, that full light came to her.

Barely in time—remembering the publicity of the place—she checked a burst of laughter. What a joke, to be sure! And how she and Dick would laugh over it together! Dear old Dick! How absurd of him to redden in that way! purely from annoyance, no doubt. What, in the name of all that was improbable, could have caused Aunt Phœbe to jump to this latest and most preposterous conclusion?

Meanwhile the mistake came in very conveniently for the afternoon's plans.

“Oh, Dick, is that all?”

Audrey said the words in a somewhat blank tone stooping beside Dick over the wooden case whose lock he had just succeeded in bursting. The raised lid had revealed what at first sight looked like a caseful of small oranges, shining and fresh, and neatly packed in rows.

“What on earth could he want all these for?”

Without replying, Captain Selville took out one of the supposed oranges, examined it carefully, weighed it on his hand and, without speaking, handed it to Audrey. She was immediately astonished at its lightness—still more astonished when she looked closer, for this was no orange, unless there be a land where tin oranges grow. The imitation was very good—the grain of the

yellow skin excellently counterfeited, but the very first touch betrayed the fraud.

"What are they?" she asked in a voice that had grown hushed.

Captain Selville had taken out a second of the sham oranges.

"If they are not children's toys they can only be one thing."

"What thing?"

"Bombs. I remember seeing somewhere a list of the different disguises that bombs are made to wear, and one of them was oranges. I don't see what else they can possibly be."

"Bombs!"

Audrey felt the colour retreating from her face as instinctively she moved back.

"No danger, you know. They are not charged. But as to their nature I have not got any doubts. Look—here is the opening left for the filling."

"Then you were right in your surmises?"

"So it would seem."

"But what are we to do with them?" Audrey asked, after a pause of real consternation this time. "Can we leave them here?"

"Not unless we want Monsieur Michaud to run off to the police with the news of the find, since of course now that the lock is gone, he will lose no time in sticking his nose in here. There's nothing for it but the Seine, I fancy. Fortunately the watch-dog has been turned into a lamb by this time. Another gold piece will enable me to take the whole concern away after dark, and I'll find some way or other of chucking it



bodily over the bank. Meanwhile you had better go back to the hotel, in order to keep mother quiet."

"I can't go without another look at the papers in the writing-table, Dick."

"Very well. But I should recommend taking them away with you for a more leisurely examination at home. There is no more difficulty about that."

"Yes, that will be the best way. I feel so flurried here at the idea that those people can come in at any moment."

"All right, but don't be too long about it. I would rather have you out of the house while I finish the examination of this box. There *may* be explosives at the bottom, you see."

"Oh, Dick. And you? Won't you be careful?"

"Of course I will—very careful. And now, where are those papers?"

With Dick's help and an old newspaper supplied by the lamb-like Monsieur Michaud, Audrey made up her parcel, and within a few minutes had departed with it in the taximeter waiting below.

Mrs. Selville's disappointed mien at seeing her return alone once more stirred the forgotten amusement of the morning. Dick was bent upon an excursion up-river, as she explained to her aunt—had taken it into his head to study the Seine by gaslight.

"And you?" asked the discouraged intriguer.

"I was feeling much too cold, auntie, to be allured by such a watery plan. Why, I expected to have my prudence commended, especially as I fancy that Dick will be rather late."

He was late. It was quite nine o'clock before he

came in, looking rather chilled and more thoughtful than ever. A rapid whisper, passing between the cousins, now revived Mrs. Selville's drooping spirits. What the whisper actually consisted of was as follows—

“Got rid of them?”

“Got rid of them all right. Unless any of those unhappy fishermen bring them to light, they are not likely to be heard of again.”

“And the explosives?”

“There were no explosives; but there were some queer bits of steel—parts of some mechanical contrivance, evidently. I thought it safer to enrich the Seine with them as well.”

Late that night, while Mrs. Selville slept soundly, Audrey, in her dressing-gown, and by the light of a shaded candle, went through each single sheet of the papers brought away with her. By far the greatest part was printed matter, and could be no more than glanced at with uncomprehending eyes, and put aside. Among the manuscript portion there were various things that looked like lists, likewise in Russian characters, and there was a limited number of letters. It was to these that she turned with something like hope, to be once more met by the sealed writing. Most of them were mere notes—so she judged by their look—bearing a Parisian postmark and dated from July, as she could see by the official imprint—that is from the time of her first Parisian excursion. From the “comrades” no doubt. Ah, for comprehension to pierce the meaning of those hieroglyphics! With desperate eyes she gazed at the queer letters which probably held the key to the mystery.

No doubt Paris could produce interpreters enough to grapple with this problem. For one moment she glanced at this suggestion, only to reject it. After the discovery of the afternoon, the initiating of any third person to the affairs of Demetr Dobrowicz appeared too perilous a step—might prove his direct betrayal into the hands of the police, supposing he were not there already. With a sigh of discouragement she laid aside one sheet after the other. Then suddenly her face changed, and with the swiftness of a pounce she snatched up a sheet upon which her eye had been caught by characters which were at least comparatively familiar. She had had German governesses, and with a little trouble was able to spell out the four-page letter, in which, besides a good deal of talk of Liberty and of Tyrants, reference was made to an undertaking of which the scene was apparently to be St. Petersburg. It was such a letter as one rabid revolutionist might very well be supposed to write to another—dated from Zurich, too, which was quite in keeping—exactly the letter to tally with the case of bombs in the Rue G——, but it did not throw any new light on the situation, the less so as it was bereft of any precise address and was signed with initials alone.

With rising agitation Audrey pursued her search, and a minute later held in her hand a page with ragged edges, evidently the conclusion of some letter from which it had been torn, and containing only the one sentence in French:

“Au revoir à St. Petersburg au mois d’Août’  
P—— 69. R.”

With fast-beating heart and thoughts working at high pressure, Audrey sat and gazed at the words. A clue at last! Surely a clue!

Presently she noiselessly rose, and, putting out the candle, crept into bed, not to sleep immediately, but to think, and think, and think, with both the German and the French letters beneath her pillow, longing all the time for the morning and for Dick, to whom to impart the news.

While Mrs. Selville still slept peacefully, Audrey was up already, and, barely dressed, sent her maid over to Captain Selville's room with a summons which within five minutes was obeyed.

"You have found something?" asked Dick, after a look at her face.

"I have found this. Look!"

She held the French note towards him.

He read it carefully.

"An address—I see."

"Not only an address—also an indication, and not the only one. There is a German letter here too, which points to St. Petersburg."

Rapidly she gave him a summary of the letter from Zurich. "In August he was expected at St. Petersburg, that is clear, and since August he has disappeared! Therefore where else can he be but at St. Petersburg?"

Dick had sat down opposite to her, the note still in his hand, a thoughtful frown upon his face.

"We must work this out. Let me see. Taking it that he had an appointment at St. Petersburg in August, as apparently he had, he might have gone

there straight from London, and might have had reasons for not telling you his real destination. And once in St. Petersburg—”

“Once in St. Petersburg anything may have happened. Oh, Dick, was I not right to suspect the Russian prisons all the time?” She looked at him through starting tears, her hands clasped upon her knees.

“You may have been right, but nothing proves yet that you are. I admit strong grounds of surmise for his presence in Russia, and certainly it would appear that he is not at liberty to communicate with you, else, presumably, he would have done so.”

“Of course he would have done so! Dick, listen,” and she leaned forward towards him. “I don’t care whether you think me mad or not, but I am going to follow him to Russia.”

The words bristled with defiance against the expected protest. But no protest came. It was with a most nerve-soothing calm that Captain Selville said—

“I don’t think you mad at all. Under the circumstances it seems the natural thing for you to do, only I hope you don’t mean to start to-day, as I can’t well manage without a run home to Lockwood.”

“You?”

Audrey stared—genuinely taken by surprise.

“Do you mean to say that you would go too?”

“And do *you* mean to say that you suppose I would let you go off by yourself to such a country as Russia is at present? Guardian-like habits are not so easily shaken off, you see, even though in the eye of the law I am no longer a guardian.”

He laughed, a trifle awkwardly.

Audrey put out her hand and touched his, the superfluous defiance quite melted from her face.

"How good of you, Dick! I should not have liked to ask, but if you really mean it. . . . And how about Lockwood? Can it do without you for a time?"

"It will have to."

"And Aunt Phœbe?"

"Mother will have to go too, I suppose. We will make it as easy for her as we can, but I don't see how she can be dispensed with. You would not like that stupid 'Monsieur et Madame' to become chronic, would you?"

It was said with a smile whose strain escaped Audrey.

"Well, I suppose it would be *properer*," she agreed, quite unconcerned. "But then we can't well keep her out of the secret any longer, can we?"

Dick got up and took a turn about the room, out of the reach of Audrey's eyes.

"I don't think we could do that anyway. I was meaning to suggest to you to-day that—"

He broke off at the sound of the opening door. It was only Mrs. Selville looking in in her dressing-gown, to utter a little chuckle of delight at sight of the cousins, and, with an apologetic murmur, to vanish again.

Audrey looked round at Dick with a spark of laughter in her eyes.

"Dear Aunt Phœbe! Is she not killing?"

But Dick did not appear in the least amused.

"I really cannot see where the joke comes in, Audrey. It strikes me as high time that mother's

latest idea should be knocked on the head. I wonder you could eat your supper, last night; I'm sure I couldn't."

He said it with an irritation which had survived the night's rest, for Mrs. Selville as matchmaker was calculated to grate even upon robust nerves.

"That is why I say that we would have to initiate her anyway, even without Russia. Poor mother! I'm afraid it will be a blow."

"I'm afraid so too," admitted Audrey rather humbly. "*You* will tell her, Dick, won't you? I should not know how to."

Very sweet and cousinly she looked as she glanced up at him, only half aware of the coaxing note with which expediency had coloured her voice. She was feeling really grateful to him for his offered escort; though, after the first moment of surprise, she had almost begun to wonder at her own astonishment. After all, he could not well allow two helpless women to start alone upon such a quest as this promised to be. And besides, to be served by Dick had become so much a part of daily life as scarcely to call for comment.

"Yes, of course I will have to tell her."

"And when do you think you can be back from Lockwood? You will go there at once, I suppose."

"Of course, and I don't think I shall need more than three days there to set things a-going. Meanwhile you can be making your purchases. You'll need furs, of course, and warm things generally. By this day week I fancy we might be off. You will preserve that address carefully, of course. It's from that point that our new researches must start."

"I suppose there is nothing more that could be done here, is there?"

"Nothing that I can see, without appealing to the police, and no doubt you agree with me that under the circumstances it seems wiser not to call their attention to his—to Dobrowicz's existence."

Audrey, playing with her rings, moved restlessly upon her chair.

"Dick," she said after a long pause, "do you think that revolutionists are always wrong when they resort to violence? May there not be circumstances which justify them?"

The anxiety in her tone was enough to tell Dick's discriminating ear that, despite the equanimity with which this subject had lately been discussed, the bombs were nevertheless weighing somewhat heavily upon the mind of the girl-wife.

"I think," he answered slowly, and not looking towards her, "that in their own eyes such people may be justified, but I think also that through evil means a good end never is reached."

"But they could be acting in perfect good faith, could they not?"

"No doubt they could."

He paused for one moment, then with an effort and a touch of gentleness even beyond his habitual tone towards her—

"I always think that in order to condemn any person absolutely, one would need to be able to look into his head. At the worst even an anarchist is an idealist gone wrong."

"Thank you, Dick," said Audrey very low, while a



tear splashed onto her lap; and although Dick knew that the tear was not for him, he yet felt himself thanked beyond his deserts.

The farce of sight-seeing was that day abruptly cut short, Mrs. Selville, after having been closeted for half an hour with her son—while Audrey paced the neighbouring room in conscience-stricken suspense—being quite unable to face the strain.

“Married, Dick! Married!” she kept repeating in a sort of incredulous frenzy. “But people don’t get married in that way without a wedding dress and a veil. I have never known a single case. A Registry Office? But I thought it was only runaway couples who went there. What? That’s what they were, you say? Audrey make a runaway marriage! Why, she’s only just out of the schoolroom, and, besides, I had had such different plans! And a Russian, too! I am sure Audrey would never think of marrying a Russian. And where should she have met one? There must be some mistake.”

Then, when Dick had once more patiently explained the whole matter from the beginning.

“What? That black-bearded person at Versailles? Yes, I remember him now, and he certainly was rather good-looking. But she got married in London, as you pretend, and I never saw him in London.”

Conviction having at length been achieved, hysterics had their turn, when once more the smelling-salts came into requisition. It was not until a flood of tears had swept away the last fragments of Mrs. Selville’s short-lived dream that something like rational discussion became possible. The Russian journey in itself was not without a certain weird attraction to her peculiar cast

of mind; and the prospect of spending several more blissful days in the paradise of shops, selecting the necessary equipment, went some way towards helping disturbed nerves to settle down. Optimism had to come to the rescue. Audrey having been wept over and forgiven, was conjured to abjure despondency and called upon to share Mrs. Selville's quickly born and rapidly developing conviction of a happy *dénouement*. All mention of the bomb cases and of the surmises attaching to them having been carefully suppressed, and Demetr Dobrowicz represented to her merely as a possible victim of Russian tyranny, she was at full liberty to weave her own romance, which, accordingly, she at once proceeded to do, and in which the missing husband became rapidly transformed into a nobleman of ancient race and fabulous wealth, whom unworthy intrigues had sent to Siberia, whence, of course, money and connections—was not the wife of the present English ambassador at St. Petersburg Mrs. Selville's own cousin?—would speedily rescue him.

Audrey would in all probability end by being royally provided for. But, to be sure, there was still Dick to be thought of. Dear dear, would she have, after all, to turn her maternal eyes back upon the French possibilities? No, better, surely onwards towards the Russian ones. There must be heiresses, too, in the realms of the Czar, and she had always heard that there were beauties, as well. It was towards these that her indomitable spirit now began hopefully to look.

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## PART II.

### CHAPTER I.

#### "THE MARTYRS."

It was upon a hot June evening—the June which had preceded Audrey Selville's visit to the Registry Office—that a young man, tall, black-haired and of an olive pallor, asked his way in broken German to an out-of-the-way street in the Swiss town of Kugelberg.

His face had that strained and dusty look, his clothes that tumbled appearance peculiar to people who have recently left a railway carriage. And not without reason, since it was two days back that he had crossed the Russian frontier. The wheels of the engine were still revolving in his head, the nerves of his whole body vibrating in response to the long motion undergone. A two days' growth of beard marred the classical cast of his features; but to think of rest was not possible until he had kept the appointment for which he had travelled so far. Nor did the fierce light of his brown eyes speak of anything but impatience, and possibly some consuming inner fever.

Dusk was falling fast as at the door of a steep-roofed house on the outskirts of the town he rang a bell. The sound had not yet died away before a window was opened above his head and someone, indis-

tinguishable in the dusk, looked out. A question was asked in Russian—and answered, then a pass-word demanded and given, upon which the window closed and a minute later the door opened.

"This way," said the person who had opened it, still speaking Russian, and leading the way to a space close to the narrow entrance. "Before taking you upstairs, I must see your papers."

In the room alongside he struck a match and lit a candle. Then silently put out his hand. As silently the new arrival placed in it a small packet of papers, produced from an inner pocket.

During the minutes that passed while the other bent over the papers, the traveller gazed eagerly and with a sort of awe at his face, which was of an almost bluish pallor, enhanced by the blue-black shade on the upper lip. A long, thin nose, looking as though pared away at the tip, a high, sloping forehead, small, sunken, but rapidly moving eyes under delicate black eyebrows, a mouth almost as thin as a thread, completed the peculiarity of his appearance. The hair was thin-grown and moist looking, which in conjunction with the corpse-like complexion, suggested a person recently rescued from drowning. Another peculiarity was an inclination of the fine-grained skin to wrinkle into folds, which yet certainly were not the folds of age—under the eyes, upon the neck, behind the ears, a mesh of tiny wrinkles, appearing and disappearing with almost every movement of the head, as do the wrinkles on the neck of a lizard or a snake. The whole look of this person, whose age remained unguessable, was strange and rather disquieting, the only unmistakable thing about him being

that unclassified something which marks the leaders of men.

"It is well," he said presently, raising his small smooth head. "You are welcome."

Not the shadow of a smile went along with the words, and now only he stretched out a thin hand, whose touch felt almost clammy in the other's warm grasp.

"You know who I am?"

"You can only be Gregor Gaftyn," said the younger man, gazing at him with the enthusiastic eyes of a disciple.

"Hush!" broke in the other, finger upon lips; "here there is only a Pawel Milink."

Then, with another of his lightning-like glances:

"It would seem that you have come straight from the station?"

"Straight. I had been told of the meeting to-day, and calculated that, by not losing a minute, I might still be in time."

Gregor Gaftyn nodded approvingly, but still in that strange, unsmiling manner of his. Then, without wasting further words:

"The rest can be discussed upstairs. Come."

Up the creaking wooden stairs the young man followed upon the heels of his guide, with fast-beating heart; for, despite the fanatic light in his brown eyes, he was a proselyte of comparatively recent date, and, in one sense, this was to be his initiation into the inner circle of that band of desperadoes who had dubbed themselves "The Martyrs," and to whose principles he had blindly pledged himself.

If his excited fancy had expected anything romantically lurid about the spot of assembly the disappointment must have been great; for the room upstairs, with its ponderous old-fashioned furniture, its huge porcelain stove and cosy window-seats—bore a paradoxically *bourgeois* appearance. Impossible to imagine anything more unlike a conspirator's den, and more like a highly respectable family sitting-room, in which stockings are knitted by the dozen, and German *Hausfrauen* carefully fold their linen. Even ignorant of their occupation any invisible spectator could not but have been struck with their incongruity to their surroundings of this group of men, sitting round what had probably once been the family dining-table, with marks of wet beer-glasses and too hot plates still visible upon its painted surface.

There were striking-looking persons among this group, and there were physically insignificant ones; but they all had the same look in their eyes—the look which the black-haired proselyte had brought with him through all the fatigues of the journey.

"This is our new comrade, Teofil Boloff," said Gregor Gaftyn by way of introduction. "He comes with the warmest commendations for services already rendered, and is eager to place his talents—his very considerable talents—at the disposal of the party. I think I speak in all your names when I say that he is welcome."

"Welcome! Welcome!" came from various pairs of lips, while chairs were pushed back and hands stretched towards Teofil Boloff.

"You have been sent to us—for this meeting?" enquired a little man of almost dwarf-like proportions, with features all gone to breadth, as though his big

head had, at some time or other, been forcibly flattened.

"Not expressly for the meeting. It was considered safer that I should be out of Russia, as *they* were beginning to have their eye upon me," explained Boloff with an almost childlike accent of pride in his tones. "And knowing of the meeting, I timed myself to reach to-day."

"And you got over the frontier without difficulty?"

"Without difficulty, thank God!—thanks to my luck, I should say," he corrected himself hastily, having caught various quick frowns at the sound of so unpopular a word.

"Teofil Boloff is too modest," explained Gregor Gaftyn. "He has been sent to us expressly. Committee Number One are aware that we are in need of a first-class mechanic for the experiments you know of, and he is the one selected. Even in the few months that he has belonged to the party the proofs of talent he has given have satisfied the leaders that he is the man we require. It is no wonder if *they* have their eyes upon him already."

"I am at your service," murmured Boloff, doing his best to deserve the praise of modesty. "These experiments—where are they to take place?"

"At Paris. Committee Three is working there already, in well-chosen laboratories, so that little preparation will be wanted. Take place, and let us talk it out."

The discussion which followed would have allowed an uninstructed outsider to guess no more than that the experiments referred to applied to the construction of

some sort of mechanical contrivance from which great things were expected, and which were too elaborate to be pursued with any hope of security, upon Russian territory. After the question had been raised as to whether, the experiments concluded, the actual construction should be hazarded in Russia, or the single parts smuggled separately over the frontier, even the uninstructed person could not well avoid concluding for some new development of the mechanical horror known as an "infernal machine."

"But it is not the machine alone we shall need," remarked another of the company, young, thin, sallow and eager; "we require another load of oranges as well. We have heard of the excellent oranges you grew in your workshop, and we are anxious to spread the taste for them."

"If the machine does what we want it to do," said Gregor Gaftyn, staring straight into the flame of one of the two candles which was all that illuminated the room; "then maybe we shall not require any more oranges. But one has to count with evil chances. There was nothing new known about *his* movements, was there, when you left Russia?" he asked, darting one of his swift glances at Boloff.

"Nothing new. But it seems certain that he will pass through St. Petersburg in September, on his way to the Finnish waters."

"We must be ready by then," said a man with a conspicuous and shining white forehead, which seemed to have usurped more than its due space, the remaining features bearing the appearance of having somehow slipped down to the lower portion of his face. Later



on Boloff got to know him as the chief chemist of the party, and by far his most important fellow-worker.

"We shall be ready!" asserted the big-headed dwarf, bringing a disproportionately large fist down upon the table. "I shall take Teofil Boloff back to Paris with me, and he can set to work at once."

"Petru Swierzo belongs to the Paris Committee," explained Gregor Gaftyn. "You see here all the Continental Committees represented to-day. Let us pass to the next point. What stands next on the list, Dumiek?" and he looked towards the sallow and eager young man who, with pen and paper before him, seemed to be acting the part of secretary.

"The case of Filip Filipowicz," read out this person.

At the words every set of features, except those of the uninstructed newcomer, contracted with displeasure. In a few rapid sentences Boloff's ignorance was enlightened. Filip Filipowicz's name would stand for ever upon the books of the party as that of a traitor; not because he had knowingly played into the hands of the police, but because he had failed in the duty of silence towards his young and lovely wife, whose indiscreet tongue had let slip the dangerous secret, which had caused the arrest of two valuable members of the band.

"He meant no harm, doubtless, and neither did she," remarked Gregor Gaftyn, almost indulgently. "But it is always the honest traitors that are the most dangerous. I am sincerely sorry for her. Those pretty brown eyes of hers must be red with weeping by now."

And for the first time that evening Teofil Boloff saw the leader smile, but almost wished he had not seen it, so curiously cold did that smile cause him to feel about

the spine, even although he did not know, as the others did, that this man never smiled except when rage had reached the white-heat point.

"Was she so remorseful for her indiscretion?" Boloff ventured to enquire, his youthful fancy caught by the picture of the desolate traitress.

"I don't know about that. But she was very fond of her husband."

"And he was arrested?"

"No, he was not arrested," said Gregor Gaftyn, still staring, unblinkingly, into the flame of the candle. "He was found in the Danube—it was at Vienna this thing happened—a little way below the town, with a bullet in his head. The general belief is that he committed suicide out of despair at the incident. That is the general belief—outside of the party."

Again Teofil Boloff felt a certain chill sensation running down his spinal cord. His enquiring glance went round the table, to read upon every single face of the circle corroboration of the appalling thought which had dawned within him.

"Such a thing must not happen again," remarked Gregor Gaftyn after a minute. "I mean such a thing as even the risk of an indiscretion. If women are not the priestesses of our movement they are its undoing; there seems to be nothing between. Therefore, except for those sisters who have given proof of their devotion to the cause, we must have no women belonging to us—not even our mothers. Those who still have them in this world must say good-bye to them to-day. But it is the conjugal bond which is the most dangerous, as the case of Filip Filipowicz proves. And therefore, comrades,

before we disperse, I have a proposal to lay before you."

Taking his gaze off the candle-flame, Gregor Gaftyn sent it round the table, searchingly, questioning. Then straightening his spare figure and raising his damp-looking hand, spoke with a new weight of authority:

"I propose that we all who sit here, representatives as we are of the centres of the party—those that are admitted into the inner circles of information—do not leave this room until we have pledged ourselves to take no wife before the day on which our hopes are realised—the day upon which Russia's liberty will have dawned. If I had it in my power to say to you, 'Shun women completely,' I would do so; but I know what youth is, and all I say is: 'If you cannot do without love, then sip at the chalice, but take no deep draught. Let your love be as the love of the butterfly, not that of the bird. Flit from flower to flower, if you must, but build yourself no nest. Its warmth is too fatally relaxing to the hardness of that discipline which makes the muscle of our party.'"

There was silence when he paused—the silence of astonishment. Then the eager youth spoke diffidently:

"But your own wife, Gregor Gaftyn?"

"I have no wife. It is a month ago that I separated from her—immediately after the betrayal at Vienna. The divorce was pronounced last week. Of my own will I shall not see her again, under present conditions."

He said it indifferently, without a sign of emotion; but the men round the table looked at each other in a sort of fright, for they knew that Gregor Gaftyn's wife was beautiful and that he loved her.

"It is fortunate that I alone among you have had to rid myself of an encumbrance, you others are free; all I ask of you is, that you should keep your freedom until such time as Russia has gained hers. After all, we do not call ourselves 'The Martyrs' for nothing, do we? Your answer: will you take the pledge?"

"We will take it!" came the many-voiced reply in a burst of enthusiasm fired by the contact of self-sacrifice.

"Be sure that you know what you are doing! This is no light talk. This pledge ranges among our constituting oaths. If any man doubts of himself, let him withdraw."

He paused, but no one moved.

"Then the proposal is passed?"

"It is passed."

"With all the usual conditions?"

"Yes—yes!" came as in one voice.

"And with the usual penalty attached to a breach?"

"The usual penalty."

"It is well. Dumiek"—to the secretary—"give me that paper."

The paper was handed over—a large sheet upon which about half a page was covered with close writing.

"I have embodied the resolution in these lines. Let each of you read them through before putting down his signature. I will begin."

Taking the pen presented to him and dipping it into the cheap glass inkstand pushed towards him, Gregor Gaftyn signed himself, then passed on the sheet to his neighbour.

In unbroken silence it made the round of the table

—slowly, because of the necessity for deciphering those written lines. By the time it reached Boloff eight names figured there already.

He paled a little as he read that which stood above the signatures—not because he was a coward—far from it—but because his excitable imagination was picturing for him the death-scene of the unfortunate Filipowicz with himself substituted as chief actor and victim. Yet, although feeling the weightiness of the moment in every fibre of his tired body, his hand did not shake as he signed the pledge. Nor did any serious misgiving assail him. To live without love might have been too hard for his ardent twenty-five years; but it was not love that was forbidden, only the domestic hearth; and towards that he had never yet yearned—less so than ever, since his plunge into the all-absorbing revolutionary movement.

The next day was spent by the new arrival principally in sleep, and towards evening in gazing with entranced eyes at this new world of mountains, known only by hearsay to the son of the steppes. As in company with the dwarf-like Petru Swierzo he walked the streets of the quaint, old-fashioned town, his mind was strangely divided between admiration of landscape beauties and an excited sense of his own importance. A somewhat naïve vanity was one of the qualities inherited from his beautiful Greek mother—not, in his case, vanity of personal appearance, but of personal importance, fed largely by the consciousness of a rather remarkable turn for mechanics, declared by some to savour of genius. It was this feeling which caused him,

while walking the streets, to look carefully at every policeman, with the fixed conviction that every policeman was looking at him. It was likewise this which caused him, every few minutes, to feel in his pocket for his revolver, quite prepared to discover that the Russian police, having missed him already, had communicated with the Swiss authorities. If his arrest were to take place, it should not takè place without bloodshed; he would see to that.

But it should not take place, if he could help it. The party could spare him too badly. Hence the elaborate precautions taken when after dusk the house on the outskirts of the town was again visited. It was on his return from this meeting that Boloff got his first real fright; for in the small inn bedroom, which he had yet carefully locked, there was lying upon the table a paper which had not been there before. It was only the usual *Meldezettel*, which police regulations require to be filled up by each new arrival, stating name, profession and latest habitation, and which by some oversight had been neglected yesterday. The mere fact of someone having been inside his closed room—easily explained though it was by the landlady's duplicate key—was just the thing to alarm his peculiar form of nervousness. When, moreover, this fussy person started a lament on the disagreeables she had already had to undergo for not having yesterday notified the traveller's arrival, Boloff no longer doubted that he was already marked down—the less so as he now distinctly remembered having noticed a dark figure in a doorway, on his way back from the meeting, and having heard pursuing steps behind him all the way home.

What chance remained of reaching Paris unmolested? Throw them off the track? But how? No doubt the Kugelberg Station would be closely watched; but was the Kugelberg Station the only resource? Could he not give them the slip by taking a cut across the mountains and rejoining the railway-line at some other less conspicuous point?

During a feverish night, spent with the revolver beside his bed, he turned over the point in his mind. As a result next day he sought out Petru Swierzo, his proposed escort to Paris, and laid his idea before him. It was received with an indulgent smile. Being an old hand at the game, Swierzo was well used to the over-nervousness of new members.

"You are too complimentary to the police, I think," he observed with small eyes twinkling maliciously in his big head. "Their noses have not nearly the *flaire* you would credit them with. I don't myself believe you would be running any danger by taking a railway ticket straight off."

"Maybe. But precautions do no harm. It is not for myself I feel nervous, you understand; but because of the interests of the party."

"Of course," said the dwarf genially. To the exaggerated self-importance of the neophyte he was likewise used.

"Well, have it your own way!" he added after brief reflection; "you could walk over to N—— on the French frontier, and join the railway there. It's a walk of about eight hours—a good day's work, but not particularly hard walking. But you would have to do it

alone. I cannot spare a day. Am due at Paris to-morrow."

"Very well. I will do it. Shall I require a guide?"

"No, only a good map. The road is quite plain. You must start early, not later than four, in order to be sure to catch the night express at N——, since of course you cannot walk eight hours on end. By the way, I suppose you don't know your own strength in that line? Is this your first mountain excursion?"

"My first!" said Teofil, with a pleasing sense of excitement beginning to stir within him, while his eyes went longingly towards the grand, pine-clad heights beyond the town. Who knows how much the seduction of those unexplored fastnesses was not answerable for the choice of the plan just discussed?

## CHAPTER II.

### MARIANELE.

It was a perfect June morning on which Teofil Boloff, on his back a knapsack, in his pocket a newly purchased map of the country, set his face towards the mountains. An irrepressible buoyancy gave elasticity to his step and light to his eyes. Anarchist convictions notwithstanding, there was still enough of the boy in his nature to let him keenly taste the hitherto unknown delights of a mountain excursion—even minus the flavour of adventure, of which the prospects seemed small, seeing that the road was a well-beaten valley track, neither difficult nor dangerous, and not easy to miss.



Even without adventure there was enough to occupy both eye and mind in this most perfect hour of the most perfect season. Summer had come prematurely and victoriously, and on all sides, beside the still lingering hawthorn, the wild roses were rushing into bloom. Over the meadows, starred with every tint of floweret, there lay a grey veil of dewdrops, which the very first sunbeam slipping over the mountain heights would presently turn into a mesh of diamonds.

As he strode onwards, his broad shoulders squared, his mighty lungs filled with the wine of this untouched air, Teofil Boloff realised that never before had he felt so keenly aware of his youth, his vigour, his perfect health, never known so strong an appetite for life and for all the goods of life.

And the further he penetrated into the mountain fastness, the more crystal-clear waters he saw tumbling over rocks, the more eagle-cries he heard piercing the air, the mightier did the sensation grow. The cows grazing upon emerald-green slopes, the red-cheeked, flaxen-haired lads watching them, the quaint, balconied châteaux, so exactly his idea of toy-houses—they all filled him with delight. The world, in itself, was undoubtedly a beautiful place; although, of course, all its arrangements were completely wrong and must perforce be set right by means of bombs and infernal machines. Meanwhile, there was no reason why he should not enjoy what came his way—in pursuance of which reflection Teofil Boloff presently caught himself tossing his cap into the air, from sheer approval of existence in general, and even making a very praiseworthy attempt at an-

swering a challenging *Jodel*, which had rung down from one of the meadows above.

But through it all he walked on sturdily, mindful of the necessity of catching the night express at N——, and regardless of the sun which, once having topped the heights, beat down mercilessly into the narrow valley. Such good haste did he make that, midday reached, and after consulting both his watch and the map, he decided that an hour's rest would be more than justified. He had now left the more populous tracts of the mountain behind him, and was drawing towards the thinly inhabited region. Except to drink at a stream, here and there, he had not so much as relaxed his pace. Surely he had deserved this halt. Having hungrily swallowed his frugal meal and stretched himself luxuriously upon the grass, the inevitable drowsiness came.

It was a dull grumble, like that of a wild beast growling in his ear, which awoke him. Starting into a sitting posture he looked about him with dazed eyes, not immediately able to account for his surroundings. Ah, yes—the mountains! and his lunch just eaten. But where was the blue sky to which he had lately looked up? The valley, so smiling awhile ago, had already lost all its light—all its gilding. The rocks frowned upon him; even the flowers in the grass had almost vanished by reason of their furled petals. Hastily he pulled out his watch. What! Close upon three hours since he had lain down here! Three of his precious hours gone, and perhaps not to be made good. He looked up at the sky and almost shuddered at the black masses of cloud scudding across it. And now again that wild-beast growl, nearer, and more threatening. A thunderstorm!

He had never thought of that possibility. In face of that spotless morning sky the conception had been too distant. Yet behind the screen of mountains the first thunderstorm of the season had been gathering unseen, and now lowered above his head, ready to burst.

In the darkened valley every bush stood motionless, as though in expectation of some terror to come. While Boloff still looked about him, his soul attuned to this terrified expectation, he saw the first shiver pass over the rigid branches, and by the whitening of the willows beside the stream as they turned up the lining of their silver leaves, could mark the progress of the ominous wind sweeping up the valley. In another moment it had reached him, whirling away the paper in which his sandwiches had been wrapped.

As hastily he readjusted his knapsack and picked up his stick, the first heavy drop splashed upon his head.

He had made but a dozen steps when he stopped again in a sort of consternation, for a glare of lightning had almost blinded him, while straight above his head a thunder-clap burst, which made him feel as though the earth were rocking beneath him. That sound had been the signal for the opening of the floodgates. Within a minute the water was pouring off his hat. Wildly he looked about him for anything in the shape of shelter. No roof visible anywhere. Nothing that resembled a wall, unless it were those frowning rocks, whose hospitality he must perforce appeal to, since to walk on in this deluge—ill-equipped as he was for such a tour—was out of the question. Having espied a shelving ledge which promised some shelter, he made straight

for it; and there, cowering against the stone, waited in devouring impatience for the passing of the fury of the storm.

A weary wait it was, for the storm was one destined to become memorable in the annals of the country—not one storm, but ten storms, linked in what peasant-language calls a “storm-chain”—where what seems the last note of retreating thunder in the east is taken up by a fresh voice in the west, while new layers of cloud top the horizon at every minute, and both the wrath of heaven and the sluices of the sky seem inexhaustible.

Twice Boloff had left his shelter and twice been driven back to it by the rage of the storm. When at last, in a rather longer lull, he started off anew, determined to keep on this time, at all risks, the afternoon was far spent already and dusk not distant. All hope of catching the night express at N—— was now lost; but there was another train soon after midnight, as he knew, and was sanguine enough to place his hopes thereon.

Before ten minutes more passed he was back in the clutches of the elements; but this time set his teeth and battled on.

Though the days were at their longest, night seemed to come early beneath this lowering sky, and between these steep, pine-clad mountain-flanks. Soon, blinded by the rain, buffeted by the gale, soaked to the skin and sore of foot, the traveller was stumbling on, almost at haphazard. For hours now the map had not been consulted, and when, by a flash of lightning he was able to throw a glance upon it, it was only to confirm his rising conviction that he had missed the right path,

and was alone and astray in the wilderness of the mountains.

Being quite sure of the fact, and another lull having come, he sat down upon the wet ground in a sort of relief; at least now there was no more need for hurry, since, for aught he knew, each step might be taking him further from his goal instead of towards it. But in another moment he stood up, peering anxiously about him. N—— was unattainable; but other human shelters might not be so. Any roof to shield him—any hand to minister to him, any fellow-being with whom to exchange speech—it was towards this that his whole longing went, after the long, solitary day spent *tête-à-tête* with this fickle Nature, whose welcome had turned to such dire inhospitality.

Always peering about him, he stumbled on; but it was only a weary half-hour later that the dark flank of the hill was pricked by a twinkle, faint and yet unmistakably the light in the window of a human dwelling.

“Thank God!” he said aloud, unrebuked this time, since in such primitive regions as this God is occasionally still thanked—and immediately set his face towards the distant glimmer, as towards a star of hope. Ruthlessly he went towards it, regardless of obstacles—stumbling over stones, slipping upon the wet moss, wading sometimes to the knees in turbulent waters.

Before he had reached it the storm had burst afresh. In order to surmount the last steep ascent he had to gather all his strength. The wooden house—not much more than a hut—was shaking in all its beams from the reverberation of the last thunderclap when in his exhaustion he almost fell against the door. It was not

locked, as he became at once aware, the handle yielding to his touch. Without pausing to ask for admission, he stepped over the threshold, drawing a long breath of unspeakable relief as the gust behind him threw back the door into its fastenings.

He had stood still close within it, and remained thus immovable for quite a minute, his shaking hand raised to the height of his eyes, as though to shield them from the light so long missed, and which yet was no more than a dully burning oil-lamp hooked onto the wall. More than the encounter of the light, it was the surprise of the picture before him which chained his feet to the spot.

In one corner of the small space, whose ceiling was crossed by smoke-blackened rafters, hung a gaudy print of the Madonna, and before it, on her knees, lay what seemed to him to be a second Madonna—a very young girl in peasant corselet and shirt-sleeves, her golden head bowed, her heavy plaits, like ropes of gold, almost sweeping the ground. Weeping with terror she stretched clasped hands towards the picture, rocking her slender body from side to side, and uttering a moan, whose low sound had reached Boloff confusedly even as he struggled towards the hut. While he gazed, astonished, another glare of lightning filled the room, flashing over the kneeling figure, and making a new glory of her hair. She cried out again, covering her face with her hands, and not having so much as turned at his entrance. Clearly the opening and shutting of the door had been lost in the noise of the gust.

For a moment longer Boloff stupidly stared, asking himself how he was to announce his presence without

increasing her alarm. Then, with a sudden resolution he stepped forward, and without a word knelt down beside her before the Madonna, his clasped hands raised towards it. It was a clever thought, and not entirely a farce, since in the true Slav religious sentiment dies hard. In moments of emotion even the anarchistical Russian slips back almost automatically into the exploded habit of prayer. The gaudy Madonna which, while proclaiming the household to be one of the Roman catholic ones of the district, recalled the images of his own country, had lightened his task.

He had feared to see her start away from him in alarm—but the event was different; for the astonishment upon the face turned towards him was clearly a joyful astonishment, and, the thunder just then shaking the hut, she clutched unhesitatingly at his arm, and for a minute clung to him, half mad with terror, and murmuring words in the dialect of the country, which he had some difficulty in understanding.

Without speaking he stroked her hands, her hair, soothingly, as one might do those of a child, and a child she was, in fact, he told himself, and told himself also that he had never seen anything so seductive as the blanched face she had turned towards him, out of which the great blue eyes looked at him so appealingly.

When the height of the new storm had passed, they were still upon their knees, his arm still around her, her eyes hidden upon his shoulder, out of the way of that dreadful lightning.

Presently, the quiet continuing, she uncovered them to give him a long, wondering look, the first attentive look she had yet given him.

"The Mother of God has heard me," she said, with a deep breath, "I prayed to her so hard to send me a companion—it was so dreadful being alone in the storm—and she has sent you."

"But how came you to be alone? Is there no one else in the hut? Surely you do not live here alone?"

"I live with my parents. But they went down to Kugelberg to the market this morning—we had a cow to sell—and the storm must have caught them on the way. Oh, I was so frightened of spending the night alone!"

"And now you are not afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid. The Mother of God has sent you. You look strong, and you look good also. I think you will not hurt me."

"God forbid that I should!" said Teofil, to himself rather than to her, and gently releasing his arm, he rose to his feet, having only just discovered that they were still both upon their knees.

She rose also, still holding his hand and pushing the untidy gold of her disordered hair out of her eyes. The rain beat upon the small window as upon a drum, but the rumble of thunder was dying away in the distance. Suddenly she struck together her hands.

"God Almighty! You must have come far! See how wet you are!" and she pointed to the floor. Unawares they had both been kneeling in a pool of water.

"Are you not tired?"

"Yes, I am tired," said Boloff, sinking onto a bench by the wall with a great and sudden feeling of lassitude upon him.



"And hungry?"

He reflected.

"Yes, I suppose I am hungry too; I have eaten nothing since midday."

Immediately she began to bustle about. Leaving the room for a minute she returned with an armful of chopped wood, and with deft hands kindled a fire in the big brick oven which blocked a corner of the small apartment. Then, having invited him to draw nearer to the blaze, and opened various cupboards, she produced a jug of milk, a chunk of black bread, and a slice of cheese, which she placed before him. With a novel feeling of well-being upon him, Boloff's eyes followed the fair-haired child about the space. What a haven of rest after the strain of the afternoon! And a ministering angel, to boot! It was he, the protector, who was now being protected.

"And you?" he asked, as she urged him to eat. "Have you had your supper?"

"No. I was too frightened to eat."

"But now you are not frightened any longer. Supposing we eat together."

"Let it be!" she said, unembarrassed, and sat down opposite to him, with the rough table between them.

"What is your name, fair hostess?"

"I am called Marianele."

"And I am called Teofil. Well, Marianele, this is famous milk!"

It was the simplest and yet the most delicious meal which Boloff had ever eaten—these morsels of bread and cheese devoured by the light of the smoky little oil-lamp, and with the storm drawing away in the dis-

tance. The colour had by now come back into the white face he had first seen—a clear pink colour which harmonised deliciously with the gold of her hair and the blue of her eyes. Perhaps she was not really so beautiful as it seemed to him; perhaps the super-tension of his nerves and the somewhat sensational nature of the first impression were throwing a veil of illusion over the face and figure of what was but a comely peasant-child, barely budding into womanhood; but of this in his present, extremely uncritical mood, he could be no judge. He could see, indeed, that she was no fairy-tale princess, that the small brown hands were toil-worn, and it was all his knowledge of German could do to follow the breadth of her accent; but none of these things disturbed him, serving as they did to complete the picture. With difficulty they talked; but still they talked. He learnt from her that she was fifteen—just the age he would have given her—that this hut was not her permanent home, but only the summer shelter, in which she and her parents kept watch over the cows at pasture, while her brother and his wife looked after the house in the village, at an hour's distance, to which, in autumn, they would all return. Like the child that she was she chattered on, giving him all the homely details of her life; and he listened in a sort of rapture, caused, not in small part, though he knew it not, by the prosaic sensations of reviving warmth and satisfied hunger. That appetite of Life, which he had been aware of in the morning under the rising sun, was moving in him again, together with the general sense of well-being. When at length the stream of talk was cut short by a frank yawn, he laughed aloud in sheer delight.

"How long past your hour for bedtime, Marianele?" he asked, pulling out his watch.

Past midnight! It seemed to himself incredible.

For all answer she laid her plump arms upon the table and her head upon them.

"This will never do!" said Teofil, looking about him.

A primitive bedstead stood in one corner of the room. Little persuasion was wanted to induce Marianele, drunk with sleep as she was, to lie down upon it.

"And you? Will you not sleep?" she asked, as drowsily she raised her head from the pillow.

"Perhaps presently; but I am not sleepy now."

"You promise not to go away—you promise not to leave me alone till morning? If the storm comes back again while I am alone I shall die."

"I promise, Marianele. Sleep in peace."

And she slept, peacefully and confidently, while he watched beside her as he might have watched beside a sister, though with thoughts which no sister had ever awakened in him. But not thoughts for which he would ever have to blush before himself. For, despite the poison of the principles he had embraced, despite the ardour of semi-Oriental blood, Teofil Boloff was, in one sense, unspoilt. The dream he was dreaming beside the sleeping child was one which accorded ill with the pledge he had signed but two days ago. Ah, if it had not been for that tie, how sweet to pluck such a blossom of womanhood, not wantonly to throw it aside, but to cherish it and wear it on his bosom for ever! How delicious to rest in her pure arms from the perils of the great fight—to have the dust and blood of the battle kissed away by her fresh lips!

But those delights were not for such as he, picked soldier of that army whose martyrdom was self-chosen, and which could reach victory only by trampling down all personal desires. For the first time since his "conversion" the chains which he had riveted onto his own limbs began to gall. Perhaps it was the sense of this smart which, despite bodily fatigue, kept him wide-awake for hours.

It was not until daylight had come that he began to nod upon his chair, then, stretching himself upon the bench beside him, fell into deep slumber.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE WILLING PRISONER.

WHILE Marianele slept upon the bed and Teofil upon the bench a couple of sturdy peasants, obviously man and wife, and as obviously in the worst of humours, were toiling upwards through the valley devastated by yesterday's storm.

"A fine mess this will have made of the pastures!" grumbled the man, as he stuck his iron-spiked stick into the sodden ground.

"And maybe of the cattle as well," groaned the woman. "It's a question whether Marianele will have got all the cows under shelter before the water came down."

"It's a question, rather, whether we won't find the hut washed away, with Marianele inside it."

"Dear, dear! God preserve us," sighed she, lackadaisically. "Such a good girl as Marianele is!"

"And such a good hut, you might say—built with my own hands. It would cost me quite five hundred francs to build another—all that we have got for the spotted cow—and a bit besides. Ah! but it's a hard world!"

"You wouldn't put the hut before Marianele, would you?" whimpered his spouse; "the prettiest girl in the village, as Babi Werms was saying the other day."

"Was she saying that? That may mean that Sepp has his eye upon her, since it is not his mother's way to waste compliments. But, bah! What is Sepp? A third son—not good for more than pasture for four cows. That's no husband for Marianele."

"And yet it would be a good thing to get her settled before she takes any foolishness into her head, as the girls do."

"Yes, yes, a good thing, but the settlement too would need to be good. Why should the prettiest girl in the village go cheap? No, I shouldn't put the hut before Marianele—you are right there, Resi. One never can know what a pretty face may not fetch out of a well-filled pocket. Just see what Vali Grundl's face did for her!"

"Vali was not a whit prettier than Marianele is," asserted the mother with acid decision.

"I don't say she was; but love-sick Englishmen with their pockets full of gold don't drop from the skies every day, either."

"Ah no, they don't!"

In reflective silence the couple toiled on over roads down which the surplus of yesterday's rain was still trickling in miniature rivers. The good luck of Vali

Grundl, to whose buxom charms a wealthy English tourist had fallen victim some five years ago, had by this time acquired a sort of legendary glamour, very prone to stir the ambitions as well as the envy of every parent of a marriageable daughter within the district.

As the distance lessened anxiety grew. At sight of the low hut clinging unimpaired to the flank of the hill, an exclamation of relief burst from both pairs of lips.

"God be thanked! Marianele is safe!" said the mother.

"Praise to Heaven! I shall not have to build another hut!" said the father.

"But why does she not show herself? Send her a call, Hans!"

With his hand to his mouth he launched a vigorous *Jodel* through the air. But it died away unanswered. Marianele, so clever at the *Jodel*, was dumb to-day.

Rather silently they climbed the last slope, and somewhat hastily pushed open the door. But upon the threshold they both stood stock-still, as Teofil Boloff had stood there last night, and with an astonishment almost as great.

There upon the rough bed lay Marianele sleeping soundly in the broad daylight, and here upon the bench by the wall lay a strange young man, likewise in as deep a slumber, as though upon the hut some spell had been laid.

"Holy Mary!" murmured the woman in a panic, peering over her husband's shoulder.

The old peasant's hard face had grown suddenly so dark-red that it scarcely seemed possible that he should

not fall down in a fit. With stick upraised, he was about to rush upon the intruder, when his furious eye fell upon an object on the table—the heavy gold watch which Teofil had laid there before stretching himself to sleep. The sight seemed, somehow, to tame him. This, evidently, was no ordinary vagabond, despite the condition of his clothes. It might be as well not to come to blows with him at once. Of course the situation demanded explanation, even screamed for it—since even close-fisted fathers remain in first line, fathers; but the form should be modified. Striding up to the stranger the peasant took him by the shoulder, and shook him roughly awake.

“Here! You! What are you doing here? This is not your place, I take it!”

The words, breaking into a delicious dream which Teofil was just enjoying, and through which golden plaits and blue eyes had gleamed, brought him back abruptly to real life. Starting up with a vague sense of danger, he instinctively clutched at the inner pocket where he carried his revolver. This could only be the long-dreaded arrest, and this voice the voice of a police-agent—such his first rapid estimate of the situation. In the next moment, behind the figure of the angry peasant, he had caught sight of the girl upon the bed, with one golden plait hanging to the floor, and recollection returned. This was no spying policeman, this was an indignant father—and small blame to him either, all circumstances considered.

“No, this is not my place,” he said, almost humbly, “I know I have no right to be here. But there was no choice. The storm drove me in; and, once under

shelter, I had not the courage to leave it again; nor to leave her, either, against her own entreaties. But I have not misused your hospitality, and I will repay it tenfold. Look, I have money!"

Drawing out a full purse he opened it and displayed to the dazzled eyes of Marianele's father a handful of gold coins.

Over the broad peasant face there came a transformation, or rather another stage of the transformation which the sight of the gold watch had started. The small eyes narrowed in their sockets, the bull-dog jaw greedily contracted, even the fingers unconsciously closed, as though upon a prize.

"That money belongs to you?" he asked suspiciously.

"To me," said Boloff, whose private means were what is called "easy"—one of the reasons of the warm welcome he had received from "The Martyrs"—but who, even penniless, would necessarily have had his pockets filled by those same martyrs.

"And what were you doing in the mountains yesterday in the storm?"

"I was making an excursion—for my pleasure."

"Without a guide? People with money usually take guides."

"Not if they prefer their own society. I happen to prefer mine."

"Your German is very queer. Where do you come from? From England, perhaps?" with a bright thought.

"No; from Russia."

"And people are rich there?"



"They are either very rich or very poor."

"And he is not one of the poor ones," commented the man within his mind, having noted already that, despite its soiled condition, the stranger's linen was of the finest, and that his clothes, when properly brushed, would doubtless accord perfectly with the quality of that gold watch upon the table.

Under the influence of an idea born of his innate covetousness, his small eyes began to gleam. What was that he had said just now of wooers with pockets full of gold not dropping from the skies? Where else could this one have dropped from?—though to be sure, he was no wooer—yet. Why should Vali Grundl's good fortune remain an isolated case? Prudence would, of course, be advisable, but in face of those gold pieces, whose mere gleam seemed to hypnotise something within him, prudence appeared but a small thing.

It was in accordance with the new-born idea that the mien of the outraged father, trembling for his daughter's virtue, was picked up again, like a garment let slip for a moment, but judged the most useful one for the occasion.

With arms akimbo, and planted straight in front of his guest, he spoke in a rage which was now more than half artificial.

"And because you are of the rich ones, you think you can run about the world and slip into honest men's houses and compromise innocent maidens! Ah, but you are calculating without your host, my fine gentleman!"

"I have had no thought of compromising her. Not

so much as a single word of love have I spoken to her; I swear it to you!"

"And who is to believe you? The village gossips, maybe? Won't it just be they who will get hold of the story! They will say you lay in wait to find her alone; that she sent for you the moment our backs were turned. What will they not say of her! They will make her name so black that not a man for ten miles around would have her as a gift. A fine night's work, to be sure!"

At sound of this dismal prophecy both Marianele and her mother, now sitting side by side upon the bed, began to cry, with their arms around each other.

"What can I do to prove to you my perfect honesty in this matter?" said Boloff, deeply distressed.

"There is only one thing which could prove that—what the Englishman did when he found that Vali Grundl was being talked about, because of him."

"Which Englishman? And what did he do?"

Marianele's father began by planting his stick firmly upon the floor and his hands firmly upon the knob, before answering with a slow tongue, but a look like a knife—

"He married her, my friend; that's what he did."

At the portentous word, uttered with ponderous emphasis, Marianele, with a small cry, hid her scarlet face upon her mother's shoulder. Boloff saw both the movement and the flood of colour, and the sight brought the words to his lips:

"Ah, if I was free!"

"What? You have a wife already?"

"No—but I am sworn to celibacy."

"A priest, then—or on the way to becoming one?"

"No."

"Then what the devil are you talking about? Who has sworn you to remain single?"

"I cannot tell you. Don't ask me, but there are some people in the world who would never forgive me for marrying."

"Need they know that you have married her? Are they people in the mountains here?"

"Not exactly; but still they might—"

He broke off, reflecting tumultuously.

*Need they know?* The question had set his own speculations a-going, like so many wheels at work in his head. That vision which had tantalised him last night as he watched beside the sleeping girl, rose again, more urgent, more enticing, and with all the vigour of refreshed nature.

"I should be in danger if they found out," he began undecidedly.

"You will be in greater danger if you play with her good name," blustered the peasant, ostentatiously grasping his spiked stick.

Boloff looked across at the weeping girl, his own face full of emotion.

"But would she even have me for a husband?" he faltered with the diffidence of the sincere lover.

"As if anybody would ask her! But if you stickle for that point"—and the old man's eye passed appreciatively over the Russian's fine proportions—"let her speak for herself. What say you, Marianele—would he do for a husband?"

"Speak, girl—speak!" whispered the mother, forc-

ing up the reluctant chin. "Have a look at him! Will he do?"

Teofil, gazing eagerly across, met the look in the shy blue eyes for one moment only, but it was enough to shake his will to its foundations. They were quite different eyes from those he had seen yesterday, with a new, shamefaced consciousness in them which that one word "marriage" had been enough to awaken. If she had gone to sleep a child, it was clear that she had awakened a woman.

"Well, is that answer enough?" asked the father with a coarse laugh, as once more she hid her burning face upon her mother's shoulder.

Teofil covered his own eyes for a moment.

"Oh, give me time—give me time to think! There are considerations which you know nothing of. It is too great a thing to decide in a minute."

By the mere sound of his voice the old man knew that victory was within his grasp—a knowledge which gave a sudden poke to half-dead prudence. Yes, for him, too, there might be considerations still to weigh before making a son-in-law of this stranger.

"Take your time," he said with a somewhat tardy assumption of judicial impartiality. "You are right to say that it cannot be done in a minute, neither on your part, nor on mine—since what do I know of your circumstances? Take your rest under my roof while we talk it over. Resi, if the gentleman is as hungry as I am, we will need a big pot of milk, and you will have to hurry up too, since of course that rogue Marianele has slept through milking-time."

In one moment he had become the friendly host,

intent on the entertainment of his guest, but not for that forgetful of the real object in hand. During the hour which followed Teofil passed through the fire of a cross-examination not the less searching for its naïve brutality. Long before the end of that hour the old peasant was satisfied as to his part of the bargain, while, on his side, Teofil struggled more and more feebly against what he felt to be impending Fate. He, too, knew by now what he wanted; but dare he yield? Beside the figure and face of Marianele, with the new, delicious shyness upon it, flitting in and out of the room in her busy mother's wake, another figure rose perpetually before his mind's eye, thrusting itself threateningly between him and that vision of golden-haired girlhood: the cadaverous features of Gregor Gaftyn, with the wrinkled skin and that dreadful smile which never came except when he was in a rage. The paper he had signed—the fate of Filip Filipowicz—he thought of these things, shudderingly.

But need they ever know? Once more the suggestive question returned. Secret marriages were, after all, not quite unheard-of things; and what circumstances could be more favourable than these? Here, in the depths of the mountains, what chance of being tracked? Even Kugelberg was no permanent headquarters of the party, but a mere passing station selected purposely for this meeting, in preference to more closely watched spots. In a few days already there would probably not be a member of the party remaining in the district. Certainly the danger was remote, nor need it last for long, since the pledge he had given was to hold good only until Russia was free—an event which he confi-

dently calculated to be close at hand. In a few months already he might be at liberty to show his wife to the world. And even should, by some extraordinary chance, his secret be betrayed within those few months, might he not yet escape the penalty of his act by pleading the compulsion under which he had stood? This old man had a bulldog look about him which argued tenacity. Supposing he were able to get away, would he not be followed? Even at Paris would he be safe from the pursuit of this covetous father? And how dangerous for the interests of the party itself might such pursuit become! Yes, this last argument, coined by inherited Greek slyness, was good, and might come in useful.

All these things and many others were debated within him, during that hour, with the result that when, at a sign from the old man, Marianele's mother led the girl towards him, he rose to meet her with fast-beating heart.

"There! Touch lips, and be done with it!" laughed the elated father, giving Marianele an unceremonious push into Teofil's arms.

Within the minute he had forgotten that any danger threatened, had forgotten that she was an illiterate peasant, quite unable to share his aspirations, and knew only that this golden-haired child was his, and would be his for life.

Upon the first foolish raptures followed more business-like talk. While surrendering on the chief point Boloff, in details, perforce stood firm. The need both of extreme expedition and of complete secrecy, was what these details resolved themselves to. He would

make Marianele his wife, beyond possibility of doubt, but he could not give her a home just now. A story about the conditions of a will and a fortune at stake was coined on the spur of the moment in order to allay both curiosity and suspicion. Until he could return to claim her, she must remain under her parents' roof—but of course sustained by him, he quickly added, seeing a cloud upon the old man's brow. Money enough should be left in their hands to keep both her and them in comfort—at which the cloud quickly cleared.

"If you mean it honestly, you will come with me to the village to-day," urged the father; "and we will speak to the burgomaster and to the priest. Ah—but your papers?"

"I have them all upon me. How long will it take us to get married?"

"If your papers are in order, a fortnight, but there are ways of making the fortnight into a week."

"Then let it be a week. My days are counted."

That same afternoon Teofil found himself installed in the white-washed room of a neat wooden *châlet* with a young, sheepish-looking peasant—Marianele's brother—and his blowsy wife, officially designated as his hosts, but whom he soon discovered to be acting the part of watch-dogs. Under their care he was to pass the interval before the marriage; and, judging from the difficulty he had of making even ten steps unaccompanied, he could guess at the strictness of the instructions received. Any attempt at flight would be futile, the willing prisoner recognised with a smile which was not one of regret. This welcome coercion was well calculated to put

scruples to rest. If he now fretted at the unavoidable delay, it was because his heart was in flames rather than because he grudged the time lost. For this there was no help. All that prudence could dictate he had done already, by means of a few lines to Petru Swierzo at Paris, pleading an accident in the mountains as the cause of his delayed appearance. This, at least, would avert inconvenient researches.

Meanwhile there was one delicious hour in every day, the one which he was allowed to spend upon the mountainside, at Marianele's feet, under the parents' watchful eyes—for this peasant-father was, in his way, as sly as Teofil himself, and well knew that the value of every prize grows with the size of obstacles. Sometimes he found her herding the cows and sometimes spinning flax; but whatever she was doing, she seemed to his enamoured eyes to fit faultlessly into the frame of the magnificent mountain picture; and with each time he saw her the welcome in the sky-blue eyes grew franker and more ardent. It had not taken much to change her first childish awe of the handsome stranger to something very like worship. Once he found her combing her magnificent hair, which she had shaken down over her shoulders like a mantle of burnished gold. It was a sight which he never forgot, reviving as it did the first vivid impression received as from out of the storm he stepped into the hut. For ever after it was to haunt him.

But there were many other weary hours to fill up; and after some vain attempts at exploring the neighbourhood undogged by his host, Teofil fell to employing them in a fashion which had been congenial to him since boyhood.



It was on the second day of his stay at Förtli that he found the sheepish Michel sweating over a pair of scales which had gone wrong. Instantly the mechanician within him rose to the call.

"Let me do that; I will arrange it in no time," he said with new eagerness. And within five minutes he had put the scales right.

"How clever you are with your hands!" remarked Michel, looking on admiringly.

"Anything else that wants mending? I like this sort of work."

"Well, there is the clock stopped going since last week. But you're not a watchmaker, are you?"

"No; but show me the clock. Anything that has got wheels and springs comes handy to me."

The clock being put into order with almost as great ease as the scales, Michel's admiration and that of his wife increased apace.

"And I who was thinking it would have to stand still until Ferdl comes home to visit his family!"

"Who is Ferdl?"

"A cousin we have—a watchmaker by trade. He used to be at Kugelberg; but he is one of the go-ahead sort, and two years ago he went to Paris. You have heard of Paris, I suppose?"

"I have," said Teofil, and was on the point of mentioning that this happened to be his destination, but, upon some prompting of prudence, refrained.

"It must be a big place; and Ferdl gets on there famously. He keeps writing to me to give up the farming here and go join him. He says the money there is lying in the streets for anyone who knows how to pick it up."

"And what would be your fashion of picking it up? Have you learnt any trade?"

"Oh, he's clever with his hands too," put in the wife, "though in a different way from Ferdl and from you. There, Michel, fetch the things!" And she gave her shamefaced spouse an encouraging push.

After a minute he came back, blushing furiously, and sheepishly exhibited some very creditable bits of wood-carving, fruits of the long winter evenings, and blossoming with ferns and mountain flowerets.

"It's the Kugelberg shops that take them, mostly for the tourists—that is why you will find the name cut upon almost every piece; but Ferdl says he works well enough to work for a Paris shop. I'm for ever urging him to try his luck. He'd be sure to come back with his pockets full."

"If he comes back at all," said Teofil, who had had time to reflect that a meeting with Mariane's brother in Paris might have its inconveniences. Forthwith he launched into a glowing picture of the perils of a capital quite sufficient to cow Michel himself, although not so entirely his more ambitious wife.

"But you are a clever workman," he finished up, by way of sugaring the pill. "I should like to take away some of these things, but I have little room in my knapsack."

He ended by selecting a small paper-cutter, whose handle was formed by a tiny fern, and with the name of Kugelberg cut into the blade.

"This shall be a remembrance of your kind hospitality," he added, not without a touch of bitterness in his smile.

From that day on, Teofil's leisure hours were filled; for the report of the stranger, who was so "clever with his hands," spread fast. Not only all the clocks in the village, but agricultural implements without number and the one solitary sewing-machine of the place, the property of the priest's housekeeper, were entrusted to his care. When he was not upon the hillside, gazing into Marianele's blue eyes, he lived as in a workshop, and was glad to do so, deadening as it did the impatience with which he looked for the consummation of his wishes.

And during all that week Marianele's father went about rubbing his horny hands and saying to himself and to his submissive wife—

"I've nailed him—and no mistake! Who would have thought that Marianele would end by being a lady, just the same as Vali Grundl! Sepp Werms, indeed! Ha, ha!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE ABYSS.

ANOTHER such a June morning as the one on which Teofil Boloff had left Kugelberg, setting his face for the mountains, and again he was setting forth, knapsack on back, in pursuance of that journey interrupted by the storm and by all that the storm had brought in its train. Only ten days between, but in those ten days—in a few hours of those ten days—the turning-point of his life.

He was no longer quite the same person he had been on that other morning. Then the "party" had

been his world, whereas now he had created for himself a second world, whose charms threatened to overshadow the other. Youth and manhood's instincts had kept the field, triumphant. He had thought he could do without that nest, ruled out by the leader's decision, and he had found that he could not. But he had built it in so hidden a spot that surely not even the eyes of Gregor Gaftyn would be able to espy it. Here—should the necessity for secrecy drag out—he would return from time to time out of the heat and peril of the strife, to rest at the feet of his child-wife, and taste again that joy which had been his for two days only. Such was his dream. What measures he could take to keep it undisturbed had been taken, by sealing the lips of the initiated—those of Marianele by the threat of peril to himself, those of her father by hinting anew at the loss of the source from which flowed the gold pieces which so dazzled his eyes, should the marriage come to be prematurely published.

“This will keep Marianele in comfort till I come again,” he said, as he pressed several bank-notes—which rustled quite as pleasantly as the gold chinked—into the hard hand stretched towards him.

“And if you do not come again? Where am I to write for more?”

“Not come again!”

Teofil laughed aloud at the insanity of such a thought. As if he could keep himself from returning for another draught of that happiness barely tasted! For two days he had been living in a delirium of joy, with thoughts for nothing beyond the intoxication of the moment, and even with his back to Förtli he walked as

though on clouds, with Marianele's last kiss still glowing on his lips and tasting in advance the joy of the return.

But that joy must be earned by the stern fulfilment of duty. Even in the height of his rapture he knew this, and the thought was as a spur to the steps that were carrying him towards N—— and the railway that was to bear him to Paris. The lurking feeling of remorse for the broken pledge served but to quicken his desire for indirect atonement.

He had walked for hours before he allowed himself a rest.

To eat the slice of black bread cut by her hand, and spread with cheese of her own fabrication was to have Marianele's visage brought more vividly than ever before his inner eye—so vividly that when, looking about him, he saw the rocks half drowned in the pink of *Alpenrosen* in full flower, the thought of pressing the brilliant blossoms into her service, of doing her some homage through their means, took imperious possession of him. With eager hands he began to gather them, right and left—some vague idea in his mind of sending her the huge nosegay through the first messenger he could hire. Then, as his eyes fell upon a bunch of exceptionally magnificent blossoms nodding to him from over a stony ledge high above his head, he stood still with upon his lips an "Ah!" of admiration. Could those beauties be out of reach? It did not seem so to his ardour. Recklessly flinging from him the inferior specimens, and freed of the encumbering knapsack, he began his arduous climb. With impatient hands he clutched at the sharp-pointed rocks, his vigorous but untutored muscles dragging him painfully from one precarious

shelf to the other, as every moment he panted and sweated a little nearer to the coveted flowers. They were not yet within his grasp when beneath his foot a treacherous stone gave way, and for one moment, fraught with the anxieties of a year, he knew that he had lost his balance. Another moment during which the air rushed noisily past his ears—then the sensation as of a blow dealt upon the head—and then—nothing.

The space within which Teofil Boloff opened his eyes was gloomy almost to darkness, and painfully unfamiliar. Through a small, square window daylight struggled, so sparsely that it was only after several minutes of perplexed staring about him that the outlines of things began to take shape before his eyes; a low-raftered ceiling—a brick stove in the corner, pots and pans on the wall; no, certainly he had never seen any of these articles before. And this thing that he was lying on, could it be called a bed, devoid of sheets as it was, and bristling with straw.

“Where am I?” he said, just above his breath and speaking in his mother-tongue.

There was a shuffling sound somewhere in the corner, and out of the deep shadows somebody came heavily towards him. The foolish face of a very old man, thinly framed in yellowish-white hair, and disfigured by a hideous goitre, bent over him.

“Eh? What is that you’re saying?” he mumbled between toothless gums.

What between this want of teeth and a particularly virulent form of dialect, his words were almost as in-

comprehensible to Boloff as his Russian exclamation had been to his host. But that it was intended for German he was able to make out. It was therefore in this language that he repeated: "Where am I?" attempting as he spoke to rise to his elbow, but in the same moment sinking back again onto his moss-stuffed pillow with an exclamation of pain. His right hand had gone up to his head, where somewhere about the centre of the skull a painfully sensitive spot met the touch of his finger.

"Where are you?" mumbled the old man, "in my hut, of course."

"And who are you?" enquired Boloff, when, with an effort, he had made out the sense of the words.

"I'm Poldi Bürstl, naturally. Who else should I be?"

Teofil stared back, dazed, into the bleary-eyed face above him, upon which old age had added its own peculiar density to the original density of limited intelligence.

"And why am I here?"

"Eh?"

He repeated the question in more intelligible form.

"Because I brought you here," was the answer achieved.

"But why should you have brought me here?"

"Eh?"

It took time and patience to extract in anything like an intelligible form the fact that he, Boloff, had been found by the goitred peasant lying "like a dead man" among the rocks, whither the good Samaritan had gone to collect moss for stuffing his pillow anew—also that with the aid of a stray goatherd, he had managed to

carry him to his hut, where he had lain ever since, without being either alive or dead.

"Among the rocks?" repeated Boloff, speculatively.

The dizziness with which he had come back to consciousness was passing, and things beginning to return to his mind.

"Is the thunderstorm quite over?" he asked after a long pause of intense reflection.

"Eh?"

"The storm; it was very bad awhile ago."

The peasant mumbled something to the effect of there not having been any thunder for more than a week; but Boloff had returned to his own review of the past.

Yes—he remembered now: the departure from Kugelberg—the lovely morning which had clouded over so unexpectedly. He could still vividly recall the alarm of the first growl of thunder in his ear—the running for shelter under the ledge of rock—the anxiety at thought of missing the express at N—, then the struggling on again in the face of the wind and rain. How long the struggle had lasted he could not even guess, for about this point memory began to get blurred. Only the sense of a great bodily and mental distress was still there. Had there not been a light upon the hillside? The light of this very hut, no doubt. Probably it was while struggling towards it that he had slipped among the rocks, where this old man had found him. But that must have been yesterday, surely, since here was another daylight.

"Was it yesterday you found me, or to-day?" he enquired.



"It was two days ago," the man contrived to explain.

"That would mean that for two whole days I have been lying here like a log," reflected Boloff. "That must have been a nasty knock I got!"

A moment later he asked—

"How far is it to N——, where the railway is?"

But here information stopped short. Both N—— and the railway lay outside of Poldi Bürstl's horizon.

"I shall start at dawn to-morrow," resolved Boloff, "if only I am able to raise my head from my pillow. Two whole days lost! What will they be thinking of me at Paris!"

Acute anxiety came over him at thought of the time thus wasted, of the perplexity doubtless caused thereby to his fellow "Martyrs." On no account must he miss starting to-morrow. But how hasten his recovery to the extent of making this possible? He lay still, thinking hard of everything he had ever heard about the treatment of accidents of this sort—which was not much.

"Bring me some cold water!" he said presently to his host. "No—not for drinking. In a basin! There! that pot will do. And now—have I still got my handkerchief?"

All that day he lay still, changing his own primitive compresses and avoiding all but the most necessary speech. Nothing which could help to ensure to-morrow's start was neglected.

When after a broken night the moment for decision came, Boloff, as he rose dizzily from his primitive sick-bed, felt indeed that he was committing an act of folly, perhaps risking his life—but not for this did the re-

solve of the young fanatic totter. Even his goitred host—to judge from a few feeble efforts at detainment—was startled by his imprudence—too much startled to do more than shake his head foolishly at the coins pressed into his hand.

As with uncertain steps he pursued the mountain path, a look of perplexity would occasionally cross the face of the man so recently come out of the abyss of unconsciousness. These fleeting fragments of recollection, dipping at moments from out of some unknown emptiness, what were they? Where was the whole to which they belonged?

Had he perhaps dreamed a dream while he lay insensible among those rocks?—a beautiful dream, through which something blue and something golden gleamed entrancingly, together with a sense of joy which had escaped him now, although he knew that he had tasted it—if only in a dream. He had heard of hallucinations of this sort consequent upon concussion of the brain, from which he supposed that he must in part be suffering. Think as he would, it was no use. He could not again get a hold upon that tantalising impression. Between the height of the storm and the opening of his eyes in Poldi Bürstl's hut the blank still yawned. Even had there been a physiologist by to pronounce the—to unlearned ears—mysterious word "Amnesia," it is not likely that his view of his own case would have been altered; for who could bring himself to believe in the blotting-out of a whole row of days that have actually been lived, and all because the shock of a moment has wiped them away before they have got fixed upon the tablets of memory?

At the first village he came to, he anxiously informed himself of the remaining distance to N——. About three hours off, he was told—an answer which surprised him greatly, for he had not thought himself so far on the road. A few other things surprised him as he went: the luxuriousness of the grass, which surely showed an abnormal growth for only two days; the sight of green hips upon the wayside bushes where wild roses had bloomed but the day before yesterday. When he started from Kugelberg a touch of spring had still lingered in the air, while now the full vegetation of summer met him on all sides. Some difference of climate, he supposed, between the two sides of the mountain.

Owing to the frequent need of rest and to the pain in his head, still sore and aching on the injured spot, the three hours stretched to six. The afternoon was far advanced when, having at length caught sight of the church tower of N——, and reassured by his watch as to the margin of time left, he sat down exhausted upon a convenient bank, in order to make a few unavoidable preparations for the return to civilisation. The first of these consisted in a review of his purse, which, in his impatience to get under way, he had omitted in the morning. Here a painful surprise awaited him. Of coins, only copper and silver—not one of the gold pieces he was almost sure of having possessed; and in the inner flap in which he distinctly remembered having placed some large bank-notes, nothing but one for a hundred francs—not much more than enough to take him comfortably to Paris.

“Who would have thought it of that *crétin*?” he

said aloud, having stared perplexedly for some moments into his denuded purse. "It seems that he is not too much of an idiot to know the value of money. Lucky, really, that he has left me enough for my journey! But why, I wonder? Why not make a clean job of it when he was about it? And why is it that my watch did not tempt him?" He laughed a trifle grimly.

"Fallen among robbers, indeed! Only that in this case the robber and the Samaritan seem to have been identical."

There could, for him, be no doubt as to the case, but to go back and tax his host with the deed was out of the question. Time was too precious even if he could be sure of finding the isolated hut—which he was not.

Other preparations claimed his attention. Before reaching the frontier he would need to have his papers ready, in case, by any chance they should be required of him. He looked about him to make sure that he was alone before taking off his coat, in whose lining he knew them to be safely sewed up. Here another shock awaited him, more disagreeable than the first, for the hiding-place was empty.

This time, for close upon a minute, he sat like one stunned. The loss of the papers was to him ten times graver than the loss of the money and far more difficult to explain; for what should that goitred old man want with his passport? Should he not after all go back to put the question to him, at the point of the revolver?

But was it certain that he alone could have been the thief? The papers had been there—no doubt of it, even the unstitched lining still testified to the space

they had occupied. He could distinctly remember sewing them in himself with a needle borrowed from his landlady at Kugelberg on the day before starting on his mountain tramp. But had they been there when he actually started? Rack his memory as he would, he could not remember having assured himself of their presence on the morning of his departure. Knowing them safe, he had troubled no further about them. What if the hiding-place had been empty already when he set his face towards the mountains? What if the landlady had spied upon him and communicated with the police? Were his documents by this time in their clutches?

At the thought, a cold sweat broke upon his forehead. All this answered too well to the anxieties which had been pursuing him ever since his departure from Russia. That idea of being watched, was, therefore, no delusion. In a sense there was satisfaction in the thought, as testifying to his personal importance; but there was peril as well. The first necessity would, of course, be to procure other papers upon another name. He could be Teofil Boloff no longer to the world at large. No great difficulty here he knew; the fabrication of false documents having long since become a regular trade in the "party." But for this he must reach Paris, unmolested if possible, by any official demands for documents.

But this was not the end of surprises. The greatest of all awaited him at the station at N——. Here, having taken his ticket for Paris and passed his knapsack successfully through the custom-house, he withdrew into the restaurant in order to pass the time that still

remained him before the arrival of the express. While he sat there, almost too tired to eat the cutlet which had been placed before him, a remark made at an adjacent table caught his ear.

"Wonder how they're getting on at Paris?" said one man to another in French. "There was some fear of rows. But I suppose they have taken their measures."

"Who's to make the rows? I thought the Bastille day was the day to put all the people in good humour."

"The Nationalists, of course. To them the Bastille day is poison. Well, it must be pretty well over by this time."

Boloff listened idly, picking at his cutlet. It was only a minute later that an objection occurred to him. Why were these men talking of the Bastille day, which was 14th July, when this could only be 3rd July, since he had left Kugelberg on 30th June? Or was it possibly the 14th, and the old man's information inaccurate? He must make sure at once. Not to be clear as to the actual date was an absurdity.

At the primitive bookstall upon the platform he bought a paper and incredulously stared at the date. "July 14th"—there it was, printed plain and clear. How was he to interpret this? A misprint? Impossible? One glance thrown over the leading article showed that this was indeed the Bastille day. All at once he remembered the look of the grass upon the meadows—of the over-flowered rose-bushes which had astonished him so. Was this the explanation? A whole fortnight gone since he had left Kugelberg? What had become of it? Only one thing, of course: he had lain insensible all that time. No other explanation seemed available.

That the goitred imbecile should have spoken of two days when he meant two weeks, was easier to believe than that a whole episode of his life had left no record. A feeling of discomfort, of acute anxiety, began to steal over him. Surely he must have been very near to death! No wonder that spot on his head was so persistent in reminding him of its presence! The thought of the abyss of unconsciousness which separated this era of his life from the former, filled him with a shrinking and shuddering dread.

It was just about the time when Boloff was sitting upon the bank and viewing his despoiled coat, that the old priest at Förtli, looking in his writing-table drawer for a pencil, said to his housekeeper:

"Dear, dear—there is that Russian gentleman who has gone and left his papers here. You had better carry them over to the Huber's house, in case he is not gone yet."

"He went this morning," said the housekeeper, "I met Marianele with her eyes swollen as big as gooseberries, and she told me so."

"However could he forget them?"

The housekeeper, an elderly female of terrifying ugliness, pursed up her bloodless lips while stooping to thread the needle of the very sewing-machine which Boloff had put into order.

"What will a man not do when he has the love-madness upon him?"

"We had better give her the papers to send after him."

"She can't send them after him; she has no address."

"No address? That is strange!" said the old priest, in mild wonder.

"More than strange, I should say. He said there was no need—that he would write—that he would come back—what do I know?"

"And you don't think that he will come back?"

"I shall never have been more surprised in my life than if I see him here again. He looks to me just the man to have a wife in every place he comes to."

"God forbid!" said the priest, hastily crossing himself. Then added with a flicker of commonsense:

"But that would only be another reason for needing the papers."

"If he needs them, he will write for them—never fear!"

"I suppose he will," acquiesced Father Ambros. "And meanwhile you must remember the need for discretion which he imposed upon us. As to the marriage, mum is the word!"

"Oh, I'm as mum as the grave," said Barbara Frischli, her words drowned in the whirr of the machine which she had just set a-going.

## CHAPTER V.

### "THE DELIVERER."

TEOFIL BOLOFF, transformed by the ingenuity of his comrades into Demetr Dobrowicz, and in possession of a new set of documents, had been only two days in Paris, when, in the Comédie Française, visited for the first time, he caught sight of something in one of the



boxes which immediately took possession of his attention to the exclusion of the "Avare," which was being acted on the stage. That something was a head of golden hair, resplendent in a first-floor box, and drawing his eyes like a lode-stone. Again and again he had to look—against his own will, as it were, and aware of an emotion which he could not explain. At the very first sight of those brilliant tresses something in his memory had stirred, very faintly, very far down, overlaid, it would seem, by some weight which he could not lift. That dream which he had dreamed, that vision which he had seen while he lay between life and death, moved again, more urgently. Yes—the gold belonged to the dream; its glitter drew him as with chains.

From that moment onward he had followed Audrey Selville about Paris with an assiduity which seemed independent of his own will, and even although the first close sight of her had brought disappointment. For he had looked into her eyes expecting them to be blue, and had found them to be grey—a clear, pure grey, beautiful in itself, but not the eyes which ought to have gone with that hair—not the eyes he was seeking.

But the golden chains were strong and dragged heavily, despite the partial disappointment. To the astonishment of his comrades the neophyte's zeal, so burning at first, flickered but fitfully in these days. Appointments missed, notes unanswered, as well as the restlessness of his eye, testified to some abnormal state of mind.

"It's my opinion that he has not quite recovered

from that accident in the mountains," said a one-armed, one-eyed giant, whose mutilated condition testified to his rightful claim to the title of "Martyr," and replying to some severe strictures pronounced by Petru Swierzo, the head of the Paris group. "There is at times a dazed look about him. And yet he *does* work. Look at that job in the laboratory yesterday."

"He works—at night; but what does he do with his days? I should not be surprised if he was after some woman."

"And what if he is?" argued the giant, good-natured after the manner of giants, "Where is the harm—so long as he keeps the pledge? And of course he will do that."

"He had better," said the dwarf significantly. "All the same I don't like his look."

When presently Boloff, disappearing suddenly from Paris, wrote from London to explain that the state of his injured head had forced him to put himself in the hands of an English specialist, and giving no other than a *poste restante* address to which anything urgent was to be directed, Petru Swierzo liked the look of things less than ever, and, together with him, the whole Paris group waited with some anxiety for the promised return of the master-mechanic of whom they had such need.

Boloff—alias Dobrowicz—aware of the need, was meanwhile following the lead of Fate. It was in vain that he had struggled against the weakness which had unmanned him; in vain even that the figure of Gregor Gaftyn and the remembrance of the pledge signed at Kugelberg was conjured up—to cure by wholesome terror the obsession which had hold of him, and which

he himself at moments recognised as morbid. He was not even sure that he loved Audrey Selville; he knew only that the sight of her awoke troubled sensations, having roots somewhere in the past, too deep to be delved for; that those golden tresses must belong to him or, rather, that they belonged to him already according to some anterior right which he could neither trace nor analyse. It was his own lost property which he had espied that night at the Comédie Française, and could not rest until he had claimed. The mere thought of that golden head resting upon another shoulder than his, brought with it a paroxysm of rage which he could not but mistake for the jealousy of love.

Acting like a man hypnotised, he had followed Audrey to London and had there taken her by storm, as it were. When an urgent summons for a specified date reached him, his resolve was quickly taken. He would not return to Paris without making her his wife. Whether marrying her under a false name—and in view of the only documents in his possession he had no choice in the matter—would be a legal act he did not know, nor troubled greatly, the object aimed at being to bind her in her own eyes. Nothing easier than to put that right later on.

As he lost sight of the hansom which held Audrey, the supposed Demetr Dobrowicz was feeling quieter than he had done for weeks. The treasure he had been pursuing was his now, to claim when he listed. With a mind freed of the tormenting obsession, he could return now to the duties he had so shamefully neglected.

At the first telegraph-office he came to, he stepped in and sent off a message:

"Shall reach Paris, Gare du Nord, at 11.50 to-night."

He could scarcely doubt that by this time suspicions were aroused. It was as well to forestall, even by a few hours, any steps that might be taken to trace his movements.

As he stepped onto the platform at the Gare du Nord, a slight shock of not quite pleasant astonishment touched him at sight of two familiar faces: that of the small Petru Swierzo and of the big Nikola Lurko. To be met at this late hour seemed ominous; and the look on the two faces was ominous too.

"You got my message?" he asked nervously.

"It is that which brought us here."

"You did not tell me what I was wanted for, just to-day; but, knowing that I am wanted, I have come, even though at the risk of my health."

"Ah! Is your head all right again?" enquired Swierzo rather drily.

"No. It was that which took me to London, you know. A man I went to here, told me of an English specialist he advised me to consult, and as there was a doubt about catching him in town before his holiday, I had to go off in a hurry."

He told the concocted story too glibly for even Petru Swierzo to feel quite sure that it was a lie.

"But, once there you might have been more communicative, might you not?"

"I was under treatment. Even the writing of a letter was forbidden. It is in direct contradiction to doctors' orders that I have come away now."

"I should have fancied that Paris doctors might have done as well as London ones," grunted Swierzo. "Where is your valise? It will have to be put into the cloak-room. We cannot take it with us now."

In a rather uncomfortable silence, they took place together in a taximeter—some direction which Boloff did not catch being given to the driver. Night, but not peace, reigned over the vast city, which seemed to be murmuring and turning in its sleep.

"Where are we going to?" asked Demetr presently, vaguely aware that they were advancing in an unfamiliar direction.

"Out of the town—towards Boligny. There is work waiting for us there."

Boloff sat silent again, with something like panic upon him. Had he been spied upon during all that fortnight in London, and was the act at the Registry Office discovered already? In that case might not the spot he was being taken to prove to be his place of judgment? The gloom upon the faces of his companions seemed to support that idea.

It was not until, beyond the suburbs, the taximeter had been dismissed, that the two began to talk again in a strain which showed him that at least the blackest of his surmises had been born of his own guilty conscience. Now only, safely out of reach of curious ears, he was initiated into the object of this nightly excursion, the goal of which was a deserted quarry, which had lately been used as a sort of outdoor laboratory—convenient because of its isolation. In default of him, other mechanics of the party had been at work upon his own designs for the "Deliverer"—that perfected infernal

machine which was to work the salvation of Russia. To-night was fixed for a decisive experiment. He had arrived barely in time to assist and give the benefit of his expert criticism.

"They are waiting for us now," explained Nikola Lurko, as they tramped on by field-paths and obscure lanes. "The hour had been fixed for one a.m., but when we got your wire, we put it off till three."

It was close to that hour when at length Boloff, with a mind relieved of its worst care, followed his companion down the steep path leading into the depth of the old quarry, where, at sound of their steps, dark forms rose from the ledges and scattered blocks upon which they had been sitting.

"All safe?" enquired Swierzo in a keen whisper.

"All safe. We came singly and have not been followed. We are sure of that."

"And ready?"

"Ready for more than an hour."

"There is no time to lose, unless we want to lose the night. In another hour things will be astir. Here, Boloff, you had better take a look at the thing."

Going up to the harmless-looking little object which stood isolated upon a clear space of ground, Teofil bent over it critically. The pieces were all of his own design, although it was not his own hand which had joined them.

"I cannot be responsible for the fitting together, of course. Are you sure you have got it all right?"

"Quite sure"—from another of the experts. "Your designs left no room for mistakes."

"And you have forgotten none of the screws? And the corner winches have been tested?"

"Of course they have."

A lively discussion as to technical details, Greek to the layman, was interrupted by Swierzo.

"If the thing is for to-night, you had better come to some understanding. The farther on into the morning the explosion takes place, the more chance of bringing the police about our ears. I leave the matter to you, Boloff, shall it be for to-night?"

"Yes, it shall be," said Teofil, anxious only to wipe out his late shortcomings by proofs of present zeal. "But I must set it a-going myself. Get out of the place, all of you, while I wind up the works."

"And you?"

"I follow at once, of course. I shall give the clock a full five minutes run—more time than I need for getting under cover."

They scrambled out of the place and, panting with excitement, sought the nearest ditch in which to squat expectantly. Around them lay the silent fields—on the horizon Paris lights, half drowned in Paris vapours, dully loomed. Above that the summer-night sky was whitening already towards dawn. With strained eyes the waiters gazed towards the quarry, from which one more form was to emerge.

It had not yet emerged, and not more than the half of the appointed five minutes had elapsed, when a dull sound close at hand took them all by surprise. In the first instant it was not identified by all, for the height of the quarry walls had muffled the explosion even beyond their hopes. Some of them, unable to locate

the noise, looked about them bewildered. But a puff of smoke, curling slowly out of the depth, enlightened them.

"It's the 'Deliverer!'" whispered the chemist of the party, he whose face consisted principally of a shiny forehead.

"And Boloff?"

"He must have got out by the other side."

"Did he get out at all? The five minutes were nothing like up."

Without another word several of the men scrambled to their feet, and, regardless of possible danger, ran to the quarry, over whose edge they anxiously peered. But the smoky shadows remained impenetrable, the lantern they had left there having been extinguished by the explosion. A minute later, two of them with a fresh lantern lit, were precipitately descending the path. Almost the first object which came within the circle of light, was the form of a man lying immovable upon his face among a shower of scattered stones and fragments of iron.

When turned over upon his face, Teofil Boloff seemed, to all appearances, to be dead; but after a brief examination, a medical student who figured in the party declared him to be alive. Whether he had been merely stunned by the shock of the explosion, or whether injured by the fall of one of the fragments of stone it was not possible to decide by so cursory an inspection.

"What are we to do with him?" was the outcome of a hurried consultation.

To take him back to Paris in this condition seemed out of the question, while the thought of leaving him to



die here alone in this deserted spot, revolted even the most callous among them.

Presently someone had an idea.

"We could carry him to some more frequented spot and leave him lying where he is sure to be found by some early passer-by, and equally sure to be taken to the hospital—the only place he is fit for now."

"Could we not take him there ourselves?"

"And answer the questions put to us? No thank you—not if we don't want any lights turned upon to-night's business. Far better let him be taken by an impartial person, who will naturally suppose him to be the victim of an assault. Let me see? Are his clothes singed? By good luck, no. We must empty his pockets of course and remove his watch, since he is supposed to have been robbed—which will also blot out all marks of identity."

Dawn was close when they laid down the insensible man by the side of a country road. In a thicket close by one of the party cowered to watch the development of events, while the rest hurriedly dispersed, taking with them the tell-tale fragments of the "Deliverer," which, so far as was feasible, they had collected in the quarry.

The watcher had not long to wait. By the first few passers-by, indeed, the prostrate form was evidently taken for that of a drunken man and consequently disregarded. But soon a milk-cart came along, which was pulled up sharply by his side. There was a woman in the cart, who had called the driver's attention to the immovable figure. It was her vote too, which, after a brief consultation, decided for his transference to the cart.

Having seen the vehicle heading straight for Paris, the observer left his post and took the same direction.

"By this time he is probably in the Hotel Dieu," he closed his report. "But we can make sure of that."

Within the next few days it was made sure of—for the indefatigable band had ways and means. Likewise it was ascertained that Teofil Boloff, had, so far, not recovered consciousness.

"It is ten to one whether he ever will," commented the medical student. "Two knocks on the head in one summer has been rather too much, even for his constitution."

"A heavy loss to the party!" sighed the giant, Lurko. "Shall we ever get the 'Deliverer' right without him? Meanwhile, it would be as well if we could clear out his room before anyone else develops an interest in its contents."

This was the effort which had failed, owing to the mistrust of the landlord-*concièrge*.

As to the contents of Boloff's pockets, they remained in the possession of Petru Swierzo. Among them were two things which had an importance of their own. One was the cloak-room ticket with the number of the valise which had been left deposited at the Gare du Nord, and of which, of course, it would be as well to assure oneself. The second was a note dated only "Wednesday" and signed only with "Audrey."

"I always thought it was a woman, not a specialist, who was at the bottom of that visit to London," grimly commented Petru Swierzo, as he closed his revision.

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## PART III.

### CHAPTER I.

#### IN THE REALMS OF THE CZAR.

"WHO is the girl with the hair?—the one in the white dress, I mean, talking to Sir Everard? I don't seem to have seen her before."

"Not a girl at all, if report speaks true. Goes by the name of the 'Grass Widow.'"

"Whatever may that mean?"

"Oh, don't you know? A widow who isn't a widow exactly—bereaved of her husband not by death, but by absence, or—accident. In German they make them 'straw' widows and widowers—but I think the 'grass' sounds more complimentary. This one's official designation is 'Miss Selville,' but something of her story has leaked out: a mysteriously missing husband, whom she has been hunting for over a year past, all over the holy Russian empire. It was only a few days ago that she returned from the latest of her excursions—since you came out from England, I think—and baffled again, it would seem."

"Shows rather bad taste in the husband, does it not—circumstances considering?" remarked the first speaker after another appreciative look at the "Grass Widow."

"Certainly—if he is a free agent; but the general idea is that he belongs to the extreme *red* side."

"Ah! And she still expects to find him? Poor thing!"

The two *attachés*, who, in a corner of the ball-room at the English Embassy at St. Petersburg were watching the festive scene, gave a commiserating shrug to their well-clad shoulders, as with their eyes they followed Audrey Selville, who just then was being accosted by a squat, black-haired girl whose swarthy neck and woolly hair were alike ablaze with diamonds, and whose hand rested upon a rather insignificant-looking civilian's arm.

"Another Selville that—a cousin. He is helping her to find the husband. A very decent sort of fellow."

"And the little horror with the diamonds?"

"Reserve your expressions until you hear the figure of her fortune—which, by the way, I cannot give you. Tatjana Katschulin, commonly known as 'Tata,' a Caucasian heiress, whom they say the old lady—there is a chaperon in the family, you must know—is setting her cap at for her darling boy."

"Well, it's about time he was settling, I should say, if he means to settle. What are the heiress's views on the subject?"

"Not likely to be favourable, I imagine. He isn't exactly dazzling, you know."

"Neither is she, if it comes to that. What a want of stature!"

"But what an amplitude of acres! What can the lack of a few inches in height matter when weighed against hundreds of miles of forest in the Caucasus?"

"Oh, it's that sort, is it? Upon my word you make me inclined to reconsider my opinion of her! If that Selville man were not in the way, who knows—"

The two men strolled away, laughing, to the supper-room.

"You did not see the ceremony last year, I think?" Tatjana Katschulin was at that moment saying to Audrey.

"No; last year we were—not in St. Petersburg. I am looking forward greatly to to-morrow. Lady Chesley has asked us to join them on the stand erected for the diplomatic corps—on the very edge of the river. We shall have an excellent view—if only the weather is clear!"

"The meteorological weather will be clear, I think, but some people have doubts about the *human* weather, or, I should say, the political. Since the fall of Port Arthur, popular feeling is in a very explosive condition, it seems. The police see storm-signs, they say, and have taken extreme measures."

"Oh, don't say that before my aunt, please," implored Audrey. "She is rather nervous as it is, and had her doubts about accepting Lady Chesley's invitation. Only luckily she is still more curious than nervous. Dick, mind you don't say a word to Aunt Phœbe as to possible disturbances! I shall never forgive you if you spoil my fun to-morrow."

"We will hold our tongues—both of us," assured Tatjana Katschulin, with a rapid glance upwards at her companion out of her slits of black eyes. The cheek bones beneath the eyes were rather high, the nose rather flat, and the mouth rather wide, and al-

ready faintly shaded by black down; and yet, by reason of the straightness of the gaze and the frankness of the smile, the total impression was far from disagreeable.

"I have not promised to hold mine," said Dick rather stolidly. "If I thought there was actually any danger—"

He was stopped by a two-voiced protestation.

"*Make* him hold his tongue, Mademoiselle Tata!" said Audrey with a shade of raillery in her laugh. "I am sure he will obey you."

"Do you think so?" asked Tatjana, looking for one moment straight into Audrey's eyes. "I have my doubts. But of course he could not be such a monster. There, I think my father is looking for me. *Au revoir!*"

An hour later Audrey was taking off her jewels before the glass and wondering to find that the evening, on the whole, had not been so entirely disagreeable as she had expected it to be. It was the first ball she had attended since her departure from England, now nearly fifteen months ago, for although the drawing-rooms of the English Embassy had always stood open to the Selvilles, Audrey had hitherto shunned anything more festive than dinner-parties, as unsuited to her half-widowed condition. If she had yielded to-day to the pressure put upon her by her aunt, it had been for the sake of Dick and of Tatjana Katschulin. Affairs between her cousin and the heiress appeared to be progressing so satisfactorily, that it seemed a pity to deprive them of the enjoyment which the evening would presumably bring them. And there was no other way but that of going to the ball herself, since Dick refused to go alone, perhaps for fear of making himself con-

spicuous. She had felt rather self-sacrificing as she put on her ball-dress; for to look on at the developing happiness of other people was to quicken regret for that which she had known for so short a time and lost so abruptly. And besides, she was not absolutely convinced that Mademoiselle Tata—which appellation, in her own mind, had long since been metamorphosed into "The Tartar"—was exactly the right sort of wife for Dick. No doubt she was an eminently "likeable" sort of Tartar, with only the buoyant energy and none of the ferocity of the race of whose blood more than one drop undoubtedly flowed in her veins. But a person brought up in so hopelessly un-English a fashion, accustomed to this semi-barbaric splendour of existence, how should she ever fit into the sober frame of Lockwood? and how attune herself to the inherent sobriety of Dick himself? All her money notwithstanding, Audrey thought he could have chosen better—if indeed he had chosen—for upon this point she had not been able to come to any definite conclusion. That they had got on splendidly from the first was perhaps partly due to the piscatorial interest in common; for "Tata" was that rather unusual thing, a Russian sportswoman, who told Dick such wonderful tales of the fish in the Caucasian rivers, and of the salmon in the Finnish waters, upon the borders of which she had frequently bivouacked for weeks at a time, as almost to necessitate a certain degree of sympathy. That the sympathy was developing into something warmer was the firm belief of Mrs. Selville, who lived in a chronic state of internally blessing the invention of fishing-tackle and bait, the intricacies of which furnished such endless material for animated

talk. Lately Audrey had inclined to her view of the case, which was the reason of her yielding in the matter of the ball.

She had gone there expecting to be frightfully bored; and, once there, had discovered that despite all that had happened, she was still too young, too healthy, too *normal* to escape from the magic of music and of movement, of lights and of flowers, and of all that goes to make the glamour of a ball-room. If Dick was feeling any of these influences, then surely he would take this opportunity of proposing to the girl of his choice—or was it his mother's? But no—he would not marry her for the sake of his mother—which would be equivalent to marrying her for the sake of her money—she felt sure of that.

As to how matters progressed between the two it was not easy to form a guess; for square dances was all that Dick could make up his mind to, and of the two quadrilles on the programme he danced one with herself—as in duty bound. At supper he had been Tata's neighbour, as Audrey could not help knowing, since they had sat straight opposite to her; and it had certainly struck her that the heiress was "encouraging" Dick in a quite newly ostentatious way. Up to to-day her manner towards him had been that of a *bon camarade*, but what she saw going on at the other side of the supper-table looked to Audrey most suspiciously like a "flirt." Well, if Dick did not make the most of his opportunities now, then surely he was a bungler!

And yet the end of the ball had brought no signs of the opportunities having been made the most of.

But that would follow soon, Audrey supposed. It



was fortunate, really, that she had the progress of this affair to watch—something to take her thoughts at least momentarily from her own sad and perplexing history—more perplexing than ever after the long, fruitless hunt of the last fifteen months.

What a weary time it had been, that chain of months stretching back to her departure from Paris! The address found in the note-book had led to nothing, and the fortunate circumstance that the wife of Sir Everard Chesley was a reasonably near cousin of the Selvilles, and that consequently many channels of information closed to ordinary mortals stood open to them, had, so far likewise, led to nothing. The Chesleys, necessarily initiated into the truth of the situation, had done their best loyally, both as relations and as countrymen; but it had perforce been a hampered—and so to say unofficial best—the nature of the case making it appear unadvisable to direct the attention of police authorities too strenuously towards the existence of the sought-for Demetr Dobrowicz. That no Russian prison and no Siberian exile station contained any person of that name, had been fairly established by this time. Of course, there remained the hypothesis of a false name; and it was in accordance with this idea that the Selvilles had made various excursions to different parts of Russia, in order to take personal cognizance of state prisoners whose description appeared to answer to that of the missing man. A painful process altogether—very like the Morgue over again—and one which Audrey did not know how she could have got through without Dick's support and unostentatious sympathy. The whole undertaking, in fact, was unthinkable without Dick, who some-

how managed to draw the sting of the most awkward situations, apparently by no other means than by refusing to see that they were awkward. Those intervals during which, summoned home by urgent business, he had left her to the doubtful mercies of his mother had been almost necessarily periods of inaction; and for that reason perhaps even harder to get through than the weary hunt through the prisons. How many of these she had seen within these fifteen months! How many pictures both of rebellion and of tyranny had passed before her eyes in that time! What glimpses she had got of conditions of which she had never dreamed! Only fifteen months? Sometimes it seemed to her more like fifteen years. There were moments when she asked herself whether a Demetr Dobrowicz really existed, not only in Russia, but in the world; when the figure of the man she had known for so brief a space seemed to be receding, dreamlike, behind veils of doubt and of baffled speculation. Had that act in the Registry Office ever really taken place, and not been a mere hallucination of her brain? At any rate it had borne as little fruit as might a hallucination.

Quite lately a discovery had seemed to bring the end of the quest within sight.

Up till now no trace of any person calling himself Demetr Dobrowicz had been observable, either within prison walls or outside them. Unexpectedly the name was stumbled upon. Such a person actually existed—or had existed lately. This time the clue led to a village on the western frontier. In painful trepidation Audrey reached it, to be met by the information, extracted from a very old parish priest, with a blear eye

and a ragged grey beard, that the only Demetr Dobrowicz he had ever known, schoolmaster here for a brief space, had been buried a year ago in the cemetery beside the church. The visitors could see his grave if they liked.

"Stay here, Audrey—I will go," Dick had said quickly, at sight of the sudden whiteness overspreading his cousin's face like a coat of paint. But she rose resolutely, and, with a face like stone, followed him and the peasant sacristan who was to show them the way.

The snow had to be shovelled off the stone slab at the foot of a piece of common deal planking, before they could read the inscription:

Demetr Dobrowicz  
aged  
Twenty-seven

By this time both of them were familiar enough with the Russian characters to make it out easily.

With a convulsive tightening of the throat, Audrey stood staring at the lines, then suddenly uttered a little cry, for her eye had fallen upon the date of the death.

In the same instant Dick said:

"This cannot be him. This man has been dead for more than two years; and the one we are looking for was alive seventeen months ago."

"But the priest said a year ago," breathed Audrey.

"The priest is in his dotage. I trust this stone more than his memory."

The next few minutes proved Dick right upon this point. Two years ago, was it? Yes, yes, it may well have been. The bleary-eyed priest had fancied it was less—but, to be sure, time does pass so quickly.

Further enquiries soon made it clear that the Demetr Dobrowicz buried here, and even although his personal description tallied most undeniably with that of the missing individual, could not possibly be the man whom Audrey had met in Paris in the summer before last.

Shaken by the new storm of emotion she went back silently by her silent cousin's side to the inn where her aunt awaited her. There, having shut herself into her room, she struggled for long to analyse the sensations of the day. A great terror, followed by a great deliverance—such was the estimate which it seemed most natural to give of them. But somehow it would not fit. The real thing was not nearly so simple as that. Looking close she became aware of a very jumble of sensations. The moment in which she had heard that Demetr Dobrowicz was dead had indeed brought a shock of pain; but there was something else mingled with the pain—something like that wild relief which the consciousness of "knowing the worst" sometimes brings with it. The weary quest was ended; the torturing uncertainty done with. This way, at least, she would no longer live upon false hopes, nor dream dreams destined never to come true. It would be possible to adopt a definite attitude towards Life, instead of swaying about upon the quicksand of surmises, on which she had been precariously poised.

All this had passed in hot haste through her mind during the few minutes between the first discovery and the second. And then came the recognition of the discrepancy of date which in one instant overthrew the theory.

The relief which she had been aware of a moment ago, vanished to give way to another sort of relief, which again was darkened by the old shadow, for this meant, of course, that everything stood at the same point it had stood on yesterday. The old torturing uncertainty was here again; more torturing than ever. Her place in life—her future lot—remained darkly wrapped in shadow.

"I suppose it is because I have thought so much and felt so much, that I am losing the faculty of acute sensation;" she mused, as she sternly interrogated herself. "I should have felt more unhappy at the first discovery and happier at the second than I actually felt. A year ago I know it would all have been intenser. And yet, what is the difference? Is it not my Demetr—my beautiful, black-haired Demetr whom I am seeking—now, as then?"

With her hand over her eyes she tried to call up his features, as she often tried to do, though with diminishing success—for already the outline was growing blurred. What! Was even his face slipping away from her? Then what was to remain of the past?

Dick, on his side, was pursuing his own reflections.

The recent discovery, though leading to failure, appeared to him to be not without importance. Whatever might be the real name of Audrey's missing husband, he felt sure now that it was not Demetr Dobrowicz. It

was a surmise often considered and now apparently established. The use of false documents was universal among the revolutionary party, as he knew, and—circumstances being favourable—the transference of real documents to another than the individual designated. To all appearances this was what had taken place here. The papers of the schoolmaster—an individual isolated from all family ties, as he had succeeded in finding out—had by some chance fallen into the hands of the anarchists, and—age and personal description tallying—had been found more convenient to use than false documents. This would mean, of course, that the man had married Audrey under a name not his own. Could such a marriage be valid? Dick was too little versed in points of law to be sure; but had kept his thoughts to himself, carefully refraining from disturbing his cousin's mind by the complication of this doubt.

## CHAPTER II. THE "JORDAN."

"THESE old barbarous customs are *so* interesting, don't you think so?" asked Mrs. Selville in her thin, but painfully audible voice, of her neighbour upon the raised platform. Whereupon Lady Chesley as a true diplomatist's wife, quickly brought up a string of such adjectives as "picturesque," "patriarchal," "truly edifying," wherewith to strangle that "barbarous," which could not be expected to sound agreeably in the various native ears within reach.

But it would have taken more to quench Mrs.

Selville, whose comments ran on unchecked by the fact that nobody was listening to them, all necks being craned and all eyes strained, in order not to miss any change in the *tableau vivant* displayed down there upon the ice of the Neva.

"Such a pity that it's got to be done out of doors! In spite of furs and foot-warmers, it's difficult to feel comfortable, isn't it? I know my nose is frozen. Audrey, are you sure you don't feel chilled? And don't you think it's beautiful?"

"Yes, beautiful," whispered back Audrey. "But we will talk it over at home. They are reading the Gospel now, and one is supposed to be listening to it, you know."

It was a gorgeous picture indeed upon which they gazed from the height of the covered stand which Russian courtesy had erected upon the bank of the river for the foreign diplomats. A picture to be seen in this perfection nowhere but in St. Petersburg, and no more than once a year on the "Jordan" day—the day of the blessing of the waters.

At a short distance from the bank, an enormous cross had been built of huge blocks of ice; beside it yawned the hole from which the blocks had been taken. Close by stood an altar erected on the ice, with the *Metropolit* in gorgeous vestments before it, flanked by the cream of the St. Petersburg clergy. Behind that again a brilliant medley of uniforms of all descriptions worn not by soldiers alone, but by every species of civil functionary as well. Waving banners, swinging censers added their notes of colour to the living island, which was seamed by a *cordon* of guards, whose drawn swords

glinted in the winter sunshine. There was so much to look at in the motley group, so much suggestiveness in the exotic costumes of which more than one hailed from over the borders of Asia, as well as in the solemn chaunt of many male voices perfectly attuned, and carrying far in the frosty air, that a sort of surfeit of sensations was almost bound to supervene.

But it was to one figure among the others that Audrey's own eyes ever again returned—that of the unhappy man who dares to call himself the Czar of all the Russians, and who, as he stood in splendid isolation before the altar, while the banks of the river, and the river itself, beyond the space kept clear by the police, was packed with the watchful faces of his subjects, must almost necessarily be asking himself, shudderingly, whether or not he would get back to his palace with a whole skin. Nothing more tragic, nothing more pitiable than the spare, insignificant figure set in this frame of pomp and circumstance had ever come before Audrey's eyes, or even entered into her imagination. The sight of it even took her attention off the details of the curious ceremony. She scarcely saw the swaying of the censers, and all but missed the moment when the grey-bearded *Metropolit* stepped to the edge of the pool with a golden candelabra in each hand, whose burning lights he quenched in the icy water, while from the fortress across the river the guns booming in salute, drowned the melodious chaunt of hundreds of choristers.

It was one of the last acts of the ceremony, and immediately after its conclusion and the withdrawal of the Court, would follow another intrinsically Russian sight—the rush of the populace to the river in order to



secure at least a few drops of the freshly consecrated water. Quantities of them, in especial the country people who had invaded the town in shoals to-day, had come armed with jugs and pitchers or at least mugs, for this purpose. The miscellaneous crockery, tightly clutched in determined hands, added not a little to the characteristic physiognomy of the crowd. It was quite as interesting in its way, that crowd upon the banks, as the brilliant island of vestments and uniforms. What time Audrey was not gazing at the crowned victim before the altar, her eyes strayed to the silent and seemingly so orderly spectators, in whose hands—far more than in those of the functionaries over there—the future of Russia lay. Signs of storm had the police thought to read upon the political sky? To Audrey's untutored eyes they remained undiscoverable, even from the vantage ground she stood upon, and which gave her so comprehensive a view of the crowd. These piously attentive men, these women holding up their children to get a glimpse of him, the Little Father, over there upon the ice, these stolid, sheepskin-coated peasants with their pitchers in their hands, how loyal and how harmless they looked, how superfluous their mere expressions made the swarm of policemen on all sides appear!

"I do wish they would not shoot so much!" wailed Mrs. Selville beside Audrey. "Those guns really make one feel quite jumpy. What *are* you staring at, girl, in that way? One would think you were trying to get your eyes out of your head."

There almost seemed some ground for Mrs. Selville's warning; for Audrey, leaning perilously far forward over

the draped balustrade of the platform, was staring wide-eyed and fixedly at one particular point of the crowd below.

"What is it, child? Good gracious! You don't see a bomb, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Audrey, very low, moving only her lips and not her eyes. "But I see a big man with one arm and one eye; and I am trying to make out—" She leaned so far forward that Mrs. Selville clutched nervously at her dress—then spoke again very quickly and with suddenly heightened colour.

"Call Dick! but don't make a fuss. I dare not take my eyes off the people I am looking at, for fear of losing them in the crowd. Make him a sign—but quickly!"

To ask Mrs. Selville to do anything both quickly and quietly, was a forlorn hope, as Audrey herself knew only too well. But fortunately, before any sort of sign had been made, Dick himself was at her side, his attention attracted by the strange demeanour of his cousin.

"Dick!" she whispered, maintaining her same rigid attitude, thankful, the while, for the absorbed attention of the rest of the company, whose eyes were all for the cup of consecrated water, just now passing from hand to hand down there upon the ice, and touched by each pair of lips in turn, in imitation of the gesture of the Czar himself; "look over there where I am looking—there, on the edge of the crowd beside the second lamp-post. You see that big man with the bandage over the eye, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," said Dick, after a moment.

"And beside him a short one with a big head?"

"Yes."

"Now go down quickly; don't lose an instant. Get hold of them somehow. Make them come to our hotel. Promise them security—money—anything. They are the two men we looked for at Paris—the giant and the dwarf—you remember? I am certain that they are. Now quick, Dick—quick! if you care for me at all!"

"I shall try," was all he said. "But in this crowd I don't know what I can do. The second lamp-post from here, isn't it?"

He was gone in a moment, and Audrey still leaning immovable against the balustrade, gazed at the two figures she had described as though she would hold them captive with her eyes, and waited to see Dick reappear beside them.

She had been waiting for barely a minute, almost oblivious of the rest of her surroundings though the guns were still booming in her ears, when she became vaguely aware of some subtle change in the attitude of the crowd. She could see men and women looking at each other with a sort of frightened question in their eyes, while many heads turned in one direction—that of the Winter Palace, whose vast façade dominated the river.

"By Jove! What was that?" said one of the English *attachés*, standing behind Audrey. A moment ago he had seen what she had missed: a shower of bright fragments whose glitter caught the light as they fell, raining from the front of the Winter Palace, with a strange, fantastic resemblance to tears being shed. The clatter of glass could not be audible among the many other sounds, and yet what else could those be but broken window-panes?

"By Jove! What was that?"

"That" was the historical shot which so far has never been cleared up for the world at large—the ominous discharge which on 19th January 1905 struck the Winter Palace—perchance the signal for which brooding rebellion had been waiting, in order to burst into open revolt. With it was inaugurated that Russian revolution whose end, perchance, the majority of us will die without seeing.

But these conclusions were drawn later. At the moment itself nothing was clear—not even as to what exactly had happened—except that some windows of the Winter Palace had been smashed; quite enough in itself to explain the flurry of the crowd, although not succeeding in shaking the apparent self-possession of the uniformed phalanx upon the ice, who, to all appearances oblivious of the accident, continued to play their dignified parts to the solemn end. So slight, on the whole, were the symptoms of anything serious having happened, that even Mrs. Selville refrained from shrieking, and contented herself with wondering loudly what it was the people were staring at so hard.

Instinctively Audrey's eyes had gone along in the common direction, but without seeing anything to satisfy curiosity, since the tell-tale glass was no longer falling. Provoked with herself for allowing her attention to lapse, she brought back her gaze to the second lamp-post, only to be conscious of a pang of disappointment. Dick, indeed, had reached the spot meanwhile, but was staring, disconcerted, about him—for neither the big man with the bandage nor the little man with the big head were anywhere visible. Wildly she probed the crowd with

her eyes, to the right—to the left—all around the spot. In vain. The two men remained as invisible as though the pavement had opened to swallow them up.

Half an hour later, the Court having retired, and the rush for the blest water being now in full swing, Audrey met Dick at the foot of the stand.

“Vanished into thin air,” he reported in a rapid aside. “By the time I got there not a trace of either of them. I might have enlisted police assistance, of course; but I knew you did not want that.”

“We must find them yet, Dick—we must!” whispered back Audrey, behind her muff.

“It is something to know that they are at St. Petersburg.”

Alongside, Mrs. Selville was profusely thanking Lady Chesley for the treat afforded, and once more regretting, as she rubbed the tip of her chilled nose, that the beautiful ceremony had to take place out of doors.

At home Audrey talked out the discovery of the day with Dick, exhaustively.

“‘Monsieur le Géant and Monsieur le Nain’—the description fits exactly. I am ready to swear that they are his ‘comrades,’ which means that they *know*. I shall make them tell me what they know. But first we must find them. You will help me, Dick? You are not growing too tired of helping me, are you?”

“No,” said Dick, concisely, “I suppose we must tell Sir Everard; but I think we had better continue to keep the police out of the matter.”

“Of course we must; but the private agencies will have to be put into action again; and we ourselves must walk about as much as we can, in all parts of the town,

and keep our eyes open. Do you think you would know them again?"

"Together, certainly—perhaps even singly—the big one, at least."

"Very well. Let us set to work. I do not leave St. Petersburg until I have got speech with one of those two men."

### CHAPTER III.

PETRU SWIERZO.

To the resolve taken upon the day of the "Jordan" feast Audrey held firm through all that followed—through the panic of the blood-stained day before the Winter Palace, when success seemed almost within the grasp of Revolution—through the long anxious weeks which followed, while Autocracy and Anarchism seemed to be standing face to face with bared fangs, ready, at a touch, to fly at each other's throats. To the entreaties of her aunt who suggested a temporary retirement from the capital—a retirement from Russia not being suitable to her own private ends—she steadily replied:

"You can go, auntie dear, to any place you think safer—but I stay here. I *have* to."

To herself she quite acknowledged the madness of the quest on which she was engaged—the slenderness of the hope of putting her hand upon two nameless individuals in such a place as St. Petersburg. And yet she knew that until she had exhausted all possibilities she would have no peace. Every hour that weather and the necessities of life permitted were now spent by

herself and Dick in the streets—and not the fashionable ones—scanning the figures and faces of every passer-by, attentive, in especial, to anything in the shape of a crowd, although such things were rare in these days of acute police supervision. But the two individuals who, like some sort of grotesque storm-birds had appeared for one brief moment on the momentous “Jordan” day, had vanished again as traceless as though they had never been.

Two long and agitated months dragged by. The Mukden catastrophe was passed and the end of March reached. Audrey was beginning to tell herself that persistence was becoming insane; when suddenly, without presaging symptoms, the clue which she had sought for with such useless pains, dropped into her hand without an effort.

It was on a raw, dull day of March that it happened. Not far from dusk, with Dick by her side, Audrey was returning on foot from the Wyborgska peninsula, the manufacturing quarter of the town, where, under her cousin’s protection, she had been inspecting a leather-work establishment, recommended as interesting and characteristic. Manufacturing districts were a favourite haunt of revolutionists as she knew, and accordingly had looked about her very keenly among the crowds of workmen, busy with the mountains of skins. As ever, the result had been negative.

Now, tired and more discouraged than ever, she walked beside her cousin. Dick had indeed suggested a droschke, for wheels were just coming to their rights again; but, true to her now inveterate habit of minute personal observation, Audrey had insisted on walking.

In order to regain the hotel, the river had to be crossed.

"Shall we go round by the bridge?" asked Dick. "The ice looks rather sloppy."

"It's safe as long as it's sloppy: someone was telling me that the other day. It's when the water disappears and the ice gets grey, that the break-up is close. The bridge is such a way off."

"Very well," said Dick; and they descended the bank, following one of the numerous tracks which crossed and recrossed the river, through the remnants of the winter's snow, like so many dirty ribbons lacing together the two banks. There was no one in front of them; but from the opposite side a single figure was coming rapidly towards them. They were almost in the middle of the river before the dimness of approaching dusk allowed them to distinguish details of appearance and dress. With an exclamation on her lips, Audrey turned to look at Dick and perceived in the same instant that he, following an identical impulse, was looking at her with keen enquiry in his eyes. Again she peered forward. The solitary pedestrian was a good deal nearer already, both his shortness of stature and the size of his clumsy head grown unmistakable.

"It's him," said Audrey, with a sharp nudge of her elbow. "*Monsieur le Nain*. Dick—he must not get away this time. Oh, Dick, what are you going to do?"

They had settled a hundred times what they would do if chance were to bring them face to face with one of the two men they sought; but, for all that, the actuality brought a touch of flurry with it—to Audrey at least. Dick was not looking flurried; he was only



looking rather anxious, and his lean jaw was set in an extremely suggestive way.

"You must not let him pass, Dick; but we had better begin by being polite, had we not?"

"Oh, I am going to be very polite," said Dick, barely unlocking his teeth.

A few more steps through the slushy snow and then a sudden halt on the part of Dick. It was straight in front of the pedestrian that he had stopped, and so unexpectedly as to force the other to stop too. He looked at the Englishman in obvious astonishment, just tinged with alarm; then would have stepped to the side of the path, but that Dick put out one hand ceremoniously, raising his hat with the other.

"Monsieur speaks French, I think?" he remarked, making use of that language as preconcerted. His own command of the same had, during the past year and a half improved so far as greatly to facilitate comprehension—though loyally retaining its Anglo-Saxon character.

The short man gazed at him from out of small, quick eyes, without as yet committing himself to the knowledge of any language. His shabby, black hat was pulled low on his forehead; his clothes were those of a low-class workman.

"This lady and I have been looking for you. We believe that you have news of a friend of ours called Demetr Dobrowicz."

At sound of the name something glimmered in the dwarf's eyes; it might have been a spark of comprehension, and was gone in a moment, but not before they both had seen it.

"No doubt you will be kind enough to tell us what

you know of him," went on Dick, pounding away heroically at his Anglo-French while Audrey, with fast-beating heart, stood by in a torture of suspense, expecting every moment to see the precious informant slip through their fingers.

"I have no news to give," said the man sullenly, but in excellent French.

Audrey moved forward, unable to keep still.

"I know you have; I see you have. Oh, don't be so hard—so obstinate! We mean no harm. Demetr Dobrowicz is—a friend."

The dwarf's eyes turned to her, scrutinisingly, speculatively, but he kept silent.

Then Dick, stepping up close to him, spoke in a now almost confidential tone.

"Look here—whether you know anything about him or not, we are quite determined to have a conversation with you about Demetr Dobrowicz. We have been so determined for the last seventeen months, and we are not going to let slip our chance. But this is not the place for explanations. There are some people coming. Our hotel would do much better. The question is: will you come along quietly, or shall I have to make you? There is a policeman over there upon the bank, quite within hail, and probably a dozen more whom I don't happen to see."

The dwarf had been standing all the time with his hands plunged into the pockets of his rough overcoat, in which, as it occurred to Dick, there was not at all unlikely to be a revolver, for which reason he did what he could to keep between the man and Audrey. Before answering now, the man first looked to the right

and to the left. If he had had Audrey alone to deal with it is more than probable that he would have cut the knot of the situation by simply taking to his heels; but Dick's legs were considerably longer than his own, and Dick's jaw had a set about it which, as a connoisseur of humanity, he appreciated at its true value. From him he looked again at Audrey, likewise with appreciation, and finally he shrugged his shoulders and uttered a laugh which might have been that of a philosopher bowing to the inevitable.

"Very well! Why not? I will come with you. But if you are leading me into a trap, mind only that Demetr Dobrowicz will be in that same trap."

He turned upon his heel, and in a silence which to Audrey was filled by the humming of her pulses, the strangely-assorted trio regained the left bank of the Neva. Here a droschke was hailed, onto whose front seat the virtual captive climbed without any demur to sit beside the driver.

If the hotel porter felt any astonishment at the strange guest whom the English people had brought back with them, professional discretion successfully veiled the fact. Not even when he saw the uncouth and ill-clad individual following the Selvilles up the thickly carpeted stairs, did a muscle of his face move. English eccentricity was no new thing to him; and this was not the first time that the doings of these English, in particular, had exercised his mind.

Upstairs, Audrey, merely loosening her furs, and aware of a rather shaky sensation about her knees, sank into the nearest armchair, bracing herself for the interrogation upon which so much depended. It was into

her hands now that the conduct of affairs had passed, since for the searching enquiry to be made even Dick's improved French would scarcely suffice. Dumb as a mute, he now stood behind her chair, very much at attention, never taking his watchful eyes off the face of Petru Swierzo, who, with a whimsical smile upon his lips, stood there, hands in pockets, having refused to take the chair, perforce offered. He seemed to have arrived at almost enjoying the situation, and certainly did not look like a man who could be induced to say one word more than he intended to say.

It was not Audrey, but he, who put the first question.

"Will you allow me to enquire how you came to suppose that I am a friend of Demetr Dobrowicz? To my knowledge I have never before had the pleasure of meeting either you or this gentleman?"

Whatever his clothes might be, his speech was not uncouth. The very accent of the French helped to make him appear less incongruous in the luxurious hotel-room.

Audrey, her nerves strung high, faced him boldly.

"No, I have never met you; but I have heard of you—at Paris; not by name, only by description; you and the big man with the one arm and the one eye. I know that you tried to get the things out of Demetr Dobrowicz's room after his disappearance. That can only mean that you know where he is—or was."

Again that spark of comprehension showed itself in Petru Swierzo's eyes—to vanish again.

"Ah!—and you also tried to get the things out, and got them too? Is it not so, mademoiselle?—or perhaps I should say madame?" he suggested with a sudden

sharpening of the eyes, and a malicious curl of the lip. "You see that I also have heard of you—at Paris. I begin to understand."

"You and that other are both his comrades. Do you want to deny it?"

"Before I deny anything, or affirm anything, allow me another question: are you his wife?"

At the directness of the question, Audrey started back, as though it had been a blow.

"I have told you that I—that we are friends of his," she said with flaming cheeks and defiant head poised high.

"Friends is too wide a word. I cannot serve information to every acquaintance of Demetr Dobrowicz who has the fancy to ask for it. To the demands of a wife I might possibly respond, but only to that."

"Don't let yourself be caught," murmured Dick in Audrey's ear. "It's ten to one that he has no information to give."

Over the dwarf's face there passed a spasm as of amusement. His ears seemed to be as long as his linguistic attainments were varied.

"What is that monsieur says? No information to give? See rather for yourself."

Unearthing a large, battered pocket-book, he began to hunt through its numerous flaps. Fully a minute passed before, from an inner pocket, he produced a sheet of note-paper, very much the worse for wear, and carefully unfolded it.

"Perhaps this is not quite unknown to you," he said with an ill-concealed snigger, as he handed the paper to Audrey.

She looked at it blankly, aware at first only that she was looking at her own handwriting. A few scrawled words, dated "Wednesday," and signed "Audrey." Then suddenly, with the recollection of the very occasion—the very mood in which they had been penned—the blood rushed to her face.

"How did you get this?"

"If you are his wife I may tell you—perhaps. If you are not, you can find out for yourself. Are you his wife?"

She sat silent, dizzy with agitation—torn between the desire to speak and the terror of its consequences.

The dwarf laughed, almost good-naturedly, though his eyes gleamed like points of burnished metal.

"There! You need not tell me. I can see for myself. But tell me this. Where was it you met him? Did you not, by any chance, pass a summer in Switzerland, in the mountains near Kugelberg? I always suspected that something had happened to him at Kugelberg, or in its environs."

"No, I have never been in Switzerland," said Audrey impatiently. "But about this note? You have not told me yet how you got it."

"I took it out of Demetr Dobrowicz's pocket."

"Without his knowledge?"

"Quite without his knowledge."

"Does that mean that he—"

"Let's cut this short!" broke in Dick, reading the suspense in Audrey's unsteady voice. "Answer a plain question plainly. Is the man alive or dead?"

"For her he is dead," and Petru Swierzo pointed a short finger at Audrey; "dead and buried, even though not under the earth."

"No riddles, please! Does this mean that he is alive, or does it not?"

"There are different ways of being alive, are there not?" remarked the dwarf, looking more than ever as though he were enjoying the situation.

"But you promised me information!" broke out Audrey, with angry reproach in voice and eyes.

"I have given it you, I have told you that he is alive—in a sense. And I will tell you something more; he is not in Russia."

"Nor in Siberia?"

"No."

"Is he at liberty?"

Petru Swierzo appeared to reflect.

"He is in no prison built by human hands."

"Did he ever get back to Paris from England?"

"Maybe he did, or maybe he did not. I have told you all that I mean to tell you."

Audrey looked at the man before her, with eyes that seemed almost capable of tearing his secret from him.

"And you will not help me to find him? Not if I conjure you by all that you prize—by anything that you may hold holy?"

Petru Swierzo looked back very straight into the clear, grey eyes fixed upon him; his own filled not with admiration, but with that gleam which looked so very like hatred.

"It is for the sake of those things which I hold holy, that I will not help you to find him."

"Are you afraid of danger to yourself or your companions? I swear to you that there is none. I cannot

harm you without harming Demetr Dobrowicz—you have said so yourself—and I will not do that.”

“It does not matter what I am afraid of or not; but I will not help you.”

The thought of a bribe crossed Audrey’s mind, only to be rejected as impracticable. Something in the dwarf’s face told her that she would be wasting her pains, and probably courting insult. There was nothing but persuasion to fall back upon; but the next five minutes proved persuasions to be as vain as the threats, which, almost as a logical consequence, followed close upon their heels.

“You have only to touch the electric bell in order to have me arrested,” said the dwarf, perfectly composed. “But if you do, I swear to you that within twenty-four hours Demetr Dobrowicz will be in my case. Or would you have me put upon the rack? Such instruments are not quite obsolete yet in our glorious empire. But if you imagine that screws or pincers will succeed in loosening my tongue, then I am sorry for your little knowledge of men. All that you would gain would be the chance of seeing Demetr Dobrowicz, your handsome husband”—the word came out with wicked emphasis—“lying upon another rack. He and I are what you call in England ‘in the same boat’—don’t you see. And now, will you let me go? You have got from me all that you are going to get—though you kept me till midnight.”



## CHAPTER IV.

## "THE TARTAR."

THAT evening Audrey went to her travelling-desk and, unlocking it, took out a small object: the little wooden paper-cutter which she had put into her pocket on the occasion of the first visit to Demetr Dobrowicz's Paris lodging, and which ever since she had religiously preserved, as the solitary keepsake she possessed of him. During the earlier months of her grass widowhood she had taken it out frequently, to gaze at it as intently as though she expected to discover the imprint of her vanished husband's fingers; but some time had passed since she last looked at it.

"Kugelberg"—there it stood quite plainly, cut into the fine-grained wood. The same place which that strange dwarf had mentioned to-day so significantly. Somewhere in the background of her mind, Audrey had all along been nursing the half-formed idea of falling back upon Kugelberg, if everything else failed. It was a place which Demetr Dobrowicz had undoubtedly visited; and from what the dwarf had said to-day, it was not hard to deduct that some crisis of his life attached to it—or was supposed by his "camrades" to attach to it. Since Russia did not hold him within its borders—and even if her own fruitless researches had

not convinced her, her instinct would have divined truth in Petru Swierzo's assertion—why not try Switzerland? Who knows whether those unfamiliar mountains might not hold the clue she had been so laboriously seeking upon the Russian plains? It was in Switzerland that he had met the accident he had spoken of. What connection this could possibly have with his subsequent disappearance she could not even attempt to guess. But there being nothing else to hand, she snatched at this—mere ray of hope, though it seemed to be. As for the dwarf's enigmatical statements, her brain already ached with the turning over and over in her mind of words which appeared devoid of any rational meaning.

Before she slept her resolve was formed, and next morning communicated both to her cousin and aunt. The acception by the former surpassed her expectations. Dick, though he had refrained from fretting her with suggestions to which he knew she would not listen, privately thought it was high time to seek more peaceful regions. He would not breathe freely until he had got both his cousin and his mother safely over the Russian frontier. Not that he thought much of the Kugelberg clue, but it would do as well as any other place for the purpose of a lure.

Mrs. Selville, herself, despite personal nervousness, was far less enthusiastic. In her case maternal ambition dominated even the fear of bombs.

"It does seem a pity to go, just when things are getting on so well with Mademoiselle Tata," she took the first opportunity of confiding to Audrey. "I am sure that in another fortnight Dick would have proposed."

"What is to prevent him proposing to-day or to-morrow?" objected Audrey a trifle irritably. "They have known each other for months now. I can't think what he is waiting for."

"I can't think so either, though I tried to ask him the other day. But he got almost cross. It's the very first time that Dick has ever given me a cross answer, and it makes me fear—though I can't quite believe it—that he is afraid of not being accepted."

"I don't think he need be afraid. But I daresay one could find out—indirectly of course."

"Oh! How would you do that?"

"It will almost do itself, I think. The mere fact of our departure will probably move her to betray whatever she is feeling, one way or the other. And besides, nothing is easier than to sound judiciously. I think I shall go and see her to-day, in order to break the news, and I shall keep my eyes well open during the operation. Never fear!"

"Shall I come with you?" volunteered Mrs. Selville.

"Thank you, aunty dear, I think I had better go alone."

That same afternoon Tata, sitting upon a Turkish ottoman with her feet tucked under her, and trying by means of a French novel and innumerable cigarettes, to forget the dismal rain that was beating against the panes of the luxuriously-furnished apartment—which in the matter of Persian carpets and silken hangings might well have vied with an Oriental harem—was astonished by the announcement of a visitor.

"You!" she exclaimed, regaining her feet with alacrity. "This is Christian charity indeed! Are you

aware that you are visiting the sick? I have had a cold for three days, and my nose is so swollen—what there is of it—that I feel quite proud of it. It's almost become of normal size, you know; but it burns like a coal, all the same. There now! Take off your furs, and let us have what you call in English a 'jaw.' Nobody will interrupt us to-day. What shall I give you to eat? Tea, of course—to drink, anyway. And I know that you are converted to rose jam. But if you knew what is really good, you would have one of these cigarettes. No? Ah, well—if you *will* deprive yourself of delights—But I hope you don't object to my going on?"

"How could I be so cruel?" laughed Audrey as she took place in the armchair pushed towards her. Through the clouds of tobacco-smoke she looked across with friendly eyes at her hostess. Of the smoke itself she completely disapproved; it was one of those things which made it difficult for her to fit "The Tartar" into the conventional frame of Lockwood; but of Tata herself it was almost impossible not to approve, even against one's own rooted prejudices. She was rather glaringly exotic, it is true, but she was *genuine*, and therefore appealed to genuine people.

"I have not seen you for a long time," she now was saying, having rung the bell for tea, and puffing away again like a furnace.

"And you will not see me for much longer either," responded Audrey, going straight to the mark. "This is not a sick call, it is a farewell visit."

"What? You are going on another excursion?"

"No, it is not an excursion this time. We are leaving Russia altogether."

"Soon?" asked Tata in a tone which rendered any painstaking observation entirely superfluous, so frankly disconcerted, so openly distressed was it.

"Very soon. Next week, already, I hope."

"You hope? Oh, Miss Selville, has Russia been so unkind to you as to make you unkind enough to say that? And what is to become of me and my English accent without our conversations?"

She was smiling at Audrey through the cigarette-smoke, but upon her short stubbly black lashes tears glistened quite plainly.

Audrey looked at her curiously, and, encouraged by the symptoms, risked a bolder move.

"Do you know what I have sometimes thought might possibly become of you?"

"Well?"

"I have thought that perhaps you would come away with us—for good! That England might end by becoming your home instead of Russia!"

Tata made no pretence of not understanding. Affectation was a thing she was unable to achieve. Scarlet up to the roots of her oily black hair, she reclined a little farther back among the cushions of the ottoman, exhaling a vigorous puff of smoke which almost acted the convenient part of a veil.

"Are you angry with me?" asked Audrey, after a moment of silence, and somewhat alarmed at her own audacity.

"No, I am not angry; but I think you are making a mistake."

"You must forgive me, if I am. It is only natural, you know, seeing what good friends you and my cousin have become. I know that Dick is not exactly a ladies' man. I fancy he is usually voted rather slow. Not the sort of person to fall in love with at first sight. But still I think he is not bad-looking in his own quiet way, if he only knew how to make the most of himself. He isn't old, either, in spite of those grey hairs. And he really has qualities, though certainly not showy ones. I thought perhaps that you had discovered them."

"Love at first sight," repeated Tata pensively, and unheeding the rest of the speech. "Do you believe in it, Miss Selville?"

She had tucked up her feet again onto the ottoman, and with her head thrown back among the cushions, was watching the smoke rings float to the ceiling.

"I—I don't quite know. Why do you ask me?" faltered Audrey, somewhat taken aback by the change of tactics.

"Because something I have heard—never mind what—made me fancy that you did. I do not."

"And yet it happens—"

"It's not 'it' that happens; it's something else. Just think a little! What does one see of a person at first sight? Nothing but the outside. What can one know of him even after half a dozen cursory meetings? The way he parts his hair and the shape he cuts his nails—and possibly you may get a smattering of his opinions upon things in general. You will not have got beyond the mere shell of the man, and if you are dazzled, it is that which has dazzled you. In order to get to the

kernel you need time and you need opportunity—the contact of hours and days—the test of circumstances. This is the only sort of love I believe in. The other seems to me degrading—even a little brutal.”

“You may be right—I don’t know,” said Audrey, with a vague perturbation of mind which she could not stop to analyse, and also with a good deal of astonishment. Despite her liking for “The Tartar,” she had never suspected the existence of any such shades of delicacy in her nature.

She paused for a moment, and then ventured with a rather uncertain smile—

“It is just because in all these months you have had opportunities for getting at the kernel of my Cousin Dick that I thought perhaps—but it seems I am mistaken.”

The rings glittered upon Tata’s small, brown hand as she crushed out the fire of her cigarette upon an alabaster ash-tray.

“You are not mistaken about me,” she said quite steadily.

“But then?”

“He has sent you, has he?” asked Tata quickly, with a lightning-like glance from her black eyes.

“No—he knows nothing. His mother thinks that he does not venture to speak. He is always so apt to undervalue himself. We were both anxious to know whether it would be right to encourage him or not.”

“I see,” said Tata, and her chin sank a little. “It is as I thought.”

“You must not betray to him what I have done when he comes to you—himself.”

"He will not come to me himself."

"I think he will, if you are at all kind to him. Why should he not?"

Tata almost bounded among her cushions in order to lean across the table. Her small eyes were shining under the red lids, inflamed by the cold, and her low forehead puckered into folds of impatience.

"Why should he not?" she repeated in a tone well-nigh of exasperation. "Really your English slowness does get upon one's nerves sometimes. Do you want *me* to tell you why he should not? Why, because it is you he loves, and not me! There! Is that plain enough?"

"Oh, but that is impossible!" exclaimed Audrey very quickly, and half inclined to laugh. "Whatever could have put such an idea into your head?"

"My eyes, which are not quite so blind as yours seem to be."

"But you are mistaken—I know you are mistaken," persisted Audrey, growing a little flurried. "Of course Dick is fond of me—I know that. He has known me all my life, you see—or nearly so, and I suppose he has got accustomed to me. But I have never been more to him than a sister."

"You mean that he has never been more to you than a brother," suggested Tata with a rather scornful smile. "But that is not quite the same thing."

"Oh, no, no—it cannot be. I am only his sister. Do you actually mean to say that you thought it was—different?"

"And do *you* actually mean to say that you are not aware that he worships the very ground you tread upon,



and that he himself would lay himself down to be trodden upon if he could serve as a stepping-stone to your happiness?"

"What makes you think so? I don't understand—"

"I am not blind—that is all. My eyes are not big, but they take in a good deal. My nose too is small, but it scents well—except when I have a cold, of course"—she laughed abruptly. "Perhaps it is just because no man has ever been in love with me, that I know so exactly what they look like when they are in love with someone else. I always study the men who approach me, in order to find out whether it is me they want, or my money. I have studied this one well, and have come to the conclusion that it is neither me he wants nor my money. He thinks I am what you call 'a good sort,' and he is glad to find somebody who knows the difference between a May-fly and a dry-fly—that is all. But he is thinking as little of proposing to me as of proposing to the wife of the man in the moon. And that is the very reason I like him. If he were as purchasable with money as most of the others are, then I think I should at once lose all desire to purchase him, whereas, this may—"

Tata sank back again slowly among her cushions, and resumed her study of the ceiling.

For some moments Audrey sat dumb, silenced by these so positive assertions, and with a strange, stunned sensation upon her. At last she shook her head.

"It cannot be. He would not have behaved as he has—if it was as you suppose."

"I don't know anything about that. But don't forget what I have been telling you about the stepping-stone!"

Is it that way he has been behaving perhaps? Ah, here is the tea!"

Thankful for the respite afforded by the presence of two footmen in livery elaborately laying out a well-furnished tea-table, Audrey sat plunged in bewildered reflection. Under this new flood of light turned upon the situation, everything in the past seemed to be changing form and colour.

Several minutes passed before the two girls were alone again, and during those minutes Tata seemed to have come to a resolution.

"Listen!" she said as the door closed behind the servants, and hovering beside the table, teapot in hand. "You have been open with me to-day—I bear you no grudge for it, but I think it gives me the right to be open with you too. I am going to ask you a question not much plainer than the one you asked me. There is a story about you at St. Petersburg—a story that you are married. Do you mind telling me whether it is true or not?"

"Why do you ask me?" enquired Audrey, her cheeks burning.

"Because if it is not true—if you still have your freedom, then take my advice, and grasp the love of this man—with both hands. Qualities! You asked me just now whether I had discovered his qualities; I think it is I who might put that question to you. You have grown so used to them, I suppose, that you just take them for granted. You take the whole man far too much for granted, it seems to me. To you he has become daily bread; while to me he is like some strong, savoury dish served up in the midst of the many in-

sipid and over-sugared morsels that are being offered me on all sides. You think it necessary to point out that he is neither ugly nor old. Do you think I should like him less if he *were* ugly? And what have years to do with such a sterling soul as his? I am sure you don't even consider him clever, although you have told me yourself that he has got you out of every scrape you have ever been in in your life; and could a stupid man have done that? I should give a good deal to know what you really think of him. I have even tried to find out. Do you remember the ball at the English Embassy when I sat opposite to you at supper? It was the only time I allowed myself to 'flirt' with him; I thought it might pique you into betraying jealousy—if there was any jealousy to betray; and I am not quite convinced yet that I entirely failed. No—don't interrupt me! I am nearly done. It is just because I have had the opportunity of getting at the kernel of the man that I feel entitled to speak. And what I say to you again is this: If that story is not true—if you are free, then take hold of that great—that precious love—with both hands."

Tata, in the heat of her harangue, had been gesticulating so vigorously with the teapot as to cause a shower of brown drops to stain the whiteness of the lace-trimmed tablecloth. She now put it down hastily, and began dropping into the cup beside her far more lumps of sugar than any normal person could be expected to consume at one sitting.

"But the story is true," faltered Audrey, her cheeks still in flame. "I am not free."

"Ah!"

Tata, overcome with agitation, sat down rather suddenly upon the chair beside her, staring hard at Audrey. Upon her own homely little countenance a perfect battle of conflicting emotions was raging. Something that might have been satisfaction, or even exultation, struggled visibly with an astonished disappointment. In the end it was the disappointment which gained the upper hand.

"What a pity! Then you cannot make him happy!"

To judge from the accent of genuine regret it would almost seem that "The Tartar" too had a certain vocation for acting as stepping-stone.

Audrey looked at her in sudden admiration.

"I think it is very foolish of him not to be made happy—by you. You are far more generous than I could ever be. Perhaps he will come to see so yet. I cannot believe the case is quite so desperate as you suppose. If it had been so, why should he not have given some sign long ago? I mean before I met—the other one. I was past twenty before that happened."

"Why? Because the unhappy man is infected by that most unpractical of all qualities—modesty. Have not you yourself told me to-day that he always undervalues himself—which is the surest means of being undervalued by others. Of course he thinks himself an old frump—and has very nearly become one too, from the mere force of suggestion."

Again Audrey felt herself silenced. Undoubtedly there was something to be said for this view of the case.

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## CHAPTER V.

DOCTOR BONNEF.

UPON the balcony of the Hotel "Zur goldenen Ziege" sat Audrey, gazing down with rather listless eyes at the lively spectacle below. It was market-day at Kugelberg, and the May sunshine was pouring its floods of light upon many quaint head-dresses and bright kerchiefs, upon gaudy aprons and silver-buckled shoes, some of which had already travelled far since morning, for the first big spring market of the season never failed to lure both buyers and sellers from even distant mountain villages. Since early morning an unbroken string of cows, dappled and speckled, of goats, black and white, had been moving past the inn, making slumber impossible with their many-toned bleating—on their way to the spot reserved for the serious business of cattle-traffic, while here upon the *Hauptplatz* the more frivolous part of the performance found expression in rows of wooden booths fluttering with ribbons, brilliant with holy pictures and spicy with gingerbread. There were extraordinary bargains too to be had in the way of carved boxes and platters, of inkstands, and trays, of everything, in fact, which could by any possibility be operated upon by carving tools. But although she had only been three weeks at Kugelberg, Audrey was tired of wood-

carving already, and had therefore refused to join her aunt who, under suitable escort, had sallied forth in the hope of adding yet a little to her already sadly congested luggage. Brand, the trusty English maid, without whom Audrey could not pass a day comfortably by reason of the difficulty of struggling with her masses of hair, was likewise of the party.

"I should like to take back one of them pretty work-boxes to England," she had said that morning as she combed Audrey's hair, and had added suggestively: "I suppose we shall go back to England some day, miss?"

"Yes, of course we shall," said Audrey a little hastily.

She had often wondered how much Brand knew of the real state of the case. Formally she had never been let into the secret; but, considering her opportunities for observation, it was inconceivable that she should not have formed surmises.

"The landlady was saying as how you can get the boxes much cheaper on market-days," Brand continued. "She herself is going to visit the market after the mid-day meal, and she would show me the best place to go to. So if you are not wanting me, miss, this afternoon—"

"Go, by all means," said Audrey readily; "only mind you don't bring back any carved *souvenirs* of the place! I've got more already than I can stand."

And then it was that Mrs. Selville, hearing of the proposed arrangement, insisting on joining the party.

Thus it came about that Audrey sat alone upon the balcony; for Dick, as little attracted by the market as she was, had taken refuge beside a trout-stream, which

had already furnished much good sport. Audrey wondered now why she had not joined him as he had asked her to, but could find no quite satisfactory answer.

Since her departure from Russia, and even before it—to be quite accurate, since her last intimate talk with Tata—something had changed in her relations with Dick—for the better or for the worse she could scarcely say which. Upon the first blank incredulity with which she had met Tata's suggestion had followed a curiosity which grew ever more acute. Could it really be so? But if it was so, what a different thing the whole past was to what she had imagined it! There was a strange and rather fearful interest in turning this new-found light retrospectively upon events, beginning with the event of the first disclosure made upon the banks of the river at Lockwood. If Tata was right—and how positively she had spoken—what must this past year and a half have been to her cousin! The suggestions opened on all sides before her mind's eye like gulfs absolutely unfathomable. Was it possible that a man should sacrifice all his time, all his repose, all his interests to those of his successful rival?—that he should seek so patiently, so perseveringly, so enthusiastically almost for the person who, when found, would necessarily rob him of even the right of the beloved object? Tata said that it was possible; but Audrey still doubted.

She would have liked to find out, though; but there seemed no means of doing so. For to experiment upon Dick in the usual fashion was a thing she could not even imagine herself doing. But the curiosity pursued her, putting a new shyness into her manner very per-

plexing to Dick. A close observation was all that could help her; and this she applied assiduously, not merely in the hope of surprising the true state of his feelings, but also in order to decide how far "the Tartar" had been right in her estimate of him. It was through "the Tartar's" eyes that she was trying to look at him now. So warm a praise of her very unobtrusive cousin had been to her a revelation, and also a curious sort of satisfaction. In her heart of hearts she had always known that he was like that, only that she had never troubled to reflect upon the matter. Perhaps Tata was right when she reproached her with taking things too much for granted. Yes, dispassionately weighed, she supposed that he really was a man in a thousand; one whose allegiance any woman could be proud of owning. Even she herself, if it had been offered her in good time—before that fateful visit to Paris, that is to say—would she have refused it? She scarcely thought so. Or, at any rate, she was sure that it would have been a foolish act to refuse it. What was that Tata had said about the test of time and occasion? Ah, if ever man was tested, this man was; tested in hundreds of minor incidents stretching back into early childhood; tested in the big issues of life, and found the ring true in all. No question here of being caught by the mere "shell" as Tata called it.

Whenever she arrived at this point of her reflections Audrey would experience that same sense of discomfort which had come over her as she listened to the Russian girl's dissertation upon love at first sight. Ever since that day the thought of the briefness of her acquaintance with Demetr Dobrowicz had rather annoyed her. Was



it really only the "shell" of the man which had taken her captive? and what had been her opportunities of reaching the kernel? "I think that sort of love is degrading," the heiress had said in her outspoken fashion, and Audrey could not think of the words without some of that sense of degradation descending upon herself. Those supreme good looks which had caught her fancy so rapidly, were an explanation, but there were moments now when they seemed to her an indictment rather than an excuse. What did she really know of the man beyond his features and his figure? and what would Tata think of such a love as this? Did it even deserve the name of love—or had it ever deserved it?

There were moments when the past seemed incomprehensible, scarcely to be believed in by sober reflection. And yet the thing was—and was irrevocable. It was by the side of that seductive—that enigmatical alien, that her future would be passed, should her search be successful; for that he lived, she had, with tolerable certainty, gathered from Petru Swierzo's words. There was nothing for it, of course, but to pursue the search; but the goal towards which she had been straining had abruptly lost some of its attraction—or it seemed to her that the change was abrupt, though a careful self-analysis might have revealed the fact that even before the interview with Tata the desire to attain a certainty—of some sort—was already reigning paramount over the mere wish of reunion with her lost husband.

Of late effort itself had relaxed. She had neither been in so great a hurry to get to Switzerland as might have appeared likely; nor, once there, so eager to start researches. So far, the result had been what she had

half expected it to be—a blank. At Kugelberg as at St. Petersburg the name of Demetr Dobrowicz was unknown. Russians in general were rare guests here. The only time that the presence of individuals of that nationality was positively proved by police registers was in the summer before last, when—as was unfortunately ascertained too late—a meeting of some sort—probably of an anarchistical nature—had taken place in the town. By the time the clue was found the birds had been flown, and up to now had not returned.

This was the one item of any interest which Audrey had been able to ascertain—for the summer before last was the one of her marriage. But, after all, what did it tell her? Just what the paper-cutter told her, that Demetr Dobrowicz—calling himself something else she supposed—had been at Kugelberg, but nothing at all of his present fate.

Since then effort had almost rested. If she was still at Kugelberg, it was chiefly for want of a reason for going to any other particular place. Partly also perhaps, because the wonders of spring in this mountain land kept her enthralled from day to day. The new green of the meadows, the newly-sprouted tips upon the fir-branches, the flowers enamelling the banks of the streams in which Dick angled so successfully—they all formed a spell hard to break! Since apparently life was at a deadlock, why not Kugelberg as well as any other place? and where else should she go, except to Lockwood? But Lockwood was Dick's house, and the new light shed upon the situation made the thought of living under his roof appear curiously distasteful. It almost seemed to her that he himself shrank from the idea;

else why should he never have suggested a return home? Why also was he content to let day by day drag past in this unwonted inaction, while at Lockwood a hundred wants of the agricultural season would have claimed his attention? Was it perhaps because he was telling himself what she told herself—that the end of the search would mean the end of the intimate companionship almost of a lifetime, and which the last eighteen months had drawn so much closer? Was it possible that the spell of the mountain spring was acting upon him too, corroding even the strong metal of his will?

The mere thought of it filled her with a sense of regretful pity—putting into her voice when she addressed him a gentler tone which surprised his ear. It was the only means she had of indirectly expressing her gratitude for his services—now that she knew, or suspected—what those services had cost him.

Just now she was telling herself remorsefully that it had been unkind to refuse him her company this afternoon. She was still wondering what had induced her to do so, when the return of Mrs. Selville, laden with purchases, put an end to meditation.

“Awfully nice, my dear, and *such* quaint costumes! But you *do* get pushed about. I thought I had better escape while my bonnet was whole.”

“Has Brand got her work-box?” enquired Audrey, trying to look interested.

“No, not yet; and she wants a needle-case as well. She and the landlady brought me back here, and are off again. They are both quite bitten with the market-fever.”

It was hours before the persons so bitten put in a wearied but triumphant appearance.

"Is it not a beauty?" asked Brand, exhibiting the work-box.

And yet, as it turned out, the box was not, by any means, the event of the afternoon.

"Sure, miss, I never thought to set eyes on another head of hair equal to yours!" began Brand that night, during the brushing of Audrey's hair, a process too lengthy to remain unflavoured by conversation. "But that's what I have seen to-day."

"Really?" asked Audrey, not quite indifferently. "Where was that?"

"In the booth where I bought the work-box. There was a young thing at the counter, together with a man, and the moment I set eyes upon her, I felt almost ready to cry 'Stop thief!'—for my first thought was that she had stolen your plaits, miss. It's the same colour, and the same quantity—just your own golden plaits; and to think of them upon the head of a common peasant girl!"

Brand sniffed as she plied the brush a little more vigorously, as though in need of venting her indignation at so incongruous a situation.

Audrey laughed.

"Well, I suppose she has as much right to them as I."

"Maybe she has," grudgingly admitted Brand, who was a good deal vainer of Audrey's hair than was Audrey herself. "But they don't seem to have brought her much luck, poor thing."

"In what way?"

"In the matrimonial way, to be sure. It was the landlady who was telling me the story. She knows the girl well. Her people live in the mountains, and have only come down for the market. It's from there that comes that excellent cream cheese as Mrs. Selville is so fond of. The girl brings it down once a week. 'Marianele,' they call her, or some queer name of that sort. And she isn't a girl, either—rightly speaking. It seems that awhile ago—some years or so—but it can't be many years, from the look of the chit—some stranger who was crossing the mountains fell head over ears in love with her, and married her straight off. But he could not take her with him, and insisted upon the matter being kept quiet for a time, to which the father consented, as he thought the man was rich. After that he went off, and has never shown himself since, and never sent any more money, though he had promised. The old man died of fury at the way he had been 'done,' and the young woman would, I take it, have died of a broken heart, if it had not been for her constitootion, which seems to be that of a cow. And now she lives with her brother, who makes the carved things, and doesn't rightly know what to call herself—being neither wife, widow, nor maid."

As with the concluding words Audrey met the probing eyes of Brand in the mirror, she no longer doubted that the astute female was perfectly acquainted with her own history.

"It's a curious story, is it not, miss?" ventured Brand, after a moment.

"Very curious. But, Brand, do you know that you are pulling my hair to-day. Please be careful."

Brand relapsed into silence and Audrey into reflection. Had not dignity forbidden she would have liked to ask more questions. The peasant girl whose hair and whose story were so curiously like her own could not but awake in her an interest akin to fellow-feeling. Almost she regretted that she had not resigned herself to buying one more carved article, which would have given her the opportunity of seeing those golden plaits, said to be a replica of her own.

By next morning, however, curiosity had faded. Together with the booths, which were gone already, leaving the *Platz* to its everyday aspect, Audrey's interest in the peasant-girl had lost its actuality. Her own history was, after all, more absorbing than could be any alien experience.

Another week flowed past, deliciously inactive, scented daily with the breath of new flowers. Dick was catching so many trout that to cut short his sport by an uncalled-for departure would have been almost inhuman—so Audrey told herself, by way of a partial explanation of her own passivity. Occasionally a dim sense of expectation would assail her—the inarticulate sensation as of waiting for something of whose approach some supernumerary sense gave her warning.

And something was approaching too—though not exactly that, and certainly not in that form for which she looked.

Of the three wanderers Mrs. Selville alone showed occasional signs of restlessness. Despite her love of change, she was beginning to be gorged with the continent, and secretly to yearn for more familiar scenes. From time to time this sentiment found voice.

It was doing so one evening about a week after the market-day, while aunt and niece occupied their favourite seat on the balcony, which served them as a sort of theatre box from which to view both the panorama of the hills, and the rustic doings below.

"Don't you think Lockwood must be looking very nice now?" Mrs. Selville ventured insinuatingly, after a long pause in the desultory conversation.

Audrey's eyes came back from the mountain heights upon which still lingered the glow of the sun already slipped behind their rampart.

"I daresay it is."

"Shall we be staying here much longer, do you think?"

Audrey spoke impatiently:

"I don't know. There is no particular reason for going yet."

"But it would seem, does it not, that we are not going to find the man here."

"It would seem so."

"And yet he was here two years ago."

"Apparently."

"I hope we never shall find him! I hope he is dead!" broke out Mrs. Selville with unlooked-for vehemence.

Audrey turned in consternation.

"My dear aunt—"

"Yes, I know. He is your husband—in a way—but he is a wretch, all the same; he must be a wretch or he could not have abandoned you as he has done. He is not a bit better than the man who married that peasant-girl—Brand has told you the story, has she

not? That one spoilt her life, and this one has spoilt yours. It seems that there is an excellent young man of her own class who would marry her in a moment if she were free."

"And does she want to marry him?" asked Audrey with a sudden movement of interest.

"I don't know. I rather think not. The little goose has got her faithless husband in her head—same as you have, I suppose," grumbled Mrs. Selville with a glance at Audrey, meant to be piercing.

With averted face Audrey sat, marking how the golden glow died away from one snow-crowned height after the other.

"Am I more fickle than Marianele?" was the question she put to herself in this perplexing moment.

A clatter of wheels upon the cobble pavement of the *Platz* drew her eyes back to the scene below.

"A new arrival!" she observed, not sorry for a change of topic, and leaning a little forward in order to gain a better view. The open *fiacre* which had just drawn up at the window was occupied by one person, a stout, elderly gentleman whose golden *pince-nez* caught the lingering light. The cut of his overcoat and the look of the travelling bag upon the seat beside him were such as to bring the landlord in person, with magical rapidity, to the side of the vehicle.

Some question was evidently put, and only after it had been answered—satisfactorily, as Audrey presumed—the traveller first bounded to his feet and then to the ground, with something of the buoyancy of an india-rubber-ball.

"His beard looks Parisian," commented Audrey.



"And to be sure, this is the hour of the Paris express."

"I would not hunt for such a husband any longer," Mrs. Selville was saying beside her, still clinging to the critical topic. "He isn't worth living for weeks in a place where they cook things with lard, and where you can't get a mutton chop. Oh, Audrey—do you know I dreamt last night that I was eating a mutton chop? If it was not for the cream cheeses, I don't know how I should stand it. If you would consider—"

The opening of the door of the room made them both turn their heads. It was the landlord himself with a calling card in his hand.

"A visitor for the ladies," he announced, with that depth of reverence which punctually paid bills never fail to engender in his kind.

"A visitor—here?"

Audrey took the card, scanning it with incredulous eyes.

"Le Docteur Jaques Bonnef—Paris," she read blankly.

"It must be a mistake—I don't know him," she said, and would have handed back the card, but the landlord put his hands behind his back.

"The gentleman is a stranger to the ladies—he told me so; but he begs to be received, having urgent business. He would not even stop to make his toilet—ah, here he is!"

Audrey turned just in time to see the same person she had watched descending from the *fiacre*, enter the room with something of the same buoyancy of movement which had brought him to the pavement. Small, rotund and lively, with eager black eyes behind the

gold-rimmed *pince-nez*—he advanced confidently, hat in hand.

“Mademoiselle Selville, I believe?” he remarked, bringing his fat heels together in the execution of a bow by which no dancing-master need have felt shamed.

Audrey looked uncomprehending at the stranger before her.

“Yes—I am Miss Selville,” she said, rather coldly. “Is there anything you want with me?”

Doctor Bonnef waited with visible impatience until the door had closed behind the landlord. Then he turned again to Audrey.

“It is not from Mademoiselle Selville that I want anything,” he remarked—“it is with Madame Dobrowicz that I have to do.”

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## PART IV.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE LECTURE.

“By common usage the word *memory* has a triple meaning—the conservation of certain conditions, their reproduction, and their localisation in the past.”

The holder of the lecture, a stout, black-eyed person with a gold-rimmed *pince-nez* precariously balanced upon an insignificant nose, paused for a moment to take stock of his audience. It was packed tight enough to satisfy vanity; for Doctor Bonnef, specialist in brain physiology, ranked just now among the most popular of lecturers, and an announcement of one of his “papers” never failed to crowd the benches with indigenou as well as with foreign hearers. Here the mere man in the street was almost as conspicuous as the professional student; for Doctor Bonnef was nothing if not comprehensible to the multitude. Even the women present were not exclusively blue-stockings, as their hats alone were enough to testify. If these stood in the height of fashion so did the lectures, furnishing as they did, such agreeable smatterings of quasi-scientific conversation wherewith to flavour dinner-table talk.

It was with a little nod of satisfaction that after that survey, the lecturer proceeded:

“These words are not my words. I have borrowed them from one who was a master upon this especial field—the great Ribot; and I shall borrow more, no doubt, in the course of the next hour; for we have come here to talk of memory, which was what I may call his particular hobby—or rather not memory, but the loss of it—that which in scientific language we express by the word ‘Amnesia.’

“Now, what is memory, to begin with? Popularly speaking—and this is a popular discourse—it is comparable to nothing so much as to a register; and it has the qualities and the defects of such a thing. Some registers are well-kept, written in clear characters, lying always ready for reference, others again are blurred and unreliable—cut up by blanks. For there is this difference between the registers of the mind and those of our parishes and *mairies* that, whereas the latter are written in ink, the former are preserved in some way impossible of definition, but more akin to photography—dependent upon countless shades of exposure and infinitesimal physiological processes. And just as by reason of some accident in the application of the developing medium the picture may be lost, so by an accident—usually represented by a cerebral shock—may the memory record be blotted out—not necessarily permanently. A subsequent chemical process may cause a lost picture to reappear, and a subsequent impulse from without may revitalise the paralysed memory—how or why it is impossible to say; for this is one of the least explored fields of Science upon which we grope, blindfold, able only to lay our hands upon facts, without any clue to the ordered causes from which these facts spring.”

Having gulped down a mouthful of water from the glass standing before him, Doctor Bonnef readjusted his *pince-nez*, and plunged straight into the heart of his subject.

Despite the man in the street such terms as "motor residua" and "dynamic association" proved themselves as indispensable to the subject; and the next ten minutes were filled with "cerebral cells" and the movements of brain molecules, following so thick upon each other as to keep the pencils of those listeners who were taking notes working at high-pressure. One of the most assiduous of these had early caught the listener's eye—a peaky-faced, short-sighted youth seated in the front row, whose long nose almost touched the notebook in his hand. Neither his clean-shaven face nor the fashion of his clothes were Parisian; and although he was neither ruddy nor athletic, Doctor Bonnef had already in his mind decided that this so eager listener was English rather than German. More than once the lecturer's eyes came back to him approvingly, and he even found himself pausing between two sentences, in order to give him time for the completion of a note.

"My friends, we now come to the closer field of our subject—that is the loss of the mind register. And here we must try and distinguish—I say advisedly *try* for we have nothing but a mass of heterogeneous facts to go by, and what classification can be attained is purely arbitrary.

"Amnesia, then, can be either total or partial—either temporary or lasting. To quote Ribot again:—

"Certain diseases of memory may be limited to a single category of recollections, leaving the remainder

apparently intact; these are partial disorders. Others, on the contrary, affect the entire memory in all its forms, completely dis sever mental life; produce chasms that can never be bridged over; or demolish it altogether through long-continued activity.'"

"And again:

"'Sometimes the suspension of memory begins with the disease and extends forwards; sometimes it extends backwards over events recently past. . . . Sometimes memory returns of itself and suddenly; sometimes slowly and with assistance; sometimes the loss is absolute, and complete re-education is necessary. We shall give examples of each.'"

"Of these examples," the lecturer continued, taking to hand a volume which lay ready, I have marked in Ribot's work a few of the most striking. Listen to this, for instance:

"'A young woman, married to a man whom she loved passionately, was seized during confinement with prolonged syncope, at the end of which she lost all recollection of events that had occurred since her marriage, inclusive of that ceremony. She remembered very clearly the rest of her life up to that point. . . . At first she pushed her husband and child from her in evident alarm. She has never recovered recollection of this period of her life, nor of any of the impressions received during that time. Her parents and friends have convinced her that she is married and has a son. She believes their testimony, because she would rather think that she has lost a year of her life than that all her associates are impostors. But conviction and consciousness are not united. She looks upon husband and child

without being able to realise how she gained the one and gave birth to the other.' . . .

"And this:

"'A Mr. H. was driving his wife and child in a phaeton, when the horse took fright and ran away; and all attempts to pull him in being unsuccessful, the phaeton was at last violently dashed against a wall, and Mr. H. was thrown out, sustaining a severe concussion of the brain. On recovering, he found that he had forgotten the *immediate* antecedents of the accident, the last thing he remembered being that he had met an acquaintance in the road about two miles from the scene of it. Of the efforts he had made, and the terror of his wife and child, he has not, to this day, any recollection whatever!'

"Follows a case, reported by Doctor Leguard, of a patient who, after an attack of apoplexy, lost all recollection of just five years of his life, which five years included the date of his marriage.

"From all these examples it proceeds that Amnesia, as a rule, affects the most recent events, extending backward over a period of very variable duration. 'At first thought,' says Ribot, 'this fact is surprising, since our latest recollections are apparently the most vivid, the strongest of all. In truth, it is logical, the stability of any recollection being in direct ratio with its degree of organisation.'

"We now pass to cases of a graver character, those requiring re-education. In these cases the whole of the memory record is lost, either temporarily or permanently. The patient has lost hold not only upon his acquirements, but even upon his own identity, knowing neither

his name nor his antecedents, and to all intents and purposes representing an individual—if such were conceivable—who has been introduced into the world in full physical development—‘born grown-up,’ as I have heard it expressed. Such persons have naturally to re-learn the alphabet, and down to the very use of language, but of course they learn quickly, intellect itself being, as a rule, intact. If anything is preserved it is what may be termed the organic memory—that is the merely mechanical part of it, as represented by habits acquired by the muscles or the limbs. A piano player, for instance, although having completely forgotten that he has ever learnt music, will re-acquire the faculty of playing incomparably quicker than a person to whom the instrument is a stranger. It follows that it is the lower, the more elementary forms of memory which are the last to hold out.

“As for examples of total Amnesia, Ribot’s book contains many interesting cases. But here I can speak from personal experience, which is always more absorbing than even the most authentic observations of others.”

The doctor readjusted his *pince-nez*, and leaned a little further forward upon the table.

“During the last twenty months or so I have had under my eye a very curious case of total Amnesia. My great wish was to present to you my patient to-day—for a more perfect example of re-education cannot well be conceived—but he shrinks from a public appearance and I do not feel justified in forcing his inclination. Nothing more complete in its way has ever come under my notice; and the interest and mystery of the matter



is heightened by the impossibility of identification. Here is the story in outline:

“On August 10th of the year before last there was brought to the accident ward of the Hotel Dieu a man who had been found lying insensible upon a country road beyond the outskirts of Paris. A milk-seller and his wife had come upon him in the early morning hours. Circumstantial evidence seemed to point to an assault and robbery, for his pockets were empty and his watch gone. Upon his person there was not so much as a pocket-handkerchief whereby to identify him, while the linen he wore was unmarked. He was a young man—by our estimate not much over twenty-five—strikingly handsome, in an almost classical style, and splendidly built. Examination showed an injury to the head as the cause of insensibility, a heavy blow having been dealt somewhere about the centre of the skull; but what sort of instrument had been used it was impossible to decide. Closer examination revealed the case as more complicated than at first sight appeared; for, besides the fresh injury, traces were discovered of a previous accident to almost the identical spot. To decide the age of this previous injury was another impossibility; but on the whole we inclined to put it no further back than within the last three months.

“At first sight the case looked hopeless. Despite his splendid *physique* the manifestation of life was at a minimum. Not days alone, weeks passed—more than three weeks in all—before any signs of cerebral activity became manifest. During all this time he was artificially nourished, and my colleagues and I watched in suspense for the result. Some of us had given him up as lost;

but I would not relinquish hope. The man seemed to me to have funds of reserve power. On the twenty-third day of his coming to the hospital the first change was observable. On that day total unconsciousness began to pass into something more like torpor—heavy indeed, yet, in itself, an improvement. For another month he lay in this somnolent condition, being fed now with a spoon and taking the nourishment readily. It was clear too that different flavours were distinguished, for some things were taken eagerly, while the taste of others caused the patient to close his teeth and obstinately to shake his head.

“About the middle of October brief waking intervals began to occur; and one day at last I found his eyes open and no longer quite empty of sense. Obviously he was marvelling at something or other. It was at Life itself that he was marvelling, as I subsequently concluded. He was trying to explain to himself not only his surroundings, but also himself, having lost all clue to the mystery of existence. Very cautiously I began my interrogatory—necessarily in French, though I had long ago concluded, from various racial signs, that he was no Frenchman—more likely of Slavic origin.

“‘You are in the hospital,’ I explained carefully and slowly, as though speaking to a child. ‘You have had an accident, and were brought here. Do you understand?’

“Evidently he did not, for his blank brown eyes stared back without response into mine.

“I made another attempt.

“‘What is your name?’ I enquired, with a certain sharp intonation calculated to arouse attention,

"This time he evidently tried to speak, though I know now that he could not have understood. His lips moved mechanically, and some sort of a sound came from between them, but nothing like an articulate word.

"It was possible, of course, that he did not understand French. The obvious thing was to try other languages. I fetched an English colleague, and both a German and a Russian student, and the same phrase was repeated to him in three languages, the same question put: 'What is your name?' but with the same negative result.

"His physical recovery made rapid progress from that day. The waking intervals grew more frequent and protracted, and within another week the torpor had vanished. And yet he could not answer a question. At first we inclined to believe in a defective recovery of consciousness, if not actual imbecility, produced by cerebral shock. But when I began to note the childish awkwardness of his movements, as well as their rapid improvement—how, for instance, he had obviously forgotten the use of a spoon or a tumbler, but picked it up again almost after the first showing—when it became clear that he was trying to speak, but could do no more than laboriously repeat those words which he heard from us, then it dawned upon me that I had before me that which I had yearned after for so long, which I had read of and heard of without ever meeting—a complete and typical case of total Amnesia."

With a radiant smile upon his lips Doctor Bonnet paused, leaning across the table to beam at his audience through his gold-rimmed *pince-nez*. It was something of the same rapture with which a botanist might an-

nounce his discovery of some rare plant, or a sportsman might recount his slaying of an exotic piece of game.

"The man who had fallen into my hands, straight from the skies, it would seem, knew neither who he was, nor where he was, nor how he came to be there. Enquiries set on foot failed to establish his identity. To the Parisian police he was unknown. We could do no more than conclude that he was a stranger.

"Meanwhile the most interesting task of my life had begun—that of re-education. I will not weary you with details of the strange sort of lessons which that grown-up infant had to get—of how he had to learn not only to speak, but to put on his clothes, to walk, to wash his hands—even to eat and to drink—nor of how quickly he learnt it all. From my own observation I convinced myself of what I had before believed, that in cases like this all the record is not totally lost but remains subconscious. Within three months he could speak quite intelligibly—in French, of course—could read with tolerable ease, and write a legible hand. These tasks of a child attacked by the intellect of a man presented no difficulty. And the intellect itself had been in no way impaired, with only this difference, that there was no past beyond the most recent past—to work upon—only the present and the future. Soon he had arrived at discussing his own case. Not unnaturally his interest in it was intense. When I explained to him the scientific facts of Amnesia he listened attentively. 'I think I can understand that,' he said once or twice. 'I have come out of an abyss—this is my second life. And yet I have had a first life—I must have had. What was there on the other side of the abyss? What?'

"Then he would fall to brooding, and would sit for hours silent, with a painful frown upon his face, induced by a useless cerebral effort.

"'It is no use,' he would say at the end. 'I cannot get hold of it. I must remain Laurent Samedi'—it was the appellation we had given him, in default of any other, since some sort of a designation was indispensable. August 10th, the day he had been brought to us, is ascribed to St. Laurence in the calendar—and the day of the week had been Saturday, which determined our choice.

"But this conversation did not take place till many months after the accident. Although physically completely restored, we still kept him in the hospital, under close observation. The case was too precious to let slip so easily. Symptoms of reviving memory were eagerly spied for by us specialists; but they were few and far between. Once when two Russian students were talking together in their mother-tongue he stopped in the act of carrying a morsel of bread to his mouth and listened as though transfixed. I made them address him in their language, but although a visible tremor of excitement ran over him at the sound of a speech which had presumably once been familiar, it was evident that he did not understand. All the same the incident strengthened my belief in his Slav nationality.

"On another occasion a strong emotion—obviously the effect of memory stirring in its sleep, as it were—was observable.

"This happened in the street, for by this time I used to take him out with me as one of the necessary processes of re-education. The questions he asked about

the commonest sights and sounds were as instructive to me as my answers could be to him. One day he broke off in the middle of one of these questions, and looking at him I observed that his eye had grown fixed, while that same shiver of excitement ran over him which the sound of the Russian tongue had provoked. Following the direction of his gaze I saw before us a little girl of ten or so, walking by the side of her governess, her long golden plaits hanging beyond her waist.

“What is it you are looking at?” I asked him.

“He pointed at the child’s plaits for his manners had at that time not yet recovered all the finer shades of conventionalism.

“‘That hair,’ he said, in obvious agitation. ‘That golden hair—I have seen it before.’

“From that moment I felt certain that he must have loved some woman with golden hair; but to his identity this could give me no clue.

“Before this already he had begun to fret at his inactivity.

“‘I will not stay here any longer,’ he said to me sometimes in a fit of something like rage. ‘You keep me for a show. I am well and strong. I can work for my living. Give me something to do.’

“I soothed him with promises, loath to part with my favourite ‘case.’ Besides, the choice of a lucrative employment was not easy. The peculiarities of the case were such that it became almost impossible to fit him into any of the given classes of workmen. A man who had barely learnt to read and write, whose educational attainments were those of an intelligent child of twelve, could not well adopt any of the higher professions; and

yet, without a long apprenticeship, what trade could he hope to ply? A day labourer seemed about all that he was fit for; but nothing less like a day labourer could well be imagined than this enigmatical individual with the Greek profile and the well-tended hands. All the same it was clear that the French Government could not be expected to feed him indefinitely. The situation presented a puzzle.

“Chance—if there be such a thing—suggested a solution.

“It was one day about six months after his coming to the Hotel Dieu that the lock of one of the anatomical cabinets was being repaired. Laurent Samedi, who wandered now freely over the building, was accompanying me upon one of my rounds; and together we came upon the locksmith, kneeling upon the floor, busy with the lock—a basket of tools beside him. I was on the point of indifferently passing by a sight to me so commonplace when I noticed that my companion had stood suddenly stock-still. Accustomed as I was to observe his every movement this was enough to arrest my own steps. At the same time I became aware of that same nervous tremor which had come over him at the sound of the Russian tongue and the sight of the golden plaits. I observed him narrowly. The locksmith was endeavouring to fit an obstreperous key into the lock. After watching him at work for about a minute, Laurent Samedi suddenly stooped, and taking a file from the basket on the floor, said quickly:

“‘Let me try! I think I can do that.’”

“The workman glanced up with a protest on his lips, about to give some sharp reply, but, catching my

eye, he desisted, and at a sign from me yielded his place. No doubt he thought that he was being asked to humour a lunatic. During the next few minutes he and I looked on while Laurent Samedi handled the tools, uncertainly and tentatively at first, but soon with increasing confidence and an aptitude which could not have been learnt in ten minutes. At the end of a quarter of an hour the key had been filed into shape, the stiff lock put into order; and all the time there gleamed in his eye that peculiar spark which intense interest in an occupation is alone able to light.

“‘You have done this work before, have you not?’ I asked him when it was over.

“In reply he grasped at his forehead, with a trick he had in moments of perplexity.

“‘I suppose I have—at the other side of the abyss—but I can’t find the beginning. It seems to come of itself.’

“The answer was what I expected, tallying as it did so precisely with the theory I have already referred to: that of the survival of the lower, the elementary and merely mechanical forms of memory. I now felt as convinced that he had in his previous phase of existence been a mechanic of some sort as I already felt sure that he had loved a golden-haired woman.

“Next day he was placed in apprenticeship to a locksmith; and within a few weeks already he had learnt or picked up again all that he had known of the trade. In another month or two he had nothing more to learn, and but for the want of capital would have been in a position to set up independently. For more than a year past now he has formed the chief



support of the establishment in which he works, commanding a pay that rises continually, for the ability he displays in every branch of mechanics almost deserves the name of genius. But in all this time no further gleam of memory has shown itself, although, as I need not tell you, I have kept him carefully under observation—no more signals have come from the other side of the abyss which has cut his life in two. And nothing has happened either to make identification possible. He has been claimed by nobody, recognised by nobody, sought apparently by nobody. He remains to-day what he was twenty-one months ago! Laurent Samedi—the foundling of Life—the man who dropped into the world full-grown, practically without childhood.

“Whether he will ever be anything else I cannot hazard to conjecture. Revival is improbable, but upon this domain nothing is impossible. Strong mental emotion, for instance, has in cases of this sort performed seeming miracles. We are in the dark upon this field, as I said before, moving vaguely among hypotheses. Comparisons with other cases are useless here—since each of these cases is purely individual, and most of them flatly contradict each other. I can only say again: That such things are we know, because we see them; but why they are lies beyond our ken.”

CHAPTER II.  
EDWARD LEAFLY.

A MURMUR of approval greeted the close of Doctor Bonnet's discourse.

"*Si original!*"—*Débordant d'intérêt!*" were the smiling comments exchanged as chairs were pushed back and feather boas pulled into place. Even such adjectives as *épatant* and "*pyramidale*" were not wanting in the chorus of praise.

The takers of notes regretfully closed their note-books and stretched their cramped fingers. Perhaps the most reluctantly closed of all was the note-book of the peaky-faced youth in the first row—obviously an enthusiast. It was a large, business-like-looking book; and, having restored it to his pocket, he produced from another pocket a card-case, and from that again a calling-card, upon which stood printed in small characters:

EDWARD LEAFLY

STUDENT OF MEDICINE

Armed with this as well as with a closed envelope

with a direction upon it, and having waited until the main stream of the audience had flowed off, he approached one of the attendants posted beside the exit.

"If Doctor Bonnef is still on the premises," he said in excellent Anglo-French, "I should be obliged if you would give him this note, together with the card."

Five minutes later, while Leafly waited in the now deserted conference hall, the attendant reappeared, closely followed by Doctor Bonnef in person, bounding upon his heels in his peculiar indiarubber fashion, and with pudgy hands as eagerly outstretched as the forelimbs of a well-trained pug-dog "giving paws."

"Mon cher Monsieur Leafly! What a pleasure! Ah, no wonder my eye was drawn to you during the lecture! How should it not be drawn to a disciple of my good friend, le grand Docteur Harteeng? And he speaks of you in terms so warm in this note! A stranger? Ah, no—no *protégé* of Harteeng can be a stranger to me. Command me as you please. In what can I serve you, pray?"

Mr. Leafly, overcome by so warm a reception, murmured something about being best served by enjoying the company of Doctor Bonnef, whose lecture he had been listening to with an interest he felt unable to describe; upon which the doctor, who had been beaming already to a point which seemed to exclude the idea of an increase, succeeded nevertheless in beaming by yet a degree more.

"Ah, you liked it, the lecture? Not too unprofessional for your taste? We are not at the University, you know; and for such a mixed audience I have to

chew things small. But *allons donc!* What are we standing here for? It will be much pleasanter to talk it out over our dinner. You are my guest for to-day, *cela va sans dire*. If you are as hungry as I am we cannot do better than make straight for Le Doyen. I am wifeless, you see, and therefore reduced to picking up my food—*sur la branche*."

It was a most impeccable meal which the particular branch known as Le Doyen furnished upon this occasion; but in the English student's opinion the interest of the discourse with which it was spiced quite outdid the cookery. The specialist was as good at dinner-table talk as at popular lectures, and, no longer haunted by the danger of being misunderstood by the man in the street, spoke with untrammelled confidence. The conversation, in fact, resolved itself into a prolongation of the lecture, held now in a more strictly professional tone, and every word of which was hung upon by Leafly with an enthusiasm which the flavour of the Sauterne in his glass helped not immaterially to enhance.

"That is a most interesting case you quoted," he observed about half-way through dinner—"that of the man you call Laurent Samedi."

Doctor Bonnet's eyes kindled visibly.

"Interesting! It's the joy of my life, that case, and also its torment. I shall not rest until I have established his identity."

"And no researches have availed anything?"

"None. He seems severed from all human ties."

"And yet it stands to reason that he must have relations, or, at the very least, acquaintances."

"It does. That he has at least one acquaintance I

am sure. For I was not quite correct in saying that no enquiries have ever been made. In one single instance I came—too late—upon a circumstance which, if discovered in time, might have furnished a clue. It was only months after the occurrence that one of the nurses let out having been questioned by a stranger—she described him as a sort of dwarf—concerning the condition of the nameless foundling. It was evident that he had scraped acquaintance with her for this especial purpose, but the stupid girl never mentioned the fact until long subsequently. I ordered a strict look-out to be kept for the dwarf, in case the enquiries should be repeated; but they never were—or at any rate in too covert a manner for detection.”

“And your own opinion as to the possibility of a revival of memory, what is it?”

Doctor Bonnef spread out his ten short fingers, raising his shoulders to his ears.

“That it is a possibility—nothing more. Strong emotion has sometimes worked that way. And there is an alternative, though a very precarious one. The depression of the skull upon the injured spot makes it seem not improbable that some portion of the brain is being incommoded by some bone particle. A removal of this might conceivably set the obstructed machinery a-going once more; but I need not tell you that it would be a matter of life and death—and unless expressly authorised by his relatives—how do I know that he has not got a father, a mother, a wife somewhere in the world?—I do not feel justified in taking the risk.”

“I understand,” said Leafly, nodding approvingly. “And yet—how absorbing an experiment!”

"Ah, it is a thing I dream of, waking. I think this is one of the reasons why I desire so earnestly to find any person he may belong to, in hopes of getting the authority required."

"And he himself?"

"I have not spoken to him of this possibility. I do not think it would be right to disturb his mind by the suggestion."

"And is he content with his work at the locksmith's?"

"Up to a certain point only. The fits of brooding return. There is in him a restless yearning which forbids complete peace. And always that strange emotion at sight of golden hair. It is clear that this causes some brain cell to vibrate anew each time. A very curious instance of the persistence of an impression, independent of consciousness. He is really happy only when absorbed in his work. Just now he has set his heart upon the construction of an impregnable lock—something that is to outdo both Chubb and Wertheimer. But *tiens!* By the way—perhaps you would like to see him?"

"Enormously!" assented the student, reddening with pleasure. "A meeting with your grown-up infant, as you call him, would be a thing to remember. If it is no inconvenience to you—"

"None whatever! I have taken countless people to see him already—colleagues, principally, whom the case interested—and in first line, specialists. But I have taken other people too, since I always had the lurking hope of a recognition taking place. That hope grows fainter with time, but still I never miss an opportunity.

We shall go there directly after dinner, before the workshops are closed."

The bill having been paid by Doctor Bonnef, the two men sallied forth in that hopeful humour produced by a perfect meal and enhanced by the balmy air of an equally perfect May evening. The new green of the trees on the boulevards, and the thickening velvet of the lawns in the Tuileries Gardens were in themselves enough to rejoice any not over-preoccupied heart. As on the top of a tramway car the English student glided by the side of the French specialist through streets crowded with the newest thing in spring toilettes, and over the river alive with boats, with barges, with swimming dogs and paddling urchins—and lined as usual with patient anglers—it seemed to him that no playhouse he had ever been in had afforded him so varied and inexhaustible a spectacle.

It was upon the left side of the Seine that they descended, almost in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower—and after threading a couple of side streets, entered an inner courtyard, upon which the locksmith's premises opened. Even here the spirit of spring had succeeded in penetrating, in the glimpses of blue sky overhead, in the grass blades springing up between the paving-stones. In the centre of the space stood a mangy horse-chestnut-tree, whose white blossoms a stray shaft of the setting sun, gliding between house-tops, was doing its best to paint pink. From the open doors and windows of a row of workshops came twanging and grating sounds—iron and steel being hammered, and filed, and melted into shape. The yard itself was but an overflow of the workshops—with iron bars and sheets stowed under

sheds, and heaps of metal refuse littering the pavement.

Doctor Bonnef looked in at several of the windows and nodded to several of the men before he stood still.

"In there—do you see? That big, black-bearded fellow in shirt-sleeves, busy with that key. That is he. A splendid figure, is he not? And you will see how intelligent. He has not remarked me yet. I am going to speak to him."

"Stop a moment!" said Leafly with sudden vivacity, putting out his hand as though to arrest the doctor's movements.

"Ah?"

Doctor Bonnef, turning enquiringly to his companion, saw that he was staring hard at the black-bearded workman, his pale forehead drawn into a frown of astonishment.

"Ah?" said Doctor Bonnef again, in a sharper whisper. "Can it be—"

"I know that man," said Leafly with conviction, speaking low and hurriedly. "I am almost certain it is he."

Instantly the doctor's right hand pounced upon the elbow of his companion with a vice-like grasp, while, scarlet with excitement, he whispered:

"Who is he? Speak quickly, man! Ah! has it come at last?"

"Wait—in order to be sure I require to see him close. I will tell you then all I know."

With an effort which, to judge from the shade of his complexion, brought him within measurable distance



of apoplexy, Doctor Bonnef controlled his agitation, at the same time relaxing his painfully vigorous hold of the student's elbow.

"Very well. I will introduce you to him. We shall see. But if he is the man you think, make no sign before him. We must observe whether recognition follows on his side or not. Now come!"

With as indifferent an air as they could on the spur of the moment manage to assume, the two men entered the workshop alongside. Here two lads with smeared faces were collecting the tools, while at a table sat the black-bearded man still absorbed in his task.

"Good evening, Samedi!" was the doctor's greeting, given in a voice which he vainly endeavoured to steady.

The man looked up with a pleased expression upon his handsome face.

"Ah, doctor! it is a long time since I have seen you. I thought you had forgotten me."

"Is it likely that I should forget my show case?" said the doctor with a rather excited laugh, and furtively watching the face of his companion. "I have been speaking of you to-day—in public; and this gentleman was so interested that he asked me to introduce him. I knew you would not mind, since it is to oblige me."

"I mind nothing which you ask of me, doctor," said Laurent Samedi with a glance of dog-like devotion. Both look and tone said that the man to whom he owed his re-introduction into life occupied all the affections of a soul severed from every previous tie.

"And yet you would not help me with my lecture

to-day," said Doctor Bonnef—a fat, reproving forefinger playfully uplifted.

"Even that I would have done had you insisted upon it; but you would not have been you if you had insisted."

"La, la! Spare my modesty! You must not raise Mr. Leafly's expectations too high. I think I omitted to mention his name. This is Mr. Leafly—an English student of medicine—arrived from London yesterday."

From the doctor's face Laurent Samedi's eyes went to that of the student and rested there full. But Doctor Bonnef, watching in almost unbearable suspense, could read therein no gleam of recognition.

"I am very pleased to make his acquaintance," said Samedi with civil indifference. He was standing now with his back to the work-table, his face full to the light. As he spoke he made a movement as though to shake hands, but drew back in time, noticing the stains of machine-oil upon his own.

"I sometimes forget that I am a locksmith," he said with a laugh almost cynical. "One does not shake hands with locksmiths—except perhaps on Sundays."

"But you have not always been a locksmith, have you?" asked Leafly, closely scanning the bearded face. It was the face of an abnormally handsome and obviously intelligent man—but there was that in the brown eyes which Leafly had never before seen in any human eyes; a certain emptiness of expression which seemed to speak of some inner blank. At Leafly's question they clouded suddenly.

"I do not know what I have been," he said shortly, "only what I am."

"Nor where you have been, either, I presume? England for instance—is it quite unknown to you?"

"Quite. I know where it is—geographically, since the doctor has seen to my geography lessons, but that is all."

Leafly seemed on the point of saying something more, but, at a look from the doctor, checked himself, and asked instead—

"You are much interested in your present work, are you not? Is the impregnable lock getting within sight?"

"I think it is—I hope so. I have always thought that Wertheimer could be outdone, and I mean to outdo him. Every lock is a puzzle, you see—or ought to be a puzzle."

"Except to the holder of the right key," put in Leafly, by way of saying something indifferent and civil.

"There are some locks that have no key, or to which the key is lost. In such cases one tries the reserve keys"—and he made a movement towards a huge bunch of various-sized keys hanging upon a nail close by. "But it occurs also that they are tried in vain."

He laughed again, harshly.

"Do you know how many keys the doctor has tried upon my past? Dozens—hundreds! Ask him yourself. But it keeps its secrets. If I can invent a lock as impregnable as that I shall be content."

"But supposing the right key were found some day?"

The brown eyes grew troubled again.

"It will not be found. Do you know who I am? I am the man without a past."

"Ah, well," said the student with an attempt at lightness, "I daresay you would find people enough ready to change with you. A past is not always a useful acquisition—more frequently inconvenient baggage."

"Maybe—but there was something there that I should like to have again."

Laurent Samedi, leaning with folded arms against his work-table, was looking past the visitors now, and towards the illuminated horse-chestnut tree.

"Something there is there which would satisfy me if I could attain it," he went on in the same abstracted tone. "But how attain it when I do not know what it is?"

There fell a short silence, during which the two visitors waited breathlessly for what might yet be coming. But nothing came. The moment passed, as hundreds of similar moments had passed before, without bringing any decisive stirring of memory.

With a deep sigh of dissatisfaction Laurent Samedi roused himself, looking again at the doctor.

"Are there any more questions to be answered?" he asked submissively, though bitterly.

"None, Samedi—none!"

Doctor Bonnef's plump hand laid itself upon the workman's arm with a conciliating gesture.

"This gentleman is quite satisfied. I shall come again soon—perhaps to-morrow. The head giving no more trouble, eh?"

They took a rather hasty leave; and, having traversed

the courtyard, in silence, with a simultaneous movement stood still upon the pavement of the little side street and looked into each other's faces.

"Now speak, man—speak!" commanded the doctor, almost leaping upon his companion. "Were you right or not? Do you know that man or do you not?"

"Know him is too much to say; but I am not mistaken. I have seen him before."

"His name! His name!" almost panted Doctor Bonnef.

"I cannot tell you that from memory. Patience, doctor, it was like this: About two years ago I was present at this man's marriage in a Registry Office in London—was a witness to it, in fact. I had never seen him before—was a mere passer-by. He came out into the street and accosted me straight off, with the request that I should serve as witness—said he was a stranger in London, without acquaintances to apply to. I and another stranger—an old gentleman—were pressed into service on the spur of the moment. We knew neither him nor the woman he was marrying."

"And she had golden hair, had she not?"

"Yes; the most splendid golden hair I have ever seen. But how did you guess?"

"You have forgotten what I told you about his emotion at the sight of golden hair, else you would not ask. But proceed—proceed quickly! When exactly did this marriage take place?"

Leafly reflected.

"It will be two years in August—early in August, I think; about the 8th or 9th."

"Ah—and it was on the 10th that he was brought

to the hospital. Are you absolutely certain as to his identity?"

"Absolutely. He is not a man to make a mistake about, even with the difference of dress. He was not in shirt-sleeves then, as you can imagine, he was in a very correct frock-coat, and with an extremely shiny top-hat in his hand."

"Ah? That scarcely surprises me. The working clothes never seemed made for him. But the name? The name?"

"I have not retained it; but I know that it was a foreign name—Russian, I think; something beginning with a D so far as I remember. But her name I think I can recall; it was English. Stop a minute! Selville. It's a good name, I believe."

"Ah!"

The doctor was leaning against the wall of the house, mopping his damp forehead with his handkerchief.

"So it has come! It has come at last! There cannot be any difficulty about the identification now."

"None whatever. You have only got to go to London and look up the Registry entries in —— Street. A Russian might be hard to trace; but an English county family cannot hide itself under the earth. What can have become of that girl, I wonder? Can she have been looking for him all this time?"

The doctor restored his pocket-handkerchief to his pocket and seized the two hands of the student, to shake them vigorously.

"She shall not look for him much longer! I start for London this evening; and if you would oblige me,

you will start too. My English is feeble—or, rather, it does not exist. You could help me greatly. Ah, what a service my friend Harteeng rendered me when he gave you that introduction! Can there be such a thing as Providence after all?”

## CHAPTER III.

## THE END OF THE QUEST.

"THIS is my story," said Doctor Bonnet, at the conclusion of a narrative which had occupied the best part of half an hour.

He and Audrey were alone in the sitting-room, the doctor having begun by asking for an interview "*sous quatre yeux*." He was flushed and well-nigh hoarse with talking—she white to the lips, with wide bewildered eyes, and sitting as though nailed to her chair, in an attitude of rigid attention.

"Once Mr. Leafly had recognised him of course the rest was easy. We crossed the Channel that same night, the next day the entry in the Register Office in — Street was verified. To look up the name of Selville in the list of county families was an easy thing for a native. Before evening we had reached Lockwood Hall, where the butler—though seemingly a little astonished at our curiosity and persistence, condescended to give us a list of the habitual inmates. As soon as I heard of a Miss Selville, and had succeeded in breaking down his dignified reticence to the extent of getting him to admit that the young lady's hair was golden, I knew I was on the right track—for I had made up my mind from the first that the marriage had been clan-



destine and you therefore known by your maiden name. The address to which letters had lately been forwarded was in due time forthcoming. And, after that, what more is there to say except—*Me voici!*”

With a resounding puff of relief the doctor leaned back in his chair, his fat hands clasped upon his rotund stomach, his stumpy thumbs whirling, wind-mill fashion, round each other, the gold-rimmed *pince-nez* turned meanwhile expectantly towards Audrey.

But to Audrey speech did not immediately come. She sat still, staring hard at a photograph she held—one which the doctor had handed her a few minutes ago.

“You know him?” he had asked confidently, yet with a remnant of anxiety which at sight of her change of expression quickly vanished.

Of course she knew him. This man with the classical profile and the jet-black beard was no other than the person known to her as Demetr Dobrowicz. Her first glance had told her that. Now, having listened to the doctor’s exposition, she still sat with her eyes fixed upon the picture, scanning its every feature and endeavouring to find therein the springs of emotion, which the mere thought of this man had erstwhile had the power of awakening—endeavouring, but not successfully—or, at any rate, not to her own satisfaction.

“Do you find him altered?” asked the doctor, having waited for another minute in hopes of her speaking.

Audrey laid down the picture, passing her hand across her eyes.

"No—scarcely at all. Of course the dress is different, and the shape of the beard, but it is he. Of course it is he."

She spoke low and hurriedly, with an instinctive avoidance of the doctor's eyes.

"Would you mind telling me exactly when you saw him last? and how you came to lose sight of him? I do not apologise for my indiscretion. A doctor trying to get to the bottom of a case cannot be indiscreet."

"It was immediately after we left the Registry Office. He put me into a hansom, and remained standing on the pavement. That was my last sight of him. He was starting for Paris that same day, and promised to write. But, beyond one card from Dieppe, nothing came. For two months I bore the suspense; then I spoke to my relatives—for, as you have guessed, the marriage had been clandestine. We went to Paris first, hoping to trace him, but failed. He had never been back to his lodgings."

"From which we can only conclude that the accident he met with must have occurred immediately after his arrival in Paris. But what should he be doing on a country road—and at night? Have you any knowledge of what business it was which took him to Paris?"

"No knowledge," said Audrey in some confusion—"only surmises."

"Even surmises might help us to reconstruct the story," suggested Doctor Bonnet, bending upon Audrey an insinuatingly fatherly gaze. "Would it be very unpleasant to you to tell me all you know about this man?"

"But I really know very little," stammered Audrey, hot and red, with a recurrence of that feeling of annoyance which the memory of Tatjana's words had awakened in her. "Our acquaintance was very short, and I assure you that my marriage was to myself the greatest surprise. That same morning I had no idea that it was going to take place. I was surprised into it, so to say."

She looked at the doctor earnestly as she said it, as though to gauge the effect of her words upon him. To her own ears they sounded like a sort of self-justification.

"I see," said the doctor, with comprehension in eyes and voice. "Can you tell me anything more?"

Even though she had been resolved upon silence, it would have been hard to resist the compulsion of those persistent black eyes, which, framed in gold, seemed to be begging so hard for the smallest scrap of information—harder perhaps still to turn a deaf ear to the pleading of that eager and kindly voice, whose very tone awoke unreasoning confidence.

Soon Audrey, her reluctant tongue loosened, was talking freely, giving to the doctor all the information she possessed, not hiding from him even her suspicions regarding Demetr Dobrowicz's political occupation. If evidence of interest were required to stimulate her speech, she had it amply—in the eagerly attentive eyes, in the rapid contractions of the eyebrows, in the continual play of features which came near to pure grimacing—even in the restlessness of the plump arms and legs. The whole little ball of a man seemed to be quivering with badly-suppressed excitement. At last,

like a ball indeed, he bounded from his chair, in order excitedly to perambulate the room.

“And it was in October you were at Paris? *Tiens!* Just when he was passing from insensibility to torpor, and not many streets away from your hotel. Any chance might have caused your quest to end where it began. And you have now told me all you know? All?”

“All I can remember. I told you that I know little.”

“That is true. It is little. Your acquaintance with Laurent Samedi—to me he still remains that person—throws light only upon one period of his life. But behind that there still lies mystery. Revolutionary or anarchistical accomplices? H—m, h—m! There may be something in the theory. But can it have been they who left him for dead upon the road? And what exactly was the nature of that accident?”

“It was not the only accident he had,” said Audrey, as a recollection stirred. “Even before that he was suffering from an injury to the head. He spoke to me once of a fall he had had in the Swiss mountains—in this neighbourhood.”

“Ah,” said Doctor Bonnet, standing still in his walk, with an upward jerk of the head whose animal equivalent would be a pricking of the ears.

“The spot where his head was struck still caused him pain at moments.”

Doctor Bonnet positively clapped his hands, his eyes moist with emotion.

“I knew it! I knew it!” he triumphantly exclaimed. “From the very first I detected the traces of a previous

injury, though not so serious a one. Did he give you no details of the older accident?"

"No. But he mentioned that he had been insensible for a good many days."

"Ah! A first concussion of the brain. Two within so short a space! It is a wonder he survived and kept his reason. And beyond the sore spot he complained of nothing? You never noticed anything abnormal about him, I presume?"

"Not abnormal, but he used to talk rather strangely sometimes about things he was trying to remember and could not succeed in recalling. It rather disquieted me at moments."

"What? Then already! The nearer I get to this case the more intricate it seems to grow. Shall we ever get to the bottom of it, I wonder?"

He sat down again, frowning perplexedly at the knees of his somewhat tight trousers.

With a restless movement Audrey put out her hand and again took up the photograph beside her. She nervously cleared her throat, for her turn for questioning had now come.

"You say that the past is a blank to him now—a complete blank?" she asked with uncertain voice.

"Complete."

"Then of course he will not remember me?"

"That is exactly the crucial point. It is quite within the bounds of possibility that the shock of emotion provoked by the sight of you may jog sleeping memory into life. That is why I have kept complete silence towards him as to our discovery, since, of course, surprise forms an important ingredient of the recipe. I

need not tell you how impatient I am to see the experiment applied. And you, no doubt, are as impatient as I am. I return to Paris to-morrow morning. I presume you will be ready to accompany me?"

"To-morrow morning!" exclaimed Audrey, shrinking back suddenly. "Oh—that is too quick. I could not be ready by then."

The doctor looked disappointed.

"Ah—too many boxes to pack, no doubt. But could you not leave your maid to do that?"

"Impossible! And, besides, quite apart from the boxes, you must give me a day at least to steady myself—to arrange my thoughts, and—to prepare for the meeting. Your news is very startling, you see. You have found my husband, indeed, but he does not even know that he is my husband. You must see how painful for me the situation is."

"I see—I see," acquiesced the doctor, in a voice as mild as a soothing syrup. "But, although he may not know that he has the happiness of being your husband, I have no doubt of his delight at the discovery. The colour of your hair alone is guarantee for that," added the gallant doctor, with a charming little bow in Audrey's direction.

In reply she covered her face with her hands, barely suppressing a deep, convulsive sob.

"A little attack of the nerves," commented the doctor, with professional equanimity; "quite natural under the circumstances—almost unavoidable. A few bromide of potassium powders will settle that. Allow me!" and he reached discreetly for her pulse.

A few minutes later Audrey was alone in her own

room, with a recipe in her hand which the doctor had insisted on writing. It had been settled between them that she was to reach Paris on next day but one, and immediately give him notice of her arrival. It had also been settled between them that it was the doctor who was to impart to her relations the state of the case. This idea had come to Audrey quite suddenly a moment before the doctor's departure, and just as the wooden staircase creaked under the steps of the home-coming angler.

"That is my cousin," she had said, rising in a sudden hurry. "He will have to be told at once. Doctor—do you want to oblige me?"

The doctor said that of course he did.

"Then stay here and explain matters to him. I will go to my own room meanwhile. I do not feel equal to any more explanations to-day. He understands French quite well. You will tell him, will you not?"

"With the greatest pleasure of the world!" assured the guileless specialist, who, perhaps just because he was a specialist, was no adept in the deciphering of symptoms which were not, strictly speaking, physiological.

Audrey was gone almost before he had spoken, and in the little bedroom alongside went to the window, and pushing it open, stretched her hot face far out into the chilly, evening air, partly for the sake of the grateful coolness, more yet for fear of hearing one syllable of that which was going to be said alongside.

How would Dick take it? How would he take it? The question worked in her brain. Would the doctor's

news be to him the shock which it had undoubtedly been to her? Even her hands were still trembling from the agitation. Nerves, of course, as the doctor had said. Perhaps, after all, she had better take those powders.

And yet, curious though she was to know how Dick would take the news, something made her resolve to postpone the satisfaction of her curiosity until next morning. Positively she did not feel able for any more excitement to-day. From being wept over by Aunt Phoebe she supposed there would be no escape; but more than this she would not attempt to face. As it was her head ached painfully. After the emotions of the interview just passed, bed was the only place she was fit for.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SECOND GRASS WIDOW.

IT was next morning at the rustic breakfast table upon which honey and cream cheese figured largely, that the secretly dreaded, yet inevitable moment came. In the adjacent room Brand with the radiancy of departure illumining her face, was already busy packing; and at creak of day Doctor Bonnet had left Kugelberg, but not before having fulfilled his promise of last night. Even without the tearful talk she had had with her aunt, Audrey would have felt sure of this in the very moment that she caught sight of Dick's face. He was reading the morning paper with a rather abnormal attention, and about his expression and attitude there was a certain primness which struck her as foreign to his usual bearing. This must be the result of something—could it be of the doctor's revelation? Also it seemed to her that he was looking a good deal older than yesterday—far more than one single night ought to have made him; or perhaps it was only that the merciless morning light so ruthlessly picked out the lines about his mouth and the grey hairs upon his temples.

At her entry he laid down the paper and rose more stiffly than was his habit.

"Well, Audrey—so it seems that your quest is ended at last!"

The words were said readily, though there was a jerk somewhere in the middle; and, after one hurried look into her face, he began to hunt very assiduously for something upon the table, though whether it was a spoon or a fork he would probably have been embarrassed to say, if suddenly challenged.

Self-consciousness was something so unheard of in Dick that the sight of it quite disconcerted Audrey.

"Yes—it is ended," she said rather feebly. "You know that we go to Paris to-morrow?"

"Yes—I know. May I give you an egg?" he asked with quite superfluous *empressement*.

"Thank you," said Audrey, in a tone of civility which sounded to herself ridiculous—and more thankful than she could have expressed for the opening of the door and the appearance of her aunt at this crucial moment. Decidedly a *tête-à-tête* with Dick was a thing best avoided just now.

The rest of the morning was fortunately too busy for the danger to recur; for there were many boxes to pack, and many small bills to settle through the medium of the fat landlady, who, sorely distressed at the abrupt departure of her most lucrative guests, filled the house with her lamentations.

It was a restless and busy forenoon, as Audrey had known that it was bound to be; and marked by one wholly unexpected incident which necessarily had not figured in her forecast.

Shortly before the midday meal which Mrs. Selville steadily refused to recognise as dinner, Audrey, occupied

with the tidying up of her travelling desk, was surprised by an extremely agitated entry of her maid. Brand's angular face was so obviously disturbed that Audrey laid down the packet of papers in her hand and looked at her enquiringly.

"Please, miss—the most unusual thing have happened," she began with bated breath. "Or rather, it haven't happened, exactly—but I have been asked to bring you the most unusual request—so unusual that I don't quite know how to put it."

"Do please explain yourself, Brand," said Audrey impatiently, filled with a vague dread. "What has happened, or is going to happen? Quick, please."

"As quickly as I can, miss. You remember the story I told you about the peasant lass who was married to a stranger two years ago, and has never heard of him since?"

"Of course I remember. Well?"

"Well, the girl is in the house now. She came down from the mountains this morning, as she does once a week, to sell her cream cheeses. From the landlady she heard of your departure for Paris tomorrow—upon which she gets into a state which I should like to call hysterics, if hysterics were a sootable thing for peasant folks—and begs an interview with you, miss."

"With me? What does she want of me?"

"That is the unnoosual thing: she wants to entreat you to take her to Paris with you—or rather to let her travel with our party, as she is frightened of going alone. It seems that she has taken it into her head that her

young man is at Paris, and I suppose she expects to find him there."

"She must be mad!" said Audrey with a touch of contempt.

"That's what I said, miss; but she has some story about his having been seen at Paris. She will tell it you herself if you let her in. And the landlady encourages her—she seems fond of the girl—perhaps because of those cream cheeses which bring so much custom to the house. Will you let her in, miss? I promised to try and persuade you. She is waiting on the landing just now, together with the landlady."

"Very well—let her come in," said Audrey, after a moment's reflection.

Despite her own preoccupation it had occurred to her that it would be interesting to see the girl who had a history so like her own. And the golden hair which, as she was told, might have been stolen from her own head. Yes, decidedly she would like to see this person.

A minute later Marianele, very shy, very comely, though perhaps a trifle blowsy in comparison to the vision of budding girlhood which had dazzled Teofil Boloff's eyes two years ago, was in the room—twisting her apron-strings around her fingers, and sheltering as best she could in the shadow of the landlady's very considerable bulk. It was the latter whose well-oiled tongue undertook the exposition of the case.

"This young person does not venture to speak for herself, which is the reason why I speak for her"—she started with that deeply-fetched breath which marks the settling down to a serious task. "You have heard her story, my gracious miss?"

"I have heard it," said Audrey, looking only at Marianele's hair. Yes, those thick golden plaits bound so tightly around the youthful head were very like those which she saw daily in her mirror. And how young she was to be a grass widow already, to have been one for two years past—like herself! The blue eyes were still those of a child, though the full bust and the turn of the plump neck—for peasant grief rarely affects the appetite—were those of a woman.

"Has she had no news at all of her husband all this time?"

"None. Until quite lately he seemed vanished out of the world."

"Like mine," commented Audrey in her own mind.

Then aloud:

"He was a stranger, was he not? A tourist? Of what nationality?"

"Oh, of some terribly foreign nationality," said the landlady, with a distinctly disapproving shake of the head. "Polish, or Russian, or something as far away as that. Eh, Marianele?"

"Russian," murmured Marianele, amidst burning blushes.

Audrey made a gesture of astonishment.

"Russian? That is strange. I mean—how did a Russian happen to come to these mountains?"

"Oh, there are plenty of them in Switzerland, you know, my gracious young lady; only they don't usually walk about the mountains, they are too busy concocting plots and dodging the police for that," explained the landlady, with all the *aplomb* of a person who reads her weekly paper regularly. "And just at that time—that

is, the summer before last—it seems that we had quite a nest of them in our midst, without knowing it. They were holding a congregation, or concert, or whatever the right word is—a meeting of some sort, anyway—and for no good purpose, as you may suppose, hatching some devil's plot, I have no doubt. Unluckily the hatching was quite comfortably finished by the time the police got the cue. I have often wondered whether it was not one of those godless plotters who went astray in the mountains somehow, and to whom this poor child," and she laid an ample hand affectionately upon Marianele's shoulder—"has fallen a victim."

A new thrill passed through Audrey, while her eyes were bent more earnestly upon the shrinking girl. Familiar as she was by this time with the story of the revolutionist congress, the landlady's surmise could not but appear plausible. A comrade of Demetr, then? It would almost appear so. The resemblance between their two stories was growing closer, the nearer they were examined.

"And his name?"

Marianele, appealed to, supplied it with laborious plainness, though somewhat deformed by accent.

"Doefull Polluf" was the version she gave.

"That does sound rather Russian. But what are her reasons for supposing that she will find him at Paris?"

"Only one reason, my gracious miss, but that a good one. He has been seen at Paris—not three months ago."

"By whom?"

"By Michel—her brother. He is one of the cleverest

wood-carvers we have about here;—you have bought some of his things yourself, I think. There—is not that one of his paper-cutters?”

She pointed to a small wooden paper-cutter which was lying on the table beside Audrey among the scattered papers. It was the same one which she had found in Demetr Dobrowicz's Paris lodging, and only five minutes ago she had taken it out of her desk, in the process of ordering.

“No, that is not one of the things I bought,” said Audrey indifferently. “That is an old affair.”

“But it is Michel's work, all the same—is it not, Marianele? One knows his patterns. Is it permitted?” and without further ceremony, she stretched for the paper-cutter.

“Yes, it is Michel's,” pronounced Marianele.

“How strange!” said Audrey, with a passing feeling of curiosity. “This dates from about two years back.”

“Not strange at all, gracious miss. Michel has been at the work for years. He supplies half the shops at Kugelberg.”

“Well—about the meeting at Paris?”

“It was scarcely a meeting; only what you may call a glimpse. You must know that these people, the Hubers, have a cousin at Paris—a watchmaker by trade—who gets on famously. For long past he had been trying to persuade Michel to come and try his luck there with his carving; and Michel's wife who is of the pushing sort, urged him likewise. So last year he let himself be talked over and went off. But he could not stand the town for more than six months—then the *Heimweh* drove him back to the mountains. But just a

few weeks before he left Paris he was coming down the river one Sunday afternoon, in one of the small steam-boats they have there, and another steamboat, coming up-stream, passed them close, and upon it he swears that he saw the man who married his sister two years ago. He was standing at the time leaning against the balustrade of the boat, and so was the other; so that, passing at such a short distance, they could look into each other's eyes, so he says. He has no doubt whatever as to his being the right person, even although his sister's husband had been dressed like a gentleman and this one was dressed as he himself was, that is as a workman is dressed on a Sunday. The sight gave him such a turn that he says he screamed out, and was almost for trying to leap across to the other boat. But of course that was impossible, and it was past in a moment. At the next landing-stage he went on shore and made his way back to the one to which the other boat had been bound, in the wild hope of finding the man. But he caught no second glimpse of him and he never saw him again."

"The recognition was mutual, I suppose?"

"That is the strange thing—the thing that puzzles me. Although they looked into each other's faces, and although Michel knew him in a flash, he says that the Russian never changed countenance, and that in his eyes there was nothing like recognition. That would make me doubt, but Michel remains positive that he has seen his sister's husband. Before that they had given him up for dead. Ever since then Marianele has been planning how to get to Paris; but she has never travelled before, and she is frightened. When she



heard of your departure to-morrow it seemed to her that Heaven had shown her the way. She has money enough to pay for her ticket—and my daughter can lend her some clothes. All she asks for is to be allowed to travel in the same train with you, my gracious lady."

"How could I prevent her?" smiled Audrey indulgently. "Of course she can come, if she likes. Brand can look after her. But I don't quite see what she is to do when she gets there."

"She will go to her cousin, the watchmaker. And after that—well, after that, I suppose she will just look for her husband."

"I am afraid it will be rather like looking for a needle in a haystack," said Audrey, with an incredulous head-shake. "But she is welcome, poor girl. I know—I mean I understand what she must have gone through. I hope she will find her husband, and I hope that if she does find him she won't be disappointed in him."

"That's what I tell her myself"—emphatically acquiesced the landlady. "Supposing he is one of those dreadful bomb-throwers—who knows whether she would not be better without him?"

"Yes—who knows?" echoed Audrey with a queer and rather hard little smile playing about the corners of her lips.

## CHAPTER V.

## BESIDE A STREAM.

A STRICTLY logical consistency of action is too near akin to perfection to be quite human, or, at any rate, quite feminine; so perhaps no dire condemnation need be pronounced upon Audrey for her extremely illogical conduct on this particular day.

That morning she had told herself that to be alone with Dick would be the only unbearable thing just now. A good deal of ingenuity had been used up in the avoidance of this contingency. And yet, when early in the afternoon she saw him take up his rod and look round for his cap, a quite opposite view of the case presented itself abruptly, and without apparent transition. The mere gesture had been enough to make her realise that this was actually the last afternoon of their stay at Kugelberg—the last, maybe, of an intercourse which had subsisted almost since she could remember anything; for as the wife of Demetr Dobrowicz, her path—in whatever unguessable direction it might be likely to run—must necessarily diverge widely from that of her cousin. What life could be like without Dick it was almost impossible to imagine; and yet this was what the future—the near future held. The many memories of childhood and of adolescence had coloured existence

too deeply to be easily put aside; but closer than these, had the intercourse of the last two years knit them together. What proofs of cousinly affection, of disinterested devotion, of inexhaustible patience, had he not given her in these two years! and how impossible to repay them! Her heart ached at the thought. Merely cousinly? Ah, there she was back again at the old, vexed question, started by Tatjana Katschulin. She would not stop to worry over that problem just now, but would make the most of the few last hours that remained to her. Of whatever nature were Dick's feelings it was impossible that he should deserve to be mistrusted—treated like a stranger or an enemy whose presence is shunned.

"Are you going out fishing?" she asked in a small, constrained voice.

"Yes; to try and get a last basketful."

"May I come with you?"

Dick looked surprised—almost startled.

"I—I thought you were too busy," he said haltingly.

"Not at all. I have done all I need see to myself, Brand can manage the rest. I should like some fresh air. May I come?"

It was the same question she had asked at Lockwood on the October day on which she had broken to him the news of her marriage, and asked in something of the same anguish of heart. But Dick's answer, though the same in words, was given with an almost guilty haste to-day:

"Of course you may come. Why should you not?"

She thought she had an answer to the question of why she should not, but kept it to herself, as, springing up, she said with alacrity:

"I shall be ready in a minute!"

Soon the cousins were walking side by side down the main street of Kugelberg, heading for that open country which was not far to reach in any direction. Not much was said as they went, but Audrey walked as though upon air, borne up by a sudden sense of buoyancy which bordered close upon recklessness. These few hours of the summer afternoon at least were hers, to do with what she listed; and already she had determined not to make too timid a use of them.

In a green, secluded valley out of the depths of which the cuckoo was calling, by the side of a stream still icily cold with the chill of the heights it had just left, and set in the gold of kingcups and the blue of forget-me-nots, the halt was made. A particularly promising pool was to have the first try—an oval basin lying in the shadow of a mighty wall of granite, and paved with pebbles almost bright enough to be reflections of the flowers which grew upon the banks around. Among these sat Audrey, pretending to be critically watching the "throws," and wondering the while whether the occupation seemed to Dick as empty a farce as it did to herself. This too reminded her of that other crucial day upon the banks of the river at Lockwood. And yet what differences between now and then!—differences, to begin with, both of landscape and of season. What greater contrast than between the stately English beechwoods, the wide English meadows, and these fir-clad heights climbing into the blue sky!—between those burning autumn tints which had seemed to put even the river on fire, and this cool and tender green of early summer! Upon the birch saplings the newly unfolded

leaves still hung as limp and glossy as though cut out of fine silk, and transparent enough for the light to take on a green tinge as it traversed them. Even the tall fir-trees upon the hillside and their tiny progeny squatting upon the river banks, gloomily dark awhile ago, were now so thickly set with bright green shoots as scarcely to look like fir-trees at all, or else like freshly painted toy ones.

But were the differences greater between this outward decoration and the inner drama of then and now? To find Demetr Dobrowicz had on that day been her one supreme wish. She had found him now, without finding what she required. With a feeling akin to panic she looked the truth in the face. Then her heart had beat stormily at the mere thought of his dark, ardent eyes; now, at the prospect of again meeting their gaze she shrank back affrighted. Did nobody guess what was going on within her? Not even Dick?—he who usually met her wishes, and therefore her thoughts, half-way! but what must he think of her apparent ingratitude? Would it be even quite Christian to part from him without one word of acknowledgment for all the sacrifices brought during these last two years? If that word was ever to be spoken, when else could it be but now? A second such opportunity was not likely to occur.

But it was not easy to begin. For once alone with him in the green solitude, a sudden sense of shyness had replaced the buoyancy of a few minutes back. Dick himself looked distinctly "uncomfortable," and the constraint upon his face infected her unavoidably. The remarks sparsely interchanged during the first half-hour

applied exclusively to the chances of sport, or to the beauties of Nature.

"I have never seen such blue forget-me-nots as these. Have you?"

"Never," said Dick, without looking at them.

"They are not rising well to-day, are they?"

"What? the forget-me-nots?"

"No—the trout. Perhaps they will take better later on."

"Perhaps."

With every minute that she sat there, Audrey's restlessness increased. The precious moments were passing, she told herself with dismay, and she had not even found the first words in which to clothe her gratitude. Was *this* to be her last afternoon with Dick?

Her eyes were upon the pool which a low-flying swallow had, with her silken breast, just ruffled into silver rings which danced away to shiver against the rocks. Mechanically she put out her hand and plucked the nearest kingcup, nodding its golden head beside her. The gesture reminded her of that with which, trembling on the verge of her confession, she had nervously plucked at the bracken on the bank. At the recollection tears rose suddenly to her eyes, and with the sting of them her tongue was loosened.

"Dick," she said quickly, "does this not remind you of Lockwood?"

He was busy just then adjusting a new fly, the former having been snapped off upon a sharp edge of rock; and at the sound of her voice it seemed to her that he started ever so slightly. Yet, when he spoke, after a tiny pause, his voice was quite steady.

“Lockwood?” he repeated deliberately. “I should say the differences were greater than the resemblances, surely!” And he looked up at the wall of fir-trees opposite.

“Oh, I don’t mean the landscape, of course, but—but just ourselves. I was sitting on the bank that day too when I told you—my secret. Don’t you remember?”

“I remember,” he said, with that patient smile of his she knew so well.

“That was the beginning of the last two years. Dick,” she went on with an effort, “I have been wanting to thank you for those two years, only I didn’t quite know how to begin, for all you have done since that day—the trouble you have taken, the inconveniences you have put yourself to just in order to help me. It was really too good of you.”

She stopped, rather startled by the almost scared face which Dick turned towards her.

“Don’t thank me, Audrey—whatever you do don’t thank me!” he was saying, in a confusion which was well-nigh comical of its kind.

“But I must, Dick—I must! I should feel so like a brute taking all your services and all your sacrifices without doing, or at least saying something in return. Of course I know that to show gratitude is better than to proclaim it—but what way have I got of showing it?”

“A very easy way,” said Dick almost gruffly.

“Which one?”

“The way of being happy, and letting me see that you are happy in the future that awaits you!”

Audrey shaded her eyes with one hand, staring before her at the running water.

"Do I even know what awaits me?" And lower she added:

"You cannot imagine how frightened I feel."

"You are thinking of the doctor's account—of the loss of memory. Yes—I can understand that. It will be a painful moment—a sore trial to you; but it is my firm belief that the trial will pass. The more I think over the matter, the more certain do I feel that the sight of you will have the effect which the doctor evidently expects. He will recognise you—he *must* recognise you, if he ever cared for you, as it seems he did."

"Ah, but if he does not?"

"He will! He will!" insisted Dick, with all the angry conviction of the man for whom one woman alone counts in all the world.

"If he does not it will not be like meeting the same person."

"But I tell you that he will! Don't let yourself go to craven thoughts, Audrey! It will be the same person; and since you felt two years ago that this person was necessary to your happiness, there is every reason to suppose that happiness will now be within your reach."

The fly was adjusted by this time, but Dick, instead of returning to the pool, went on fiddling with the line, throwing anxious side glances towards Audrey, who still sat with her eyes shaded, somewhat cowered upon the bank, slowly stirring the grass with the point of her shoe. Among the boulders in mid-stream the water



tinkled crisply and clearly, after the manner of mountain-born water, and again Audrey had to think of the drowsy murmur of the Lockwood river. Another resemblance and another difference!

The silence which followed his words lasted longer than was desirable—so Dick felt presently, and was just clearing his throat for something in the shape of a conventional remark, when Audrey dropped her hand and looked up straight at him.

“I wonder whether you believe what you are saying, Dick, or whether you are saying it only because you think it the proper thing?” she asked, with a new hard line about her mouth, her clear, grey eyes full upon him.

A moment ago she had said to herself: “How anxious he is to pair me off with that man who is to him a stranger! Could he speak so if Tata was right?” Ah, but was she right? There was no getting away from that question. And neither would she get away from it again without seeing it settled once for all. The resolve sprang up abruptly but unflinchingly. Once more the light-hearted recklessness of the start from the inn was upon her. She would not return to-day without knowing whether to Dick she was just the sister she had always believed herself to be—or something more.

It was then that she raised her head with the bitter question upon her lips.

Before the challenge of her eyes Dick lost countenance a little.

“If I did not believe it”—he began uncertainly.

“You would say it, all the same, in order to com-

fort me. For you see that I want comforting—of course you do.”

Dick moved one step away with the rod in his hand, then abruptly turned and strode up close to her side.

“Don’t say that, Audrey!” he fiercely implored. “Don’t let me doubt of your ultimate happiness! It’s the one thing I could not stand. I don’t mind what happens to myself; but to have to think that you have made a mess of your life would kill me. It’s the hope of seeing you happy that has made it possible for me to crush down every thought, every hope—I mean, of course, I never hoped anything—but one can’t help being a fool sometimes. Never mind about that, but just promise to be happy. Audrey—promise!”

His voice was so badly governed as scarcely to be recognisable as his voice at all; and looking up into his face, Audrey saw it as she had never seen it before, with the usually so sedate features twitching strangely, and the quiet grey-blue eyes shone through with a glow which had never to her knowledge transformed their tenderness. The answer to the question which pursued her was written large therein:—“The Tartar” was right, “The Tartar” was right, after all! At the thought her heart leaped high, and then, forcibly rebuked, attempted to lie still. To rejoice over her discovery would surely be an infidelity to that unfortunate man at Paris, who at present was not even aware of her existence.

“I cannot promise, Dick,” she said softly, “but I will try.”

Then during the space of two breaths their eyes

rested on each other's, and she asked herself whether it was only her imagination which made her think that Dick had abruptly turned very pale.

After that there was not much more said—not because Dick had nothing to say, as Audrey guessed without difficulty, but because they were things which could not be said to Demetr Dobrowicz's wife, nor listened to by her. Yet of misunderstandings there was an end—of this they both felt sorrowfully and yet gratefully aware.

A little before putting up his rod, and after they had wandered up a good piece of the green, cuckoo-haunted valley together, by the side of the stream in its setting of gold and blue, Dick said, with a fairly successful air of *nonchalance*:

“Look here, Audrey, of course I start with you to-morrow; but you won't mind if I go on straight home from Paris? There is lots of business waiting at Lockwood—and, besides, what should I do at Paris? I am not wanted any more.” And he smiled rather faintly.

Audrey could not speak for the sob rising in her throat, but she nodded acquiescence vaguely to what commonsense recognised as a wise decision.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE LOCKSMITH.

Two nights had passed since Dick's last fishing excursion at Kugelberg, when in a room, whose high-class furniture and high-art draperies put the memory of the *Goldene Ziege* far into the shade, Audrey, hat on head and parasol held ready between her gloved hands, sat alone, waiting. Restlessly her eyes travelled backwards and forwards between the door and the Louis XV. clock upon the mantelpiece. Ten was the hour mentioned by Dr. Bonnet, and it wanted but five minutes to the time. They were terribly long those five minutes, and terribly short. As in imagination she tried to forecast that which the next hour held in store for her, all Audrey's pulses fluttered painfully, and a suffocating weight seemed to lay itself upon her chest. Recognition or no recognition? This was the vital point to be decided within a very brief space.

It had been settled by the doctor that in order to heighten the element of surprise upon which he so greatly relied the first confrontation was to take place in the locksmith's workshop. No shadow of a preparation should arouse the attention of the victim of Amnesia; nothing should warn him of anything unusual in

preparation. By taking the master locksmith into their confidence it had been easy to ensure the desirable measure of privacy.

Of all this Audrey had been informed, and in all of it she had acquiesced with a numb helpless feeling of being in the hands of Fate, against whose iron grip no struggling would avail. Ah, if Dick had been here to lean upon, to contrive "something or other" for her peace of mind, how much stronger she would have felt! And yet she was glad that he was not here. Whatever the result of the experiment now preparing, his presence could not but make the situation more unbearable than it already was—now that she knew his secret and her own. It had been just as well for her womanly dignity that the parting at the Gare de Lyon yesterday had been too hurried for anything but the most conventional farewell speeches. By this time he was at Lockwood, of course—in body, at least, although his thoughts would be as obstinately fixed upon the locksmith's workshop as were her own. Of this she could not doubt.

It was as well, too, for the avoidance of unnecessary irritation, that her aunt was still resting from the fatigues of the journey, and that Brand was too busy with her young charge to fuss about her mistress, as was her wont—for Marianele, their rustic travelling companion, was still under the same roof with them. Stunned with the plunge into town noises and town sights she had yesterday clung to the bony arm of the English lady's-maid as might a scared child to that of its nurse, imploring to be allowed to spend this one night still under her protection. The cousin to whose

house she was bound did not expect her—was, moreover, a stranger to her, while the day spent by the side of the good-natured Brand, and despite the fact that conversation had to be chiefly carried on by pantomime, had developed a sense of intimacy most comforting to the forlorn peasant-girl.

“She can sleep in my room, miss,” Brand had urged, flattered by the affection of the stranger. “At this hour of night it do be awkward to knock up even one’s own relations—and he only a second cousin after all. And, to say the truth, miss,” she added confidentially—“I *should* like to see her hair down! I’m just eaten up with cooriosity to know whether it actoolly is as long as your own.”

“Oh, let her stay, by all means!” acquiesced Audrey indifferently, too tired both physically and mentally to give anything like attention to the matter.

By this time Brand had not only seen Marianele’s hair down, but was amusing herself with experimenting upon it. All day yesterday in the train her angular but deft fingers had been itching to be at it; and now she revelled to her heart’s content, piling up the golden masses in fashions better suited to townish surroundings and town clothes than the simple coronet of plaits which was all that Marianele herself could achieve.

Upon the stroke of ten there came a knock at the sitting-room door.

“*Entrez!*” said Audrey just audibly. As Doctor Bonnet entered, buoyant and beaming with the anticipation of the coming moment which, whatever it

might be to Audrey, was to him the realisation of a long-desired contingency, she confronted him with so white and strained a face that he would not have been a doctor if he had not stood still in sudden dismay.

"You are not feeling able for this—visit? Shall we postpone it?"

There was so *naïve* a disappointment in his tone that Audrey, ashamed of her weakness, was able with an effort to surmount it.

She rose resolutely, a little colour flowing back into her face.

"No, no! It shall not be postponed. It had better be now—since it has to be."

The last words were not meant for the doctor's ears, yet he heard them, and looked at her more closely in consequence.

In silence they descended the hotel staircase and entered a taximeter. While they drove westward the silence persisted—not because the doctor had nothing to say, but because he refrained from saying it—perhaps for the reason that his professional eye was able to tell him very plainly when nerve-strain has reached breaking-point.

And in the picture of the Paris streets and of all that their varying kaleidoscope recalled there was nothing to soothe and many things to stab an excited fancy—to lash an accurately sensitive memory. Side-ways and anxiously Doctor Bonnet watched his companion, endeavouring to estimate her individual force of resistance. If she were to faint now, or to break down in hysterics, it would be a most mortifying up-

setting of all his calculations. Not that he was without human fellow-feeling, this extremely kind-hearted little doctor, but that he *was* a doctor, in first line, and everything else only in second.

It was not until the corner of the street was turned which was their destination, that the doctor ventured upon final instructions.

"Mind, if he does not know you at once do not yet reveal your identity. Unless recognition is immediate we must keep our trump-card in reserve."

Audrey nodded, very pale; and a minute later was being assisted by the doctor to alight, a little annoyed by his earnest scrutiny of her face, and stung by it into a supreme mustering of all her self-control.

The horse-chestnut-tree within the yard had shed its blossoms by this time; the petals drifted over Audrey's reluctant feet as, with her parasol handle convulsively clutched between her fingers, she followed the doctor across the cobble pavement. At the door of one of the workshops to which he had steered straight he stood still to say, in a low tone:

"Would you mind taking off your hat? I should like your hair to be well *en évidence*."

She complied in silence. The oppression upon her chest threatened to cut off her breath, but the doctor's apprehensions were groundless all the same. She did not mean to break down, and knew that if she did it would not be now and here.

Blinded by the passage from sunshine to shadow she saw nothing for a moment. It required the doctor's exclamation to tell her that the workshop was empty.



“*Tiens!* He is not here. I shall have to fetch him. Perhaps better so. Would you be so good as to stand here, upon this clear space, with the light full upon you? Your face towards the door! *Voilà!* That is better. I shall be back in a minute.”

Alone in the workshop, Audrey looked around her with dazed eyes among the unfamiliar surroundings: strange instruments whose use she ignored—formless pieces of metal at whose ultimate destination she could form no guess—bunches of keys of all imaginable sizes—oil-cans, iron shavings. In her ears sounded the twang of steel and iron being hammered, in various disharmonious keys, within the adjoining premises, and with the persistent grate of a file somewhere in the background. Nothing seemed more improbable than that she was here to meet again her lost husband. Not a single thing within this space could take her thoughts back to their former meetings, her former experience of him. Yet, mechanically, unthinkingly, she obeyed the doctor’s injunctions, standing immovable as he had left her upon the centre of the rough floor, and only allowing her eyes to roam.

She had not stirred by an inch, although several minutes had passed, when steps sounded close, and the open doorway was darkened by the figure of a man in workman’s clothes. Against the light as he was, Audrey in that first moment could see only his silhouette, but even that brought instantaneous recognition.

At sight of the visitor he had stopped short, and there was a moment of silence, during which Audrey noted the face of Dr. Bonnet peering over Demetr

Dobrowicz's shoulder without being able to read its expression. She could not see, as Dr. Bonnef saw, that a slight shiver had run over the workman's frame—the same nervous shiver which the sight of the golden plaits in the street had first provoked.

During the pause which followed, Dr. Bonnef, with all the powers of his soul, with every fibre of his body, was waiting for something more—but for something which did not come. For while both he and Audrey were still physically and mentally holding their breaths, the silence was broken by Demetr Dobrowicz himself.

“To what do I owe the honour?” he asked, advancing by a step or two into the shop. “Has madame come for an order?”

She could see his features plainly now, and the last shade of doubt—if there had been any—was removed. This man in workman's clothes and shirt-sleeves was the same she had last seen standing upon the pavement before the Registry Office in —— Street. The same—but how different—for how could these blank eyes which met hers so indifferently belong to that Demetr who had followed her from Paris to London—who had pursued her with his ardent glances? Before the want of recognition in them she shrank back just perceptibly, as one shrinks instinctively from that which is abnormal. And all the time, through the chaos of thoughts surging within her, she was wondering at herself—at her want of emotion at sight of that face whose look had once seemed to be her world. Its manly beauty had increased rather than diminished—the cast of features was as faultless as ever, the eyebrows as

splendidly black, the teeth as gloriously white—she recognised it all—and remained cold.

“Speak to him!” said the doctor, below his breath, making no attempt to hide his woeful disappointment. “Perhaps the voice—”

“Demetr!” said Audrey, and had to clear her throat and say it again, so faint and hoarse had been her first pronunciation of the word. “Demetr—do you not know me?”

He looked at her attentively, but it was only after a moment that he replied:

“Ought I to know you? Are you somebody from the other side of the abyss?”

The doctor could hold himself no longer. He caught at the Russian’s sleeve.

“Look at her well! Make an effort! Do you really not remember ever before meeting this lady?”

A look of painful effort came into the young man’s face, the look he always wore when striving to pierce the darkness of the past. Then, after another moment of supreme suspense to both lookers-on, he shook his head.

“Her hair! Her hair!” he muttered, his uneasy gaze returning to Audrey’s plaits. “I know that hair, but I do not remember ever having seen the lady.”

“Try again!” urged the doctor. Then to Audrey:

“Give him your hand! Speak to him! Smile at him! It is impossible to say which precise chord of memory may yet be capable of vibration.”

She obeyed, surmounting her inner shrinking with an effort which sent the blood to her face, and with the sole result of increasing his uneasiness.

"Demetr Dobrowicz!" he repeated wonderingly, though with ready tongue. "Was that my name over there—before I became Laurent Samedi?"

Then in a tone of unmistakable anguish:

"It is no use. Don't ask of me what I cannot do. I don't know you; but if you knew me at the other side of the abyss, then, for pity's sake, tell me who you are—and who I am! Doctor—will she not tell me?"

"Not here," said the doctor with sudden decision—"and not now. Yes—this lady has known you in former days. This evening I will take you to her hotel and you shall hear all that she knows. Keep quiet till then. I will come and fetch you after working hours. And now, follow me," he said in a peremptory undertone to Audrey. "This is enough for both of you."

It certainly was quite enough for Audrey, who felt rather giddy as, without another word, she re-crossed the courtyard by the doctor's side. Having helped her into the taximeter and shouted the name of the hotel at the driver, Doctor Bonnet proceeded to ease his overwrought feelings by taking off his hat and casting it down vehemently upon his knees.

"*Un fiasco!*" he muttered, running his fat fingers through his black brush of hair. "*Un fiasco!*—and no mistake! But I am not beaten yet—oh, no, I am not beaten! Madame"—and he turned persuasively to Audrey—"whatever you do, do not give up hope. We have not succeeded in surprising back the memory—but we may yet succeed in coaxing it back. We shall make the first trial to-day."

"How do you mean?" asked Audrey resignedly.

“I mean that by going back to the beginning of your acquaintance with him—back to the very first meeting—and giving him the history, step by step, with all its details, up to the moment of the marriage, we may perchance stumble upon something—maybe some trivial circumstance—which will serve our purpose. All chords are not dead—witness his emotion at the sight of golden hair. It is this observation which gives me hope. One single reminiscence revived may prove to be the point upon which other reminiscences may crystallise gradually. It is for this that you must be prepared to-night. Muster your own memories; for much may depend upon producing the right ones. Will you be able for this, do you think?”

He scrutinised her anxiously as he put the question.

“I will be able, since I must.”

The doctor looked at her admiringly.

“Ah, *ces Anglais! Quelle nation!* And, mind, even this is not our last chance. Should this also fail there is another possibility which I have not spoken of to you yet but which I keep in the background of my mind.”

Then, in answer to her enquiring look:

“Does the word ‘operation’ frighten you?”

“Operation? You don’t mean to say—”

“Yes, I do. Not that I can guarantee anything. But I have long inclined to the belief that Amnesia in this case is not due to cerebral shock alone, but also to material pressure. Should—as I surmise—some fragment of bone be pressing on the brain, the possibility of lifting it would deserve to be considered. I

need not say that the undertaking would be critical; but I maintain the possibility."

"And you mean"—asked Audrey, gazing at him, wide-eyed, "that if the pressure were lifted memory would return?"

"I have told you that I can guarantee nothing; it is a mere hypothesis, as upon this field every theory is, but the probability is there."

"And he would then remember everything—everything?"

"If my hypothesis is right—yes."

She sank back in the corner of the taximeter without replying, and the rest of the drive passed in silence.

"For eight o'clock this evening!" were the doctor's parting words as, having conscientiously seen Audrey up the hotel staircase, he took his leave.

"Nine hours of respite!" thought Audrey, glancing at the clock upon the mantelpiece. Would not the second meeting be worse than the first—the process of "coaxing" back memory even more painful—a torture infinitely more drawn-out than had been the attempt to take it by surprise?

And then her thoughts darted over to that third contingency of which Doctor Bonnet had spoken. This alone—owing to the note of conviction in his tone—appeared to her as a solid possibility. It was something which appealed to her commonsense. If anything could vitalise dead memory, then surely it must be the surgeon's knife. Ought she not to be rejoicing at the prospect? But asking herself the question, she knew that it was not joy that she felt—rather an increase of that shrinking which she had

been aware of in the workshop. To be recognised by Demetr Dobrowicz, or to remain unrecognised—which would be worse? Those blank eyes of his had been a shock to her to-day, but also a relief. The prospect of seeing revive in them the flame she knew of old filled her with something very like horror—a horror with which yet she felt bound to reproach herself. For that poor mental cripple was her husband—her lawful husband; and it was by his side—in the care of him—that duty lay.

## CHAPTER VII.

## RECOGNITION.

"PLEASE, miss," announced Brand, entering the room wherein Audrey, with folded arms and set lips, was pacing the floor, in a sort of numb resignation to Fate which, for the moment, had paralysed excitement, "here is this unfortunate girl back again upon our hands. It seems that she haven't got the address right, so the interpreter says, or else her cousin have changed his lodgings, for the house she went to is shut up. She could only find him out by going to the police, but it is too late for that now, so she wants to know whether you will let her stop with us for just this one more night."

"Yes, yes," broke in Audrey, impatiently, before Brand had done speaking. "Keep her with you to-night. And now leave me, Brand. I am expecting a visitor."

Brand obediently vanished, and five minutes later was revelling once more in the wealth of Marianele's hair.

"You do come handy, to be sure, my dear," she was gleefully saying, undisturbed by the fact that her words might as well have been Chinese for anything they conveyed to Marianele's mind. "Just as I was



wondering upon whom I could try the very unoosual style of hairdressing which I saw in a hairdresser's window this afternoon. My own young lady is far too impatient to sit still for so long; and besides, I never can persuade her to change her style; and neither can her aunt, although both of us say that she could make ever so much more of herself if she did not wear it so exceedingly plain. But you, my dear, you let one do what one likes with you. You're as good as one of them lay figures, you are."

To which Marianele, wishing to be civil, replied at random: "*Jawohl!*"—a bi-syllable much in use with her at present, striking her as the safest thing to say under circumstances, and calculated to cover the greatest number of contingencies.

"I'm going to try those funny little nests of plaits upon her, ma'am," Brand next apostrophised Mrs. Selville, who just then nervously entered the room to enquire of the maid whether, to her knowledge, the expected visitors had yet arrived. Having been informed that they had not yet come but that Brand herself had just been peremptorily ordered out of the sitting-room, Mrs. Selville sank down in a somewhat "all of a heap" fashion upon the nearest chair. The events of the last days—the discovery of Demetr Dobrowicz and all its attendant circumstances—had reduced poor Aunt Phœbe to something that seemed but a faint copy of herself. So far as it was possible for so childlike a soul to hate anything she hated Doctor Bonnet for having produced a locksmith as the husband of her niece! And now, within a quarter of an hour the dreaded man would be here, and she, perchance, called upon to make his

acquaintance. But this latter point depended upon the course which the interview took. Meanwhile she preferred to keep as far from the scene of action as was compatible with the size of the apartment; and Brand's room presenting the most distant point, her instinct had drawn her there as to a refuge. Having gained it she evidently meant to stay where she was. Even Brand and Marianele's society was, in the present "jumpy" state of her nerves, infinitely better than solitude. Besides, it really was rather amusing to watch the maid at work upon the peasant girl's hair.

"She sits much stiller than Miss Audrey, does she not, Brand?" she asked after a minute; her volatile thoughts already turning into a new channel.

Then to Marianele:

"Does she pull your hair very hard, my dear?"

"*Jawohl!*" said Marianele as placidly as ever.

When presently Audrey, still pacing the floor, heard the dreaded knock, it was with a feeling akin to desperation that she said the fateful word "*Entrez!*" With it, it seemed to her that she was opening the door to that future before which she so passionately recoiled.

The two men came in silently, as though aware that this was not the moment for conventional greetings. The excitement consuming the stout little doctor betrayed itself chiefly in the rapid movements of his eyes; while the former anarchist and present locksmith—dressed in his Sunday clothes and therefore more closely resembling the Demetr Dobrowicz of old—looked towards Audrey with a strained expectation which, to judge

from the want of colour in his face, was telling upon his nerves.

"This lady will now tell you of the circumstances under which she first knew you," said Doctor Bonnet when, in constrained silence, the visitors had sat down. "You have only to listen attentively, and whenever any detail strikes you as familiar to tell us so at once."

He looked towards Audrey with a glance which plainly said:

"Courage!"

"It was at the Comédie Française," began Audrey in a low voice which a strong resolution succeeded in making almost steady, "that I saw you for the first time. The 'Avare' was being played. I was in a box with my aunt, and had on a white dress. You noticed me then. I saw your glance fixed upon me, and as we left the theatre you contrived to be upon our passage."

She paused, looking at him enquiringly. Leaning forward upon his chair, with hands clasped before him, he was listening with close attention, but without any visible change upon his face. In answer to her look he shook his head slowly.

"Please go on," he said anxiously. "There must be something more."

"Yes, there is more—the Pantheon, for instance. Can you really have quite forgotten the vaults in the Pantheon? It was there you spoke to me first. My aunt had remained above. I was alone. Don't you remember how damp and gloomy it was, and how weird the torchlight seemed?"

"Torchlight!" broke in the doctor, feverishly watching, "that's a thing to leave a mark! Does the Pantheon tell you nothing? Nothing at all?"

"Nothing!" said the Russian, with a strange desolation of tone.

"And Versailles? The Salle des Glaces? You know the Salle des Glaces, do you not?"

"I know it. The doctor took me to Versailles at Easter."

"And it reminded you of nothing? You did not remember having been there before? Did it actually seem new to you?"

"Quite new."

"And London? Kensington Gardens? I can assure you that you have been in London."

"If you tell me so I will believe it—but only because you tell me."

"Do you not remember"—Audrey's voice shook with the effort she was making—"how you used to call me 'Golden Audrey'?"

"I know nothing of it," said the young man in a tone of increasing mental pain.

Audrey leaned back in her chair, looking towards the doctor for instructions. But Doctor Bonnet himself was evidently wondering, as he perplexedly scrutinised the "subject's" face, what the next move had better be. So deeply preoccupied was the silence that not one of the three people in the room was aware of a slight shuffling sound just beyond the door leading to the bedroom, and all three were therefore equally taken by surprise when unexpectedly that door opened to admit what at that

moment was quite the most unlooked-for of apparitions.

A minute before, Mrs. Selville, extremely pleased with the result of Brand's manipulations, and her irresponsible mind for the moment taken off the subject of the crisis so close at hand, had risen impulsively to seize Marianele by the hand.

"Come along, my dear, and show yourself! Audrey is still alone, I think. Come along quickly, before the visitors arrive. I want her to see how sweet you look. Perhaps that will persuade her to try the style herself. Quick, now!"

And, followed by Brand, swelling with the pride of the creator, she dragged Marianele across the intervening bedroom. Before the sitting-room door she paused to lend an ear, then, hearing not so much as the sound of a solitary voice, said to herself: "No, they cannot have come yet," and boldly turned the handle.

"There! Look at her, Audrey! Is she not a picture? I do wish you would let Brand try that style upon you!"

She had uttered her little speech, and both she and Marianele were in the room before either of them realised that Audrey was not alone. Then, with an unpleasant feeling of surprise, they both stood still.

Of all the inopportune things which Mrs. Selville had committed in her life, this was, in one sense, the most inopportune, but at the same time the most providential—the random blow which, no thanks to the dealer, cuts the Gordian Knot of a situation which up to that moment had seemed to have no

issue. Often in after days did Audrey ask herself, wondering, what would have happened if *this* had not happened; what would have been her own life and the life of Marianele if Brand's hairdressing experiment had been a trifle less successful and Teofil Boloff had left the hotel again without coming under Marianele's eyes. And each time her brain reeled at the prospect opened.

The moment itself was a thing to leave its mark in memory.

Just within the door stood the peasant girl, very red in the face, her beautiful hair parted on the top of her head and plastered over her ears in two solid coils of plaits so tightly wrought as to look like burnished gold—while over Mrs. Selville's shoulder peeped the triumphant Brand, obviously expectant of the meed of approval which could not fail.

At the sound of her aunt's voice Audrey turned impatiently, and the doctor, in annoyance, half started from his chair. A sharp remonstrance trembled in the air; but before it was spoken there came a shriek so piercing as to cause both the doctor and Audrey instinctively to clap their hands to their ears. With amazed, incredulous eyes they next saw the Swiss girl running more swiftly than gracefully across the room, to throw her arms vehemently around the man whom they knew at present as Demetr Dobrowicz.

"Deofull! Deofull!" she was uttering shrilly in an almost frantic excitement. "Have I got you, *mein* Deofull? Have I got you at last?"

Before she had done saying the words she was sobbing wildly, with her face against his shoulder; while

both the doctor and Audrey, risen to their feet, looked on, speechless.

The locksmith had risen too, his eyes fixed and almost bulging with amazement—a sort of convulsion of all his features strangely altering his physiognomy. With a gesture well-nigh violent he snatched Marianele's hands from his neck, and, holding her back from him, looked hard into her face. Again his features seemed to heave. It was evident that he was trying to speak; but another moment passed before, with an effort which seemed to shake his entire frame, he brought out the word that was trembling on his lips.

“Marianele!” he managed to utter, and then again more softly, “Marianele!” and fell at her feet with her skirts clutched tightly between his fingers.

Alongside the four spectators stood and gazed, as immovable as four figures of stone, and not much more comprehending.

“Of course we shall never be able to reconstruct the case in its entirety,” said Dr. Bonnef, while, late that night, he still paced the Selvilles' sitting-room; “the materials are too incomplete for that. But so far as one can do so I should say that this was the approximate outline:

“To begin with there are really two cases here, one of partial and one of total Amnesia. The accident in the Swiss mountains to which he is known to have referred undoubtedly brought a cerebral shock. It is permissible to suppose that in consequence of this shock the episode of his marriage was blotted out from his brain. Why only this episode and not the whole of his

former life it is impossible to surmise without close acquaintance with the circumstances. And even then we might not be much the wiser, since each case is individual, and upon this field, as I always maintain, we still grope in the dark. I can only hazard a guess that the period of lapse was marked by abnormal excitement, and memory stopped on the threshold of this excitement—caused by whatever it was. In this condition he was when he met you”—the doctor was now looking at Audrey—“and, in consequence of the vibration of one particular brain cell, was attracted by your hair—by your hair, mind!—not by yourself. I beg pardon if I am wounding your vanity—but this is a would-be scientific dissertation.”

“I am not offended,” said Audrey, speaking with a strange lightheartedness which had for long been unfamiliar. “I often felt vaguely that his feeling for me was not quite normal, and it is true that he looked at my hair far more than at my face. If I understand you rightly you want to say that when he apparently fell in love with me it was really his wife whom he was falling in love with over again?”

“*C'est cela!* To proceed. This attraction was strong enough—let us say marked enough—to make him want to marry you, believing himself free, as he evidently did. It took upon itself the character and obsession of an *'idée fixe.'* This is the explanation of the visit to the Registry Office. Then followed the second cerebral shock, caused by what sort of accident we shall probably never discover, and producing total Amnesia. Both the first and the second marriage go down in the general oblivion, and nothing continues to vibrate but here and



there some isolated brain cell. Now, at sight of the woman who first stirred his passion, the only woman whom, by your leave"—with an apologetic bow towards Audrey—"he ever loved, memory returns—partially—and, so to say, locally restricted. He knows her face—he knows her name—he recalls a few words of the language in which alone she speaks; he can even recollect the circumstances under which he first set eyes upon her—this owing, no doubt, to their highly dramatic nature, and although he does not remember the details of the marriage act, his inner conviction tells him that her assertions are true. She alone, and what touches her closely, stands out like an island of light in an ocean of darkness. But further than this recollection does not yet go—may perhaps never go. Yet even this is an immense gain."

"And the difference of name?" asked Audrey, speculatively. "How comes it that she knows him as Teofil Boloff, and I as Demetr Dobrowicz?"

"Another of the things that we can only surmise, and certainly favourable to the theory of his revolutionary employment. Both Anarchists and Nihilists have frequent occasions for changes of name. From himself we shall not learn anything on this point. If ever he was an anarchist he is not aware of it. A complete restoration of memory is, so far as I can see, not to be looked for—or at least not by nature unaided. But there is something else to be looked for."

"And that is?"

"Contentment—rest of mind. That which he had been uneasily and unconsciously seeking, the one precious

thing in his past, was this woman—his wife. And now he has found her let us say, 'Thank God!'

"Thank God!" repeated Audrey in a fervent whisper.

Before she slept that night she wrote out a telegram and laid it ready beside her bed to be despatched in the early morning. The message was addressed to Captain Selville at Lockwood, and it was thus that it ran:

"Come back at once. You are wanted after all.—  
AUDREY."

When, a few days later, Teofil Boloff and his peasant wife turned their backs upon Paris and their faces towards the Alps, they left one very disappointed person behind them, and that person was Doctor Bonnet. The partial recovery of memory, however satisfying to Boloff himself, could not satisfy the specialist. Having convinced himself that the process of recollection had once more come to a standstill, his thoughts had inevitably returned to the idea of an operation. But it was Marianele he had to deal with now, and of an operation Marianele flatly declined to hear.

"Would he remember everything?" she asked suspiciously, when Doctor Bonnet had exhausted himself in striving to place the subject within the grasp of her comprehension. "Also that he had been married to—the other one?"

"It is probable that he would—if we are successful."

"Then I prefer to keep him as he is," she decided. "This way, at least, he belongs to nobody but me."

Upon this consideration all arguments, however persuasive, broke as uselessly as waves upon a rock. And presently Marianele carried off her recovered husband to the fortresses of the mountains, where the first brief days of their bliss had been enjoyed, and where many more such days lay presumably in store for the man who, henceforward, was definitely to remain a locksmith—one whose reputation soon spread over all that side of the mountain, and to whom not locks and keys alone, but clocks and scales and agricultural instruments, and anything subject to mechanical contrivance, were brought for repairs, just as they had been of old, during those few days which he had spent under Michel Huber's roof waiting for the licence to marry.

That contentment which Doctor Bonnef had foretold not only persisted but grew. Of his own antecedents he knew only what Audrey had repeated to him of his own remarks made in the course of the Kensington Gardens interviews. But although nobody could tell him exactly who he was, his curiosity on the subject was no longer acute. He was Marianele's husband, and in this knowledge rested satisfied.

Some people there were indeed in the world who might have enlightened his ignorance; but although Petru Swierzo and others of his former "comrades" successfully traced Boloff to his present abode they saw no reason either to instruct or to molest him. True, his life was forfeit, since he had broken the pledge, but the grave of oblivion in which all critical

reminiscences were buried made the digging of a material grave appear superfluous. For the sake of a man without a memory, and who by this fact alone was debarred from ever becoming a traitor, it did not seem worth while to increase the many risks which "The Martyrs" had already to run owing to the inconvenient interest which the international police persisted in taking in their proceedings.



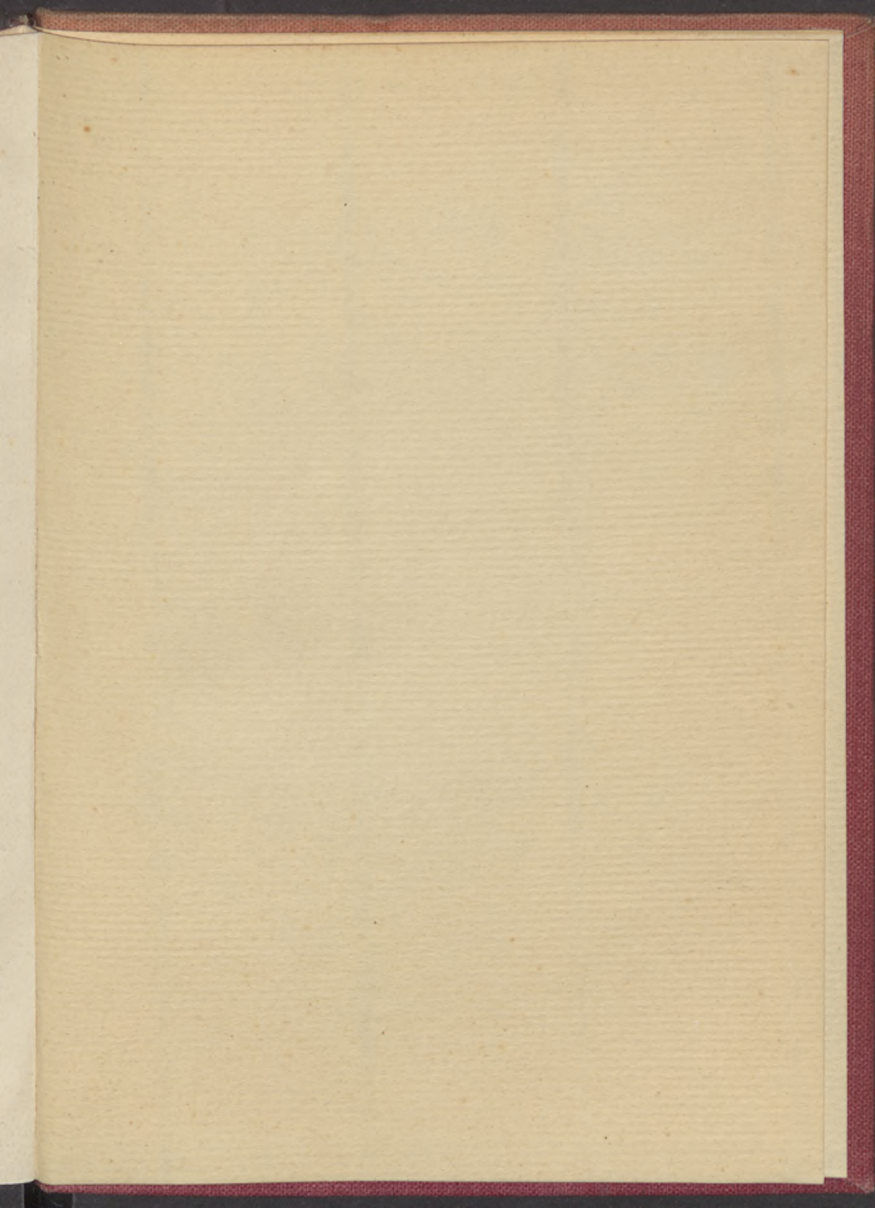
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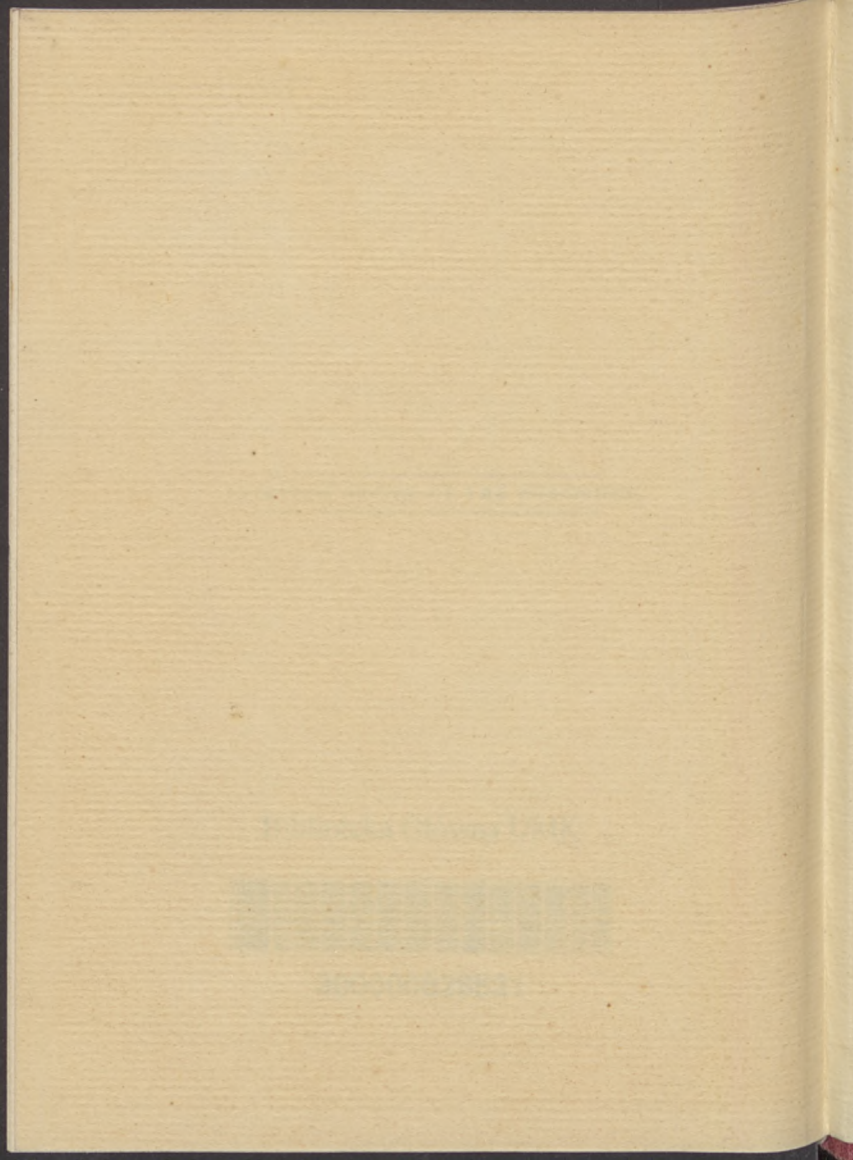
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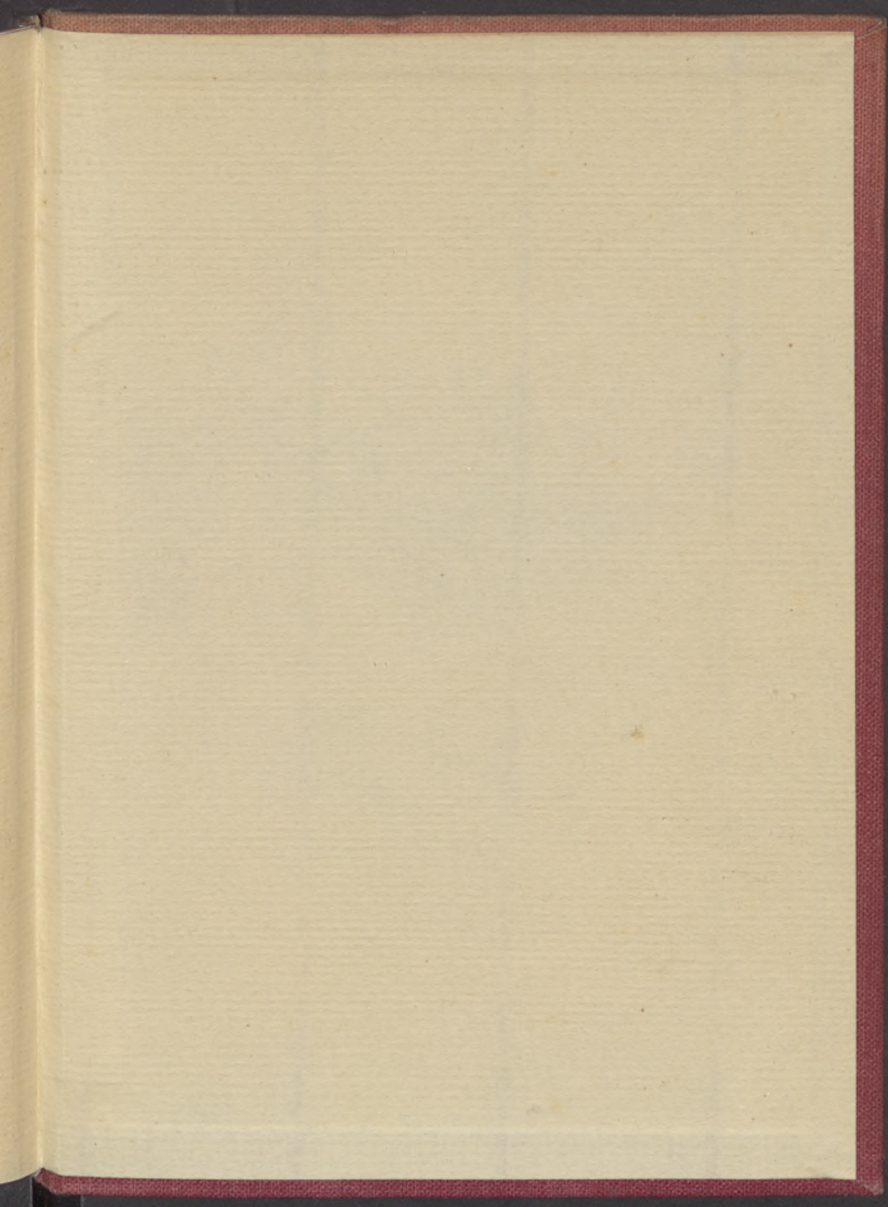
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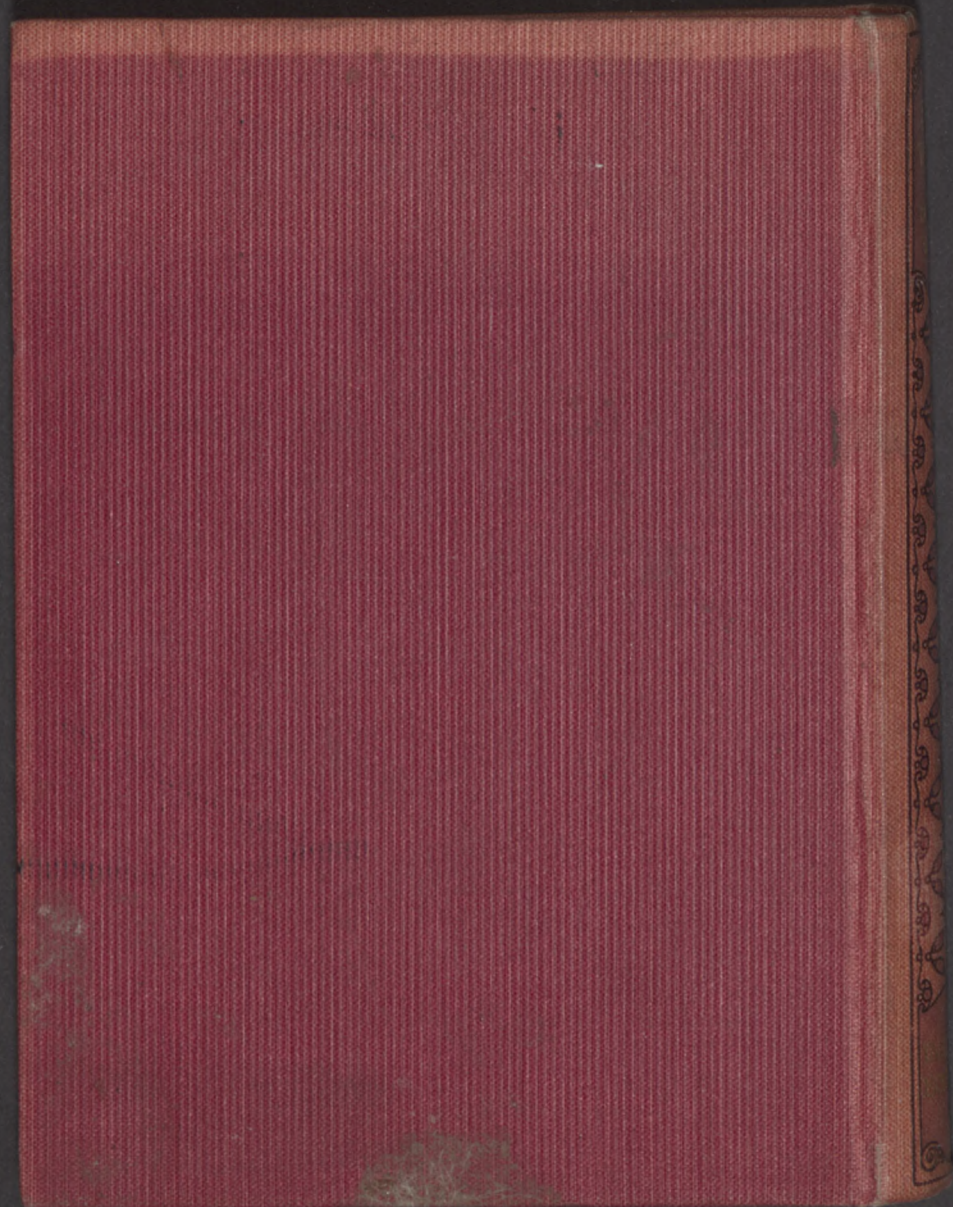
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