DOURNOF.

A RUSSIAN STORY.

(Alice Fleury Durand)

BY HENRY GRÉVILLE.

AUTHOR OF "SAVÉLI'S EXPIATION," "PHILOMÈNE'S MARRIAGES," "BONNE-MARIE," "A FRIEND," "MARRYING OFF A DAUGHTER," "DOSIA," "PRETTY LITTLE COUNTESS ZINA," "SONIA," "GABRIELLE; OR, THE HOUSE OF MAURÈZE."

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY MISS MARIE STEWART.

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"Dournof" was written in Russia during Madame Gréville's residence in St. Petersburg, and is a graphic story of Russian life, containing careful studies of Russian character, which are most admirable. The story bears some resemblance to "Dosia" and to "Pretty Little Countess Zina," but is more interesting, all the characters being master-pieces of character drawing, while there is an ease and naturalness about each of the characters that makes the volume very entertaining and very enjoyable. One gets a good deal of valuable history, and of interesting facts pertaining to the people of Russia, from such stories as this, every page of which shows the hand of a powerful and experienced author. Henry Gréville, indeed, is a charming and exquisite writer. Marie Stewart, the translator, has done her work well, and in the most thorough manner, in the English version she has made of this attractive story.

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HENRY GRÉVILLE'S CELEBRATED NOVELS.

Dournof. A Russian Story. *By Henry Gréville*, author of "Savéli's Expiation," "Dosia," "Marrying Off a Daughter," etc. *Translated by Miss Marie Stewart.*

"DOURNOF" was written in Russia during Madame Gréville's residence in St. Petersburg, and is a charming and graphic story of Russian life, containing careful studies of Russian character, and character drawing, which are most admirable.

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"GABRIELLE; OR, THE HOUSE OF MAURÈZE," is a very thrilling and touching story, most skilfully told, and follows the life of the girl whose title it bears.

THIS TRANSLATION

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

TO

MRS. BAINBRIDGE S. CLARK,

IN

LOVING RECOGNITION

OF HER

THOUGHTFUL KINDNESS.

MARIE STEWART.

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CHAPTER I.

WAITING.

ANTONINE KARZOF was just nineteen. The music of the ball given upon her birthday had scarcely died away; the traditional rosebuds had not had time to fade on her white dress; and yet, Mademoiselle Karzof was not happy. The sunlight of a Spring day lighted, insufficiently, the large, sombre salon, where, eight days before, there had been so much dancing. A duet on the piano suggested a recent visitor; but Antonine was not thinking of the sun, nor of music; she was waiting for some one, and that some one came not.

Twenty times she walked, back and forth, from the

window to the door of the ante-room, then into her own pretty little boudoir, which opened into the salon; straightened up the drooping plants, arranged the folds of the curtain; but all this took only five minutes, for time passed with such cruel slowness.

"Has my mother come in?" said Antonine to an old servant, who appeared at the door of the dining-room.

"No, not yet, my dear," replied the woman.

Antonine threw herself impatiently into an arm-chair, folding her beautiful little pink hands before her.

"She will not be long, now," added the old nurse. "Why are you so impatient to-day, my darling?"

"It is not to see mamma; of that I am sure," murmured Antonine.

The old woman disappeared as noiselessly as she came, for no one ever heard her footsteps.

Antonine's eyes were fixed upon a sunbeam which shone on the inlaid floor, while she reflected seriously upon the past. Her reminiscences dated back two years. It was at her father's country place that she had found a new and indescribable charm in life. During a vacation, her brother, who was a student at the University of St. Petersburg, brought home with him two of his college friends, that they might prepare together for their examinations.

Why was Antonine as indifferent to one of these young men as she was to the grass she stood upon? Why were his attentions so disagreeable to her? And

why did the other, who scarcely spoke at all, become the subject of her secret thoughts?

The theory of affinities will, doubtless, explain this.

Dournof did not notice Antonine—scarcely spoke to her, never complimented her, and apparently concerned himself little about her. He was then a young man of two-and-twenty, of dark complexion, somewhat stout, and decidedly prosaic in appearance — we mean by this, that he was devoid of that sentimental romanticism which has suggested so many absurd books and prompted so many ridiculous deeds. Dournof had an independent air; he was honest and frank in manner and upright in character; his laugh was hearty, showing his magnificent teeth — too large to please a dentist, but white and strong. He was active, knowing no obstacle to his will; for liberty has a poetry of its own.

Dournof did not pay much attention to Antonine; for at the frequent *réunions* in the country where they danced at all hours of the day, or in the innocent games they played, he was sure to be found at her side. No one could take exception to this, for they scarcely exchanged two words during the whole day. When Dournof finished reading a book, one was sure to see it pass into Antonine's hands; but in this there was nothing remarkable.

Madame Karzof, who was not equal to any great enterprises, has however, followed the fashion and established a free school in the village. Antonine naturally interested herself in the girls, while Jean

Karzof, her brother, took charge of the boys. But Jean was a dreamer; and often forgot school to ramble in the woods with his other friend, carrying a gun on his shoulder, but they shot little game.

Dournof took his place in the school, "to keep up the discipline," he said.

Antonine and he walked along side by side; but she did not take his arm; they went into different rooms, but frequently returned together. Thus the summer passed.

Even yet they did not talk together much, though more than they did at first. The University vacation was drawing to a close and the leaves were beginning to fall. Antonine, who was quite thoughtful, had become thinner and lost her color. She frequently retired early without giving any good reason for it. If her mother followed her into the room, she would find her seated in an arm-chair, listless and weary, complaining of nothing except fatigue.

One day, as Antonine came out of the school-house a little later than usual, she saw Dournof waiting for her. He was sitting on the wooden steps, whistling. At the noise made by the opening of the door, he jumped up, and Antonine saw, at a glance, that his face had a new expression. Her eyes dropped.

They were walking towards the house, when Dournof stopped suddenly, and said to Antonine, "I have something to say to you."

They loitered near the well. This well had a wall

about three feet high, built of square blocks of pine; the water was level with the ground, and the old wooden bucket, blackened by long use, swung to and fro amid the yellow birch leaves which the autumn winds had piled up. The pole to which the bucket was attached was concealed by the low branches of the trees; and the high, thick garden hedge made a sort of back-ground for this rustic construction; the grass was thicker there than anywhere else. At this hour no one ever came to the well; the spot was as secluded as if in the middle of a wood, and yet it was but two metres from the house.

Antonine felt her heart beating violently — so terrible did the throbbing seem to her, that she feared Dournof would hear it.

He stood a moment, gazing intently at her:

"You are wealthy," he began.

"No, I am not rich," interrupted Antonine, quickly.

"You are, perhaps, not rich in the eyes of your own circle, but rich in comparison to a fortuneless grandson of a priest. Your family belongs to the nobility."

Antonine opened her lips, but he made a sign, and she was silent.

"I am of obscure origin," he continued, "as I just told you. My grandfather was a priest; my father a clerk in the county court, and that is why I have a crown on my seal."

He smiled in such a way that Antonine smiled in return:

"That does not prevent ——"

He hesitated, looked at Antonine, who, instead of turning away, stood covered with blushes.

This encouraged Dournof. He extended his large, handsome hand. The young girl placed her hand in his, unhesitatingly, although with a certain gravity.

"I believe," replied Dournof, "that we may follow the same path in life. I intend to do something; I don't know yet what it will be, but a useful work; will you aid me? Not only when the way shall be marked out, and the route easy, but during times of discouragement and trials; when I am overwhelmed with disappointments, poor and obscure, with no one to trust me except your brother, who has absolute confidence in me. Will you give me courage when I need it? and that will be happiness."

The hand which held Antonine's trembled a little notwithstanding the perceptible effort of Dournof to appear calm. Antonine looked at the young man, and replied:

"I will."

"Think well of it," he continued, with much emotion expressed in his voice, "at present I can offer you no home; I cannot ask you of your parents until I can 'see my way clear.'"

"You said, a few moments ago," interrupted Antonine, "that I had some fortune ——"

"Enough to prevent my aspiring to your hand until I can offer you the same. What is your dowry?"

"Thirty thousand francs," replied the young girl, not at all astonished at this question.

"Well, I must have a position which will yield me at least the interest of your capital. It is very little," he added, smiling, "and I can soon have it, when once I get my license. But I must wait, and this place will be a stepping-stone to something else. The years of work and trial will be long."

"I will wait," said Antonine, unhesitatingly.

Dournof looked at her perfectly enchanted; this look, so sweet and tender, was like a benediction.

"I love you," he said, "I love you so much that if you had refused me I believe I would have renounced all my plans in life."

"What do you intend to be?" asked Antonine.

"A lawyer!"

Antonine looked at him with amazement. At that time the organization of the courts was yet in embryo, and lawyers existed only in name. This term was applied to chamber counsellors, business men, not generally highly esteemed in the community.

Dournof explained to her the projected reforms, and what position a man of talent and energy could take in the new order of things.

"Think!" said he, "until the present time everything has been given up to arbitration, millions of ruined men have been crying out for justice, without obtaining it. Think! Light will dawn upon this chaos, and after the Czar, the first benefactor, what a magnificent *rôle* a man

will fill who restores right and justice to the unfortunate!"

"Are you ambitious?" asked Antonine, with the same simplicity.

Dournof colored; reflected a moment, then replied:

"No; for if I were ambitious I would be willing to work on alone, but I cannot live without you."

"I will wait," repeated Antonine. "From this moment I am yours."

He did not thank her, for they understood each other without any need of words. He pressed the hand that he held, then let it fall.

"You will not speak of it to any one, will you?" asked the young girl as they turned into the path which led to the house.

"That is for you to decide," replied Dournof. "If you think your family would receive me favorably ——"

Antonine could not help laughing; her father's nonentity and her mother's frivolity made her feel towards them as one does towards irresponsible, weak-minded persons.

"They will not receive you favorably; but we can wait."

"As you will," replied the young man. They reached the house without saying anything more.

From that day Madame Karzof had no reason to be uneasy about her daughter's health; Antonine recovered her spirits as well as the color in her cheeks, but gradually she left off her fancy work, and turned to

more serious occupation. She learned to cut, to sew and darn.

"Heavens! what a droll girl you are!" her young companions would say to her; "what pleasure can you find in hemming towels?"

Antonine joked at first about these inelegant pastimes, but she was very persevering, and became quite expert. During the winter the young people often met, for they danced a great deal in Russia at that time. Many families had a day when the younger members would assemble, and dance from seven o'clock in the evening until midnight.

The most successful *réunions* were held at Madame Frakine's; how she could give so much pleasure to everybody, and with such a small income, was a mystery; it was a problem no one could ever solve. Perhaps the good woman deprived herself of the necessaries of life in order to pay for that large apartment; perhaps she secretly sold the last family jewels to defray the expenses of lighting the salons, which were crowded every Saturday; it was admitted they never had as good a time elsewhere, or had such a keen appetite for supper.

The supper consisted of slices of brown and white bread, artistically cut, and arranged on plates of English *faïence;* with a little butter, which was brought from the country once a month and carefully preserved in the ice-box; a few salt herrings covered with parsley, and cut onions, with an immense salad of white potatoes

and beets. A small cheese was sometimes added to this frugal *menu*, worthy of a hermit's cell.

But it was all so well served, there were so many silver knives and forks on the table, such quantities of *carafes*, filled with sparkling home-made "kvass," instead of wine; there was such true hospitality, that the young folks, more hungry for pleasure than dainties, appeared charmed with everything, and commenced dancing again, after supper, with renewed vigor.

At midnight, Madame Frakine made her appearance in the salon with a broom in her hand, which she called her broom of ceremony; this was, as she said, to drive away the dancers. They gathered around her begging for just a quarter of an hour, for one more reel; but she refused, threatening them with her broom, until one brave fellow began to play a waltz on the piano, and Madame Frakine and her broom were drawn into the dance by the persevering youth. She would make the tour of the salon, laughing merrily, her cap all crooked on her white hair, then suddenly she would drop down on the sofa.

This was a signal to leave. Everybody came up, kissed her, and complimented her, until the next Saturday.

Why did this good woman, husbandless and childless, spend her meagre income in entertaining people who were nothing to her? She will explain in a word, and naught can be said.

"It amuses me," she said. "Some people take

tobacco, others waste their patrimony; some give all their money to the doctor or the apothecary; I amuse the young, and it gives me pleasure."

It was there, during the winter after their strange conversation, that Dournof and Antonine saw so much of each other. Madame Karzof sent her daughter with the old nurse, to her neighbor's house. The servant would return for her about midnight, and wait with the other servants, half asleep on the benches of the anteroom, until the young people were tired of dancing and laughing.

During the five or six years that Madame Frakine had these reunions, which brought together about fifty persons of both sexes, several marriages had taken place; there were also many flirtations which never ended in matrimony; but nothing disagreeable ever occurred. The society was too pure, the young girls had too much self-respect, and the men honored the estimable woman.

Summer returned. Jean Karzof went off with his fellow student to the country; so the engaged couple resumed their promenades to the school-house. Madame Karzof seemed to have so little idea of the situation that she would often send them on some errand together, or on an excursion; they concluded that she must know their feelings, and had no objections.

Antonine, particularly, was so sure of it sometimes, that Dournof had some trouble in dissuading her from speaking openly to her mother about it.

"Let her alone," said he. "If she approves of it she will say nothing to us; if you are mistaken she will separate us, at least until I come to claim you; and then what shall we do?"

The idea of even a temporary separation under such conditions, was so painful that Antonine submitted to this reasoning.

The young people were happy in living in the same place, happy in being able to see each other occasionally, and working apart, with a view of being united. This happiness was moderate, but they felt they must not lose a moment of it. Antonine was very reticent.

A painful trial was awaiting them. Dournof's father died during the second winter, and the young man was obliged to leave to look after his affairs.

The separation which was to last at the most a month, was prolonged to five. Dournof settled his mother and two unmarried sisters in a more humble home than the apartment where they lived during their father's lifetime. The State in Russia, liberally supports her officers. Madame Dournof and her daughters sighed mournfully, when they saw the little wooden house they were to live in, instead of the high and spacious apartment, which had so long been their home.

Antonine and her betrothed, resolved not to write to each other, except under pressing necessities; but the separation was so long, that they were compelled to resort to a correspondence, and the young girl decided to confide her secret to the old nurse.

No one knew this woman's name, so they called her "Niania." She was born in Madame Karzof's mother's house, and was thirty-seven years of age when she was married. The young bride received Niania as a wedding present from her mother, and she was not the least valuable gift in the trousseau. She had been with her mistress when several children were born; had taken care of them, and helped bury them all except Jean and Antonine. She adored these two beings as she worshiped her God; and if she had been compelled to choose between her eternal salvation and the life of one of these, she would unhesitatingly have given up her own soul.

Niania was more particularly devoted to Antonine. She was a girl, and consequently needed more care, as she was more at home; whereas Jean was at school, and did not come in until four o'clock each day.

Since Antonine's birth, it was Niania who took her to walk, dressed her in the morning, put her to bed, in fact, she was like Antonine's very shadow. The number of maids and governesses who had been turned away on her account, the numerous quarrels and difficulties she had excited, would fill a volume.

Who ever disturbed or annoyed Antonine, would have to look out, for Niania saw no obstacle when she wanted to arrive at certain results.

Professors and teachers, one and all, were compelled to yield. Naturally, therefore, Antonine became peremptory and exacting. If she did not become a despot,

it was because she had an innate sense of right and wrong; but for all that, she was very self-willed.

This firmness guarded her from capriciousness, which was the glaring fault with her companions, who flattered her incessantly, and might have made Antonine very headstrong, had she not been so sensible.

Although so certain of Niania's blind devotion, she was much agitated the day she told of Dournof's love. The old servant listened with hands folded, and head slightly bent in the most respectful manner, a manner which never failed her in the presence of her superiors.

"Well, and what then?" she asked, when Antonine finished. "You love that youth? Why should you not if he is a good man?"

"But my mother may not like it," added Antonine, surprised that she did not meet with more opposition.

"If you love him, that is nothing. Your mother would not wish to grieve her beloved child. Only, my beautiful darling, be very prudent; do not allow your lover any liberties."

Antonine gave Niania a severe look, and the woman concluded her young mistress needed no teaching.

"It is right, very right," replied she, "provided you marry the man your heart has chosen. That is very important. Your mother, God bless her, was not so happy when she married your father — she wept bitterly!"

"You remember it?" asked Antonine, quickly.

"Certainly. She loved another; a handsome officer

with a small moustache, who used to come to the house.——"

"Well?"

"Well, what do you want me to tell you?" she consoled herself — "your father is a fine man; nothing can be said against him; he has cherished your mother like the apple of his eye. She has always done as she pleased."

Antonine secretly hoped that her mother, who was prevented from marrying the man she loved in her youth, might be compassionate in this case. However, she contented herself by hoping on in silence. Niania was charged with the letters of the betrothed lovers, and acquitted herself with much zeal and dexterity.

The morning of that day when Antonine was so impatient, she had received a line from Dournof, telling her of his intended return that very day. That was the reason the hours seemed so long to her.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARENTS' REFUSAL.

THE bell sounded in the ante-chamber. Niania ran to answer it; and, as the door was partly open, Antonine could hear these words

"Here you are again, faithful friend, our runaway, our bright star! God bless you! The young lady is waiting with impatience!"

"Is she at home?" asked Dournof, in a grave tone.

"Yes, yes; she is at home, expecting you, and is alone in the salon."

Dournof walked rapidly to the door, opened it wide, and stood still on the threshold. He saw Antonine standing with her back to the window. The light fell upon her in such a way as to bring out each feature of that beautiful face. She was afraid to move a step; until that moment, she had never done more than touch his hand — could she now resist the impulse to throw herself in the arms of her *fiancé?*

She had not time to think. Suddenly she felt two arms clasped firmly around her, her head rested on Dournof's breast, and her blonde hair was covered with kisses. The old nurse shut the door of the salon and went out, leaving her blessing upon the young couple.

"My light, my life!" said Dournof, in a low tone,

as he caressed Antonine with paternal gentleness; "how I have suffered without you!"

He held her off from him a little that he might see her better. He said nothing, but the smile showed how much he loved her.

"What have you been doing, this long time?" said he, in leading her to an arm-chair and taking a seat in front of her.

"I don't know," replied Antonine; "it was like a long night. I have been very busy, though."

"Busy with what?"

"With our school duties. I have prepared lessons for the children in the village, and it is no easy matter to explain things to undeveloped minds. I have had much trouble to make it clear — But we will talk of this later. And you; what have you been doing?"

Dournof passed his hand over his brow, as if to drive away care.

"I have been reading old manuscripts, signing papers, grappling with the deceit of some, and the obsequiousness of others. I have, with difficulty, wrested from covetous hands the remnant of my patrimony; I have settled my mother and sisters in a decent house, and here I am. Antonine, listen to me! I never will leave you again."

She looked at him; and her eyes plainly told that she too, never wished to leave him.

"I shall ask your parents for your hand. I am not rich — far from it — but I have enough to live on,

modestly, for five years. In the mean time, I am sure of acquiring a position worthy of you."

He arose; his broad chest seemed to expand with hope and joy, his eyes sparkled, his face was flushed. Occasionally he impatiently dashed aside the wavy hair which fell over his broad brow; he looked like a man of indomitable courage and energy.

"Do you fear poverty?" he asked.

She shook her head lightly, with a smile of pride and confidence on her face.

"Will your parents seriously object?"

"Probably," she answered.

"And then?"

"Nothing shall separate us," said Antonine, in a low tone, casting down her eyes.

"They will bid us wait, and we will obey."

Dournof sank into a chair and sighed. Antonine spoke lightly of waiting; for her, it was not so hard. She was living at home — in ease — working when she pleased to work, surrounded by beloved objects — life was pleasant for her — but for him, it was vastly different.

As he sat there, with his brain, weary from travel and sad reflections, his lonely existence stretched out before him. He saw a solitary room, where there was no trace of a beloved woman's hand — simply the necessary furniture, nothing agreeable to look at — no souvenirs on the walls, hung with ordinary paper — not even Antonine's photograph! A dreary repast; solitude

everywhere, particularly in his daily toil; and work would have been so sweet, near her! How much Antonine's presence would have embellished this sad picture!

He was far from mercenary; still he knew that the young girl's small dowry would bring comfort to them both. They could, at least, rent a modest apartment, wherein the wife might leave the delicate and sacred traces of her presence.

Antonine did not think of this difference in their lives; she knew only the poetical side. The poverty of the villagers was familiar to her, and she tried to alleviate their sorrows in every possible way; but poverty with a man in his position was altogether a different thing; it seemed to be gilded over by the joys of study and their love.

Dournof sighed a second time and lifted his head. Antonine looked at him sadly.

"What is to be done?" he said, with a forced smile. "We can wait, to be sure; but if your parents persist in refusing?"

"They are not wolves," answered Antonine, gaily; "they love me, and will end by consenting. And then, who knows, they may consent at once."

Dournof did not think so, but he said nothing. Between these two loving natures there was no deceit — their love was strengthened by unlimited esteem.

"Antonine," said the young man, after a long silence, "I regret that I ever became attached to you. I should

have understood that I had no right to speak until I had a home to offer you. But I was too young to know——"

"I do not regret it," said Antonine, extending to him her hand.

He took it, pressed it, but did not lift it to his lips—feeling sure of each other, they were not demonstrative.

A carriage stopped under the windows, the occupants alighted, and Antonine remarked:

"It is my mother; she has been making visits with my father to-day. Would you like to speak to them?"

Dournof put his arm around her, and for a moment Antonine's head rested on his shoulder.

"Whatever happens, you are mine, forever," said he.

"Forever!" replied Antonine, firmly.

Some one rang. Niania ran to the door of the salon to warn the young people; but they were not afraid of being surprised.

Monsieur and Madame Karzof came into the salon a moment later, and expressed their satisfaction in seeing the young man, after his long absence.

Madame Karzof was a woman about forty-five years of age, rather small, plump, active, bright, yet ignorant—like many of the Russian women of her class. Sufficiently cultivated for her position in life, kind and generous—even lavish at times, and occasionally depriving herself that she might assist an unfortunate fellow-creature—but at the same time would allow a beggar to die of

hunger upon her very threshold, if she thought him unworthy; would defray the expenses of his burial, deplore her hard-heartedness, and then do the same thing over again, when a similar occasion occurred.

Madame Karzof loved her daughter, yet persecuted her incessantly. Antonine liked blue, but her mother made her wear pink, because she thought it was becoming to all young girls. The fashion then was to wear the hair plain, she compelled Antonine to curl hers with great care, regardless of what was becoming. The following year she made her crimp her hair, which was a yard long, so tightly on one occasion, that no comb could be passed through it, and therefore it had to be cut off — all because some good woman of her acquaintance had told her it was the fashion, and the only way hair should be worn at a ball.

Antonine hated the stiff, contracted society of the middle classes, wherein her mother insisted on taking her; she liked, on the contrary, the refined freedom which she found at Madame Frakine's. Madame Karzof would have preferred it otherwise, but never forbade her attending the Saturday *réunions*, although she herself was so utterly bored in the society of Madame Frakine, that she sent Antonine with her nurse. The young girl did not complain, for she had met Dournof there the preceding year. This winter, on account of his mourning, he would absent himself — much to the regret of the young folks — for Dournof, with all his serious manner, was, in his gay moods, the leader of all the merriment.

It was in this way that Madame Karzof had accustomed her daughter to think lightly of her opinions. Although Antonine was always respectful to her mother, who was often annoyed at her daughter's acts and opinions, and had told her so, Antonine received this frank expression of opinion with politeness and gentleness, but with a certain decision, concealed under this apparent deference — which Madame Karzof felt — rendering her more firm in her determination to make her daughter happy in spite of herself; to dress her more elaborately than was the girl's wish. All, of course, was for the girl's good, but was none the less trying. Monsieur Karzof was a good man — that is all can be said of him — no one had ever heard any other opinion expressed in regard to him. He performed, mechanically, his duties in the office, overlooked his employés, kept all his engagements, was never ill, but slept and walked with a regularity, any disturbance of which he resented. He submitted in everything to the superior judgment of his wife, which was the strongest proof of his wisdom.

"Well, my dear sir," said Madame Karzof, in taking her hat off when she was settled on the sofa — she loved comfort above everything — "What do you intend to do now? Go into business?"

"No, my dear madame; I think not."

"What do you want to do, then?" said Monsieur Karzof, in amazement. The idea of a man not going into an office astonished him.

"I want to prepare myself for a year or two yet, to adopt a less popular career."

"What an idea!" said that worthy man; "Do like everybody else."

"May one ask what this career is?" said Madame Karzof, smiling.

"Most certainly; I don't care to make a mystery of the matter. You know, next year, they intend to open a Tribunal of Reports."

"Yes, yes," said Karzof, shrugging his shoulders; "they will decide your case without research. What stupidity!"

"Time will prove if this be stupidity, sir," said Dournof, considerably more politic than he would have been under other circumstances; "this institution has no equivalent in England or France — as for Germany, I don't know——"

"Nor do I!" interrupted Karzof, with a dignified air.

—"This institution, which will permit men to terminate their disputes without waiting twenty or thirty years — which a lawsuit would take — will be in operation before the year is out."

"Yes," said Karzof, in turning towards his wife; "you know they built, in Litéinaïa, a superb palace, with a statue over the door, the Judgment of Solomon. What a pity! That might serve as an example."

"Well, my dear sir," replied Madame Karzof, "what connection is there between the Judgment of Solomon and your determination not to go into business?"

"It is this,—that we must have unbiased counsellors to examine papers rapidly and give advice to clients; later on, there must be lawyers to plead cases before criminal and other courts."

"Lawyers!—Men who mix up things, and want a little slice from both sides," said Madame Karzof, in a disgusted manner.

"No, my dear madame;—you are referring to old-fashioned lawyers. I am speaking of the new."

"Will they pay them for talking?" asked Karzof.

"Precisely."

"And you wish to be one of them?"

"I do."

The husband and wife exchanged glances with a sort of mocking commiseration for the unfortunate man, who deserved, to use a vulgarism, a knock in the head.

"Is money to be made in this way?" asked Karzof, with an air of superiority.

"Money can be made, certainly."

"Well, when you have made some, will you come and let us see it—out of curiosity?" concluded the good man, laughing, as he turned towards his wife, who added her mirth to his.

All this was very discouraging. Antonine, who had not opened her lips since her parents came, looked at Dournof to see how he took all this. He responded by a goodnatured smile and a bold glance, which was full of courage and tenderness.

"Time will tell!" said he to the Karzofs. "In the mean time, would you be willing to give your daughter in marriage to a man who is determined to make a large fortune, but who for the present, possesses little besides his good will?"

"Good heavens!" cried Madame Karzof. "What do you mean? Give Nina to a poor man! that would be folly!"

Antonine looked at her mother. "Even if your daughter loved him?" said she, gently.

"I hope, heaven be praised, I have brought her up better than to indulge in any such fancies," said the mother, with a certain tartness which promised no good. She darted a threatening glance at Dournof.

He thought he must now speak, and started from his chair.

"Monsieur, and Madame," said he; "I have loved your daughter for two years, and I have reason to believe that she is not indifferent to me. I promise you that with me she shall not be unhappy. Will you give me your daughter for a wife, and with her, your blessing?"

"After what you have said," said Madame Karzof; "my dear sir, that would simply be madness!" ——

"Folly!" interrupted M. Karzof.

"I admit," replied Dournof, "that I was wrong to joke just now, but I am certain of a brilliant future, and will have more courage if Antonine is by my side through life."

"Go into an office, and we will see," said the mother.

"Enter an office," added the father. "It is there alone that a man can attain eminence and fortune."

He touched the cross of St. Anne, which hung around his neck on a piece of ribbon, and glanced around his salon, to indicate his success in life. Dournof tried to suppress a smile of contempt.

"If Antonine wishes me to enter an office," he said, "I am ready to obey her. Tell me, do you wish it?"

He addressed her with infinite bitterness in his tone. She was tempted to say yes, but was afraid of offending him. She knew he had loved her for her patience, perseverance and moral courage, and in her giving way to any weakness, she would fall in his estimation. With her heart full, she assumed a calm expression, looked boldly at him, and said: "No, I have no such desire."

"You have lost your senses!" exclaimed the Karzofs. And this was the beginning of a scene which lasted two hours. "Go into business." This was their first, and last argument.

"But," objected Dournof, "if I devote myself to the service of the State, I cannot occupy myself with questions of law, when my future is concerned. It is not to scribble at a desk in an office that I have worked eight years and obtained my license!"

"You might do two things at a time," added M. Karzof, as a last concession. I have a very intelligent young man in my office, who writes 'vaudevilles' for

the Russian theatre; that is, he arranged French 'vaudevilles' for the Russian stage, and he has succeeded very well. Besides that, he has been decorated, and last year won a prize."

"For service to the State, or the stage?" asked Dournof; who sometimes showed his boyish playfulness, even under the most serious circumstances.

"I — I — I don't know. That does not concern us," replied Karzof, a little disconcerted.

"You are employed in a law office," said Dournof. "Very good; do you believe your decorated young man devotes himself conscientiously to the business of the office, when he has a piece in rehearsal? Does he not leave his desk before the time, and come late? Would you submit to that from a man who did not write vaudevilles? — No, Monsieur Karzof; the man who wants to serve the State, consequently his country, should give himself up entirely to reach the end he has chosen. I have selected another career than business; I intend to be more useful to my country than I could possibly have become, had I remained a mere scribbler for years — I don't want to rob the State by making them pay me for work badly done — neither do I wish to ruin my profession, by devoting my strength to a service which is so distasteful to me."

He spoke with so much zeal, with such flashing eyes, that the Karzofs were dumbfounded.

"That is very good, very good!" said M. Karzof; "you reason nobly, young man."

"Then you will consent to give Antonine to me?" exclaimed Dournof, with rapture.

"Never! unless you think differently;" replied Madame Karzof. "Your thoughts are noble, as is your bearing; but one cannot be happy without money. My mother married me to a man I did not love" — she cast an affectionate glance at the astonished old man — "I would have preferred a little whipper-snapper, who had turned my head; but I congratulate myself I had such a wise and prudent mother, for with my husband I have never wanted for anything, thank God! whereas, with the other — I should have died with hunger."

"You give me no encouragement, for the present?" asked Dournof, tired of going round and round in the the same circle so long.

"Go into business! As soon as you have a situation worth 1500 roubles, we will give Antonine to you; because you are a good fellow, as we have known you a long time; you are, moreover, a friend of Jean, but we never thought of a son-a-law with so little fortune. Antonine should aspire to a colonel, or even a general!"

"When I have 1500 roubles income, will you give her to me?" insisted Dournof.

"If you were only in an office — for you see, my dear sir, these single-handed projects flourish a while, then fail. All your little schemes will have their ups and downs; nothing but the service of the State is certain!"

"Like human weakness!" thought Dournof. "Well,

let it be so," said he; "you know I am very matter of fact, you will not forbid me the house!"

"Why——" began Karzof. His wife interrupted him. She had been trying to arrive at the thoughts in her daughter's heart, and much to her delight, discovered no signs of a girl in love. No tears, or pallor, or affectionate exclamations. Antonine did not change color; her pale, sallow complexion seldom varied, even under great excitement. Madame Karzof could not understand; there might be an inward tumult under an exterior apparently so indifferent.

"Why not? Our Jean says you are his most highly esteemed friend, and a friend of my son will always be welcome at our house. As for Nina, this absurd idea will soon be driven out of her head, if it was ever there; she is a girl of some mind, and she knows we love her, so she has never been obstinate."

Here Madame Karzof prevaricated, for she called Antonine obstinate every day, but she did not think it wise to say so to a stranger, particularly to a man who might possibly become her son-in-law.

Antonine was ready to reply, but a sign from Dournof silenced her. As long as they could see each other daily, life would be bearable. Dournof bowed and shook hands with the old people, as he usually did, then extended his hand to Antonine, saying as he went out, "*au revoir.*"

"What does that mean?" exclaimed M. Karzof, brusquely. "Why did you permit such a rattle-brain——"

"Leave the affair in my hands, my dear," said his wife, immediately, "it will be better for me to speak with Nina. A mother understands how to talk with girls, and the father with boys, that is in the order of nature."

Upon hearing this, M. Karzof murmured, "That is good," and enveloped himself in his dressing-gown, for which he had been sighing for some time.

Madame Karzof led her daughter into her room, and while she was taking off her visiting attire with an occasional sigh, began questioning Antonine on different subjects. When? where? how had this love commenced? What had Dournof said? Had he always been respectful?

"He has never even kissed my hand," replied Antonine, coldly.

"That my child was because of your discretion!" The good woman talked for a half hour upon maidenly modesty, whereby Antonine was not much edified. When the sermon was finished, Madame Karzof added:

"This is all nonsense; a young girl who marries a poor man is a philanthropist, and when this term is applied to a respectable woman, she becomes a very dangerous member of society; a girl should marry a man of position, a General with a 'star,' and a fortune, then she will be happy, and certain that her children will not die of hunger."

Madame Karzof was talking to the winds. Her *bourgeoise* wisdom was a dead letter to Antonine.

The girl was in love, and that was enough to render her deaf to such advice, and to these maxims, by which mothers in the middle classes are so often guided. Antonine disliked to hear her mother utter them; but nothing elevated or dignified fell from her lips. Antonine vainly grieved over this, as she wished, not only to love her mother, but to venerate her.

In silence the girl listened to this chaotic good advice, mingled with admonitions, and finally kissed her mother's hand, said good-night, and retired to her room, thankful to be alone where she could weep as much as she pleased. And weep she did, since she saw no hope in the future.

CHAPTER III.

THE THREE TROUBLED HEADS.

MADAME FRAKINE'S salon was lighted by a few scattered candles placed against the white papered walls. About twenty young people were dancing; more than half of them girls, who seemed to forget that there was any to-morrow. Youth is rarely fatigued by pleasure, and if physical weariness assails them they soon laugh it off, and begin anew.

An old servant appeared, bearing a salver, with glasses and tea-cups.

"Don't bring that tea here!" cried one of the dancers; "it will stop all the dancing, take up time, and make us so warm."

"But you will need some refreshment," answered Madame Frakine, from the dining-room, where she and two or three mammas were arranging the buffet.

"We will drink kvass, then," answered a young girl.

"And wait until your supper," added a masculine voice. "You will have supper, will you not?"

"Yes, children; we shall have the same supper that you always find here."

"Will there be cheese?"

"And herring?"

"Yes, and cold veal too!" added Frakine.

Having heard this delicious feast announced, the fun was resumed in the salon, and the good woman explained to the astonished mammas how they were to have this extraordinary luxury. In the morning having received from her little estate a quarter of veal, she ordered it roasted immediately, that she might regale her young folks.

"Well, really!" she exclaimed, seeing Dournof come in, "here is the prodigal son come to eat the traditional fatted calf."

"Is there indeed veal?" said Dournof, with that joviality which he never lost; "what a windfall! You have inherited a fortune?"

"You rascal!" exclaimed Madame Frakine, "actually reproaching me for my poverty! Where did you come from so stealthily?"

"I came from the government of T——."

"When?"

"This morning."

"Ah!" said Madame Frakine, glancing towards the door. Antonine, who was sitting at the piano when Dournof entered, resigned her place to another martyr to social duty, and stood in the doorway.

"Shall you return there?" asked the old lady, of the young man when he took his seat by her on the worn-out sofa.

"By no means," was his reply.

Antonine approached, without showing any embarrassment, or timidity, and took a seat by Dournof. The

ladies talked among themselves, and the young man bent over his old friend.

"Do you know, they have just refused to give her to me?" he said, in a low tone.

"What do you say? exclaimed Madame Frakine, in astonishment.

"They refused, because I would not go into business."

"I do not understand," said the good woman a second time, more stupefied than ever.

Dournof could not help laughing.

"It is the fact, but that does not prevent our loving each other, does it, Antonine?"

His position of accepted suitor gave him a certain assurance; he had no longer any fear of betraying himself, but felt a kind of pleasure in evincing his love for the young girl.

"Well! what will you do, my poor children?" said Madame Frakine, looking at them with compassion.

"We will wait," replied Dournof, gaily. While no one was observing them, he quietly took Antonine's hand and held it in the presence of the benevolent, kind-hearted old lady. "We love each other enough to wait."

"And how long?"

"God only knows!" replied Dournof, tossing back his hair. "Give me a waltz!" As he spoke, he dropped Antonine's hand, passed his arm around her waist, and glided in and out among those who could find no partners.

"Are you dancing already?" asked a most uncharitable comrade, alluding to his recent mourning.

"'*Vita nuova*,' my dear," replied Dournof, over his shoulder: "I was a caterpillar, now I am a butterfly. One must enjoy pleasure where he can find it."

Giving this rather enigmatical response, he began waltzing with such spirit, that no one could suppose that he had any other aim in life than to whirl around the salon.

When it was time to leave, Jean Karzof, who arrived very late, after the Italian Opera, which he loved passionately, went with his sister and a group of young people who all lived near together. Dournof accompanied them, and soon taking advantage of a moment when his friend was interested in an animated conversation, he drew nearer to Antonine. The night was so beautiful, the Karzofs' house so near, that they were walking, and the betrothed couple had a few moments to converse.

"I must become accustomed to my new position," said Dournof. "I am like a Colonel without a regiment, a Parson without a parish, an engaged man without a *fiancée*."

Antonine turned quickly towards him, and he read, under the shade of the hood which covered her head, a reproachful look in her eyes.

"I am without a *fiancée* in the eyes of others. I can openly declare I love you, but can I say you love me?"

She hesitated a moment, and then responded, frankly:

"You can say so, since it is true."

Dournof gazed at her and felt proud of her.

"I think," continued the young girl, "that it is best to trust in the friendship and honor of those around us; if we appear to doubt them, something malicious will be told my parents; whereas, if we conceal nothing, I am sure they will be only too ready to help us."

"You are right," exclaimed Dournof, struck with the juvenile logic of this audacious reasoning; "let us commence immediately."

"Friends!" said he, in a loud voice.

The five young men who were near him turned towards him.

"You, Jean," said Dournof; "you know I love your sister. Your parents have refused to give her to me; you are grieved at this refusal; for, until the present time, we have lived together like brothers ——"

"And this will continue until the end of our lives," interrupted Jean.

"Your sister will not submit to this decree of her parents ——"

"She is right," said Jean, drawing his sister's arm through his own.

"Hear! All of you, my friends, who would be glad to have any assistance in a similar position! I now declare that Antonine and I consider ourselves engaged, while awaiting the time when a change of fortune will permit me to claim her. We tell you this news, because we consider your friendship and respect entitled to frankness on our part. Will you protect us against calumny, and warn us when we are in danger?"

"We swear," said a youthful voice, trembling with suppressed emotion, "to defend Youth and Love against the obstinacy of selfish Old Age!"

"We swear it!" repeated the others.

They were then on one of the numerous bridges which cross the canals of St. Petersburg; the city was asleep. One could just hear in the distance the rumbling of a belated carriage; their fresh young voices rang through the keen night air.

"Hurrah!" they cried, gaily, as they started off on a march.

"You will be arrested for your nocturnal disturbance," said Jean; "but I am, nevertheless, infinitely obliged to you."

"And I, also," added Antonine, in her sweet voice, —extending her hand to each one of her defenders in succession.

Had any one of that little band been charmed with her beauty after that night, he would have buried the secret in his own breast, since they all considered her as belonging, from that time, to Dournof. They all stood equally ready to protect her from gossip; and Antonine felt their friendship was to be relied upon.

While Youth was thus plotting against Age, Monsieur and Madame Karzof were still awake and awaiting the return of their children, while at the same time revolving in their minds certain projects. They talked by the dim light of the lamp burning before the Holy Images.

"Do you know, my dear," said Madame Karzof, look-

ing dreamily at her night-dress which hung upon a nail at the end of the room, — it was generally upon this object she gazed when she reflected, — "do you know, I have watched Antonine when Dournof was talking. She is not in love with him; if she were, she would not have received our refusal with such indifference."

"But," observed Monsieur Karzof, with more wisdom than one would have expected from him, "perhaps her way of being in love is different from others."

"How foolish! all young girls are alike. Do you remember little Vérashine — they wanted to marry her to the son of the minister at Kazan? How she wept, groaned, refused to eat anything! There was such a fuss at their house, her mother had to come here to get some rest, for that demon of a daughter would not allow her to sleep at home. Well! that didn't prevent her marrying, six months afterwards, a man well established in business at Apanages! That is what I call being in love. But Antonine — oh, no!"

"So much the better," added Karzof; "it reflects credit upon her good sense, and the training you have given her."

"I think, Monsieur Karzof, for fear our daughter should fall in love with some dandy, that it would be wise to marry her as soon as possible; she is nineteen."

"I am willing," said M. Karzof; "but to whom?"

"Ah — that's the question!" said the mother, with eyes still fixed upon the unconcerned night-dress, — "it is your place to look out. In your office there must be

some one — there are so many marriageable men down in town."

"Yes," replied Karzof; but they have no money."

"The young ones have none, perhaps, but the older have."

"Would you marry Antonine to an old man?" added M. Karzof, with a dubious air.

"How much older are you than I?" retorted the wife victoriously, as she turned towards him.

"Eighteen years, I believe," the good man replied.

"Have I ever made you unhappy?"

"No! certainly not!" Karzof exclaimed. "But that is not the same thing!" he added, promptly.

"We were well matched," replied Madame Karzof. "Heavens! if I could only find for Antonine a man like you, I would be happy!"

Whereupon, the husband and wife commenced to think over their acquaintances who might aspire to Antonine's hand. The ears of thirty bachelors must have tingled that night, men who had no more interest in Antonine than in a new-born infant.

The result of this examination was, the decision that during the following week they would give a ball, where a number of well selected, unmarried men, would be invited, to admire their daughter.

Just as the husband and wife were preparing to dream on this resolution, they heard a slight noise, which announced their children's return. Antonine's little laugh, as she said good-night to her brother, confirmed Madame Karzof in her former belief.

"You see Antonine is not thinking of Dournof," she concluded, "since you hear her laugh." And the good woman slept peacefully that night.

Her daughter went into her room however, and instead of undressing, sat down on a small sofa, and with bowed head, reflected sadly.

"Well, my beauty," said Niania to her — she always waited for her young mistress, no matter how late she came in, and never allowed the girl to retire without making the sign of the cross over her to drive away bad dreams — "you are not undressing? are you not sleepy?"

Antonine started.

"Pardon me, Niania," said she. "I have made you wait, and you must be tired."

She arose immediately, and placed herself in the hands of the faithful servant, who carefully combed her long and beautiful tresses, which fell in profusion over her lovely shoulders. Niania was proud of this soft, brown hair; patiently brushing it twice each day lest it should lose its lustre, and never allowed any hand but her own to touch her darling's head. When Madame Karzof wished occasionally to send for a hair-dresser, she had a regular battle with Niania, and if she came out of the struggle victorious, it was because she sent her to the kitchen and shut the door in her face.

"Well, my jewel," said the old servant, gently; "your parents have not accepted your lover? They have refused to give him our dove?"

"Yes," sighed Antonine.

"And what do you say?" asked the old nurse.

"I say that I will marry him, or no one."

Niania was silent, and shook her old gray head solemnly.

"They want to get you married," she added in a moment.

"To whom?" asked Antonine, suddenly looking up.

"I don't know; they are seeking a husband for you, and intend giving a ball, and will endeavor to marry you as soon as possible."

"What an idea! Why do you think so?"

"I listened at the door while you were at Madame Frakine's. And what does your friend say?"

"He agrees with me."

"May God watch over you," sighed Niania, "for I see your life will not be a tranquil one!"

Antonine went to bed; her nurse drew the covers over her, arranged the lamp, and retired, making signs of the cross in the air in order to drive away evil spirits. But the evil spirits were in the young girl's heart. That silent anger struggling within her, sometimes almost made reason totter on her throne. If they had only left her alone, in peace, until Dournof had attained a position, she would have been a sweet, submissive daughter; patient, notwithstanding her sorrow, and always respectful;—but they wanted to dispose of her hand without her consent; they treated her love as a childish freak, and trifled with the man to whom she had

given her heart. Antonine became so angry she could no longer remain calm, but jumped up, walked several times around her room, and, at last, knelt piously before the Images at the foot of her bed.

"Holy mother of God!" said she aloud, extending her hands to the image of the Virgin with the child in her arms; "I swear I will be his, or no one's. If I must die in keeping my vow, I will die."

She remained some time prostrated in prayer. The cold, still air chilled her; she shivered, then arose, throwing back her dishevelled hair as she returned to her couch to dream.

CHAPTER IV.

MANŒUVRING MAMMAS.

MADAME KARZOF continued to watch her daughter attentively, but Antonine was most discreet. Dournof came without restraint to see Jean, spending most of the time in the young man's room, only passing through the salon. Antonine received him cordially, as if the subject of marriage had never been broached between them. The most evil disposed could not find fault with this conduct, so that Madame Karzof, thinking all danger over, gave herself up to the preparations for the projected *fête*.

While she was making a tour of preparatory visits, she received numerous compliments for her daughter, and more hints from manœuvering dames, who were as anxious to marry off their young men friends as was Madame Karzof to settle Antonine. Where there is demand and supply, it is easy to make a bargain. In this great matrimonial mart, there is occasionally a superfluity of men, but more frequently of maidens. In this case, tact must be displayed, by keeping the goods in stock until there is a demand. Very advantageous marriages have been concluded in twenty-four hours, when an Ambassador desires an Ambassadress to aid in representing the republic at Monomotapo; then there

have been non-marrying men, given up as hopeless by the most dexterous match-makers, to find a wife without making an effort, because they had chosen the right moment, which in everything is the most important point.

At the time that Madame Karzof determined to marry Antonine, there was a grand *réunion* of young ladies the preceding Christmas, and those who let their opportunities slip by, remained single. The good woman received many extraordinary compliments upon the attractions, beauty, and intelligence of her daughter; and in the six houses which she visited the first day of her tour, she found four aspirants, not that these four showed any particular desire to marry Antonine, but these men would have no objection to marry a pretty woman with a handsome fortune, or even a handsome fortune without the indispensable complement.

Madame Karzof returned home quite triumphant.

"Since it is thus," said she to her husband, when they were alone, "we will invite them all, and we will be very difficult to please. We have a right to the selection at least.

The second day was even more favorable than the first, for she met among the victims sacrificed to her maternal pride, some one who had seen, positively seen, Antonine, and who had asked for her personally, yes, personally! Not for some young lady well brought up, with money, but for Mademoiselle Karzof herself, just as she was! Madame Karzof grew a cubit in stature that day. We should be very sorry if the reader for a moment supposed that in Russia such questions were

settled in this way. It would be the height of vulgarity, except among trades-people; with the higher, more intelligent classes, it was different. Madame Karzof thus welcomed her friends:

"How do you do, my dear Anastasie Petrowna! How long it is since I had the pleasure of seeing you!"

"At least six weeks! I should have paid you a visit, but——"

"Not at all! it is I who owe you a visit!"

"You think so! I am very glad, but we will not count visits between us! Well, what is the news?"

"Not much; the Morofs have married their son, you know——"

"Yes, yes, that is an old story; and your pretty Antonine, when will you marry her?"

"Oh! we are in no hurry, thank God! She is no burden to us, she is such a sweet, lovable child, always just as you see her, and has never given us an hour's sorrow in her life. I do not believe I have ever said a reproachful word to her!"

"How happy you should be, my friend! I have not been so fortunate in my daughters; they are married now, it is true, but they gave me much trouble in their education. There was a time when I talked as you do."

The two mothers laughed, but the laugh of one had not the ring of sincerity.

"We intend to give a ball next week," replied Madame Karzof, a little piqued; "do you know any nice men, well brought up, who would like to come?"

"To your house, indeed I do; you can find as many

dancing men as you want, when they know they will have a good time! I will bring N., X., M., T., M., Z., etc.; but if you do not want to marry Antonine this year, I will not bring M. Titolof."

"Why, my dear!"

"Because he is madly in love with your charming daughter. He saw her at the last assembly, and tried all the evening to be presented. Unfortunately I was not there, and, although he met plenty who were willing to talk about you, and your family, there was not one willing to act the *chaperone*."

"What an idea! he might have found some one I should say. What a timid man your M. Titolof must be! How old is he?"

"About thirty-five, I believe; he has already the rank of Civil General, and the cross of St. Anne."

"So has my husband!" exclaimed Madame Karzof; "So young! — has he any fortune?"

"He is not a millionaire, but he has about three thousand roubles income, and together with his salary, he ought to have about six thousand roubles."

"That is not to be despised," said Madame Karzof, seriously. "Goodness! how many aspirants! There will be plenty! In the last eight days, at least a dozen have been proposed."

It is thus that marriages are made. It is said that those who marry their own daughters the worst, are the most anxious to conclude matches for others, whether it is out of a spirit of vengeance or from some other sentiment has not yet been ascertained.

CHAPTER V.

CROSS PURPOSES.

THE result of all these visits—without counting two whole days spent in preparing for this entertainment, the procuring extra servants, the supper, ices, tea, and Antonine's toilet — was excessive fatigue, which so overpowered Madame Karzof, about an hour before dinner, on the day of the ball, that she nearly fainted.

It was too late to give up the plan, consequently the unhappy mother — a sacrifice on Duty's altar — donned her best lilac silk dress, now growing too small for her — as she so seldom wore it, — and took her stand at the door of the salon to receive the guests.

Many young ladies came with their mammas, the young men were alone. Antonine was soon surrounded by admirers — some serious, others only flirting.

The young girl had taken off the jewelry with which her mother had decked her, much to the annoyance of the good dame, and stood calm and pale, dressed in pure white, receiving with perfect indifference the attentions of these numerous acquaintances. The band of allies, with Jean Karzof for a leader, stood off a little distance, enjoying this by-play.

They began to dance, when one of the serious admirers, a man of forty, bald and stiff, wearing a pair of gold

spectacles on his flat nose, came up to claim Antonine for the first waltz. Jean quietly led her to the other end of the room.

"Oh! Jean!" exclaimed Madame Karzof, "what an impudent fellow you are!"

This rather inelegant exclamation was only heard by the young man, who was apparently very busy. He so manœuvred, that he managed to pass Antonine over to Dournof, without taking her back to her place.

This little strategy which the "allies" understood at once, succeeded perfectly. After two turns in the waltz, Dournof brought Antonine to a chair, quite near her mother; but the moment the spectacles were seen approaching the spot, one of Antonine's defenders would lead her off again, then pass her over to another, until the waltz was finished.

In Russia, it is the height of impropriety to dance the entire dance with the same lady, unless it is a quadrille. It is the custom to make one or two rounds if the salon is small, only one if it is large, then the lady is conducted back to her seat, where she can have the choice of other partners. This custom, certainly less fatiguing than the French, allows every one the privilege of dancing during the evening; therefore Antonine found many opportunities of escaping from her mother's *protégés*.

"Listen!" said Madame Karzof, angrily, to the young girl, who was arranging a quadrille — "don't dance with those youths — your brother's friends — you see them every day; but when respectable, serious men come up, you must dance with them. Do you understand?"

Antonine bowed and ran off.

When the first notes of the "*contre-danse*" struck up, the mother was horrified to see her daughter dancing with one of the same fellows. She gave her an annihilating glance; but it was lost upon the girl, like all the rest.

"Why did you disobey me?" asked Madame Karzof, as she joined her daughter in the dining-room, when the music ceased.

"But, mamma, it was not my fault if Matvéief invited me first! I did not know whether that stout man would ask me."

"Stout man!" repeated the indignant mother.

"Yes; the one with the spectacles. Can anybody dance at his age?"

After giving this sharp thrust to her mother, Antonine flew away, like a butterfly.

Ten o'clock struck, and the phœnix among the aspirants — the General of thirty-five, decorated with the order of St. Anne — had not yet arrived.

Madame Karzof looked anxiously at her daughter, who would persist in dancing with those "young fellows," then towards the door; but she recognized only familiar faces coming in and out. Finally, the dear friend arrived, dressed in a superb blue silk — a blue that would put a June sky to the blush. Following in her train, almost entangled in the folds of her dress, was General Titolof.

"Oh, oh!" said Dournof, in an undertone, standing behind Antonine; "this is serious!"

General Titolof was a man about thirty-five — perhaps thirty-seven and eleven months — of fine bearing, and rather inclined to corpulency. He had a handsome head, with grey eyes, black moustache, eyelashes and brows; his hair, which was always "*frisé*" and well-pomaded, was also black; his linen was spotless; vest somewhat dazzling — a suit of the best broadcloth, straw-colored gloves and a crush hat, with his coronet and initials within. All this was perfect; so fine, that Karzof gave Dournof a thump in the ribs that made him jump a foot from the floor.

"How do you compare with that old bird there?" said he; "why, you are not worthy to buckle his vest!"

"I would buckle it a trifle too tight," replied Dournof, seriously, as he contemplated the indisputable good looks of the General.

"I want to see if he mews or if he barks," said Jean; "it is impossible that such a head speaks with a human voice like you and me."

Titolof, still following the blue silk dress, had now reached Madame Karzof.

"General Titolof, my friend, and my husband's," said the blue dress, as she presented him.

Titolof drew his heels together, made an unexceptionable bow, straightened himself up, and the second time bent over the plump, white hand of Madame Karzof and imprinted a kiss upon it.

"Delighted, delighted!" murmured the good woman,

turning around as stiffly as her weariness would permit. "Allow me to make you acquainted with my family,—my husband ——"

The husband bowed.

"My son Jean ——"

Jean Karzof had just asked the leader to play a polka, and the salon resounded with the melodious chords of the dance. Jean bowed before the gentleman, who returned it by shaking hands *à l'Anglaise*.

"Where is my daughter, Jean?"

"Over there, mamma," replied the young man, respectfully.

Antonine was indeed "over there" — dancing the polka with one of those "young fellows." Madame Karzof gave her a withering glance as she passed, leaning on the arm of the spectacled man, but the expression changed when she looked up into the General's face.

"You shall see her very soon, General. Come this way."

"Most happy," said the General, in a suave voice.

Jean went off to join his friends, bursting with laughter.

"He does not mew," said he; "he brays."

Antonine came towards her mother, when the presentation took place.

"I have been desirous of meeting you, mademoiselle," said the General, in a low tone; "the impression which you have made upon me is indelible."

Antonine bowed slightly, as much as to say, "Enough already!" Titolof added:

"I should be so happy if your pretty lips would confirm a permission which I have received from your mother."

Antonine looked at her mother. Alas! that permission was too plainly written in the smile which lighted up Madame Karzof's face.

"Nina! answer! She is timid;" added the mamma, looking up at the General.

"I do not know what permission my mother has given," said Antonine, flushing at her own audacity.

"To offer you my most respectful homage ——"

"Antonine!" cried Jean Karzof in a loud tone; "you are wanted!"

The young girl bowed, saying, "please excuse me!" then disappeared.

"These girls!" said her mother, smiling, "are so timid, when they have been well brought up! I am sure nothing will ever spoil my Antonine."

General Titolof and Madame Karzof retired to the lady's sleeping room, converted for the occasion into a boudoir, when they had one of those matrimonial conversations, which generally terminates with these words: "It was God who sent you across my path!" All mothers-in-law start out thus, and sons-in-law commence this way.

Titolof danced several times with Antonine, as the inexorable mamma almost held her by the skirts, until the General came forward and offered his arm. The cotillon followed supper, according to custom, and even

at that last moment Antonine had scarcely exchanged twenty words with her cavalier. She danced with him, but was always so ready for a figure that he had no chance to talk; he was, however, delighted with himself and with his irreproachable conduct and manners, while the girl had the satisfaction of knowing that she had not spoken five words to him.

Dournof carried away in the glove of his left hand, a little note in pencil, containing these words:

"I have sworn before the Holy Image to be yours, or no one's."

CHAPTER VI.

DESPERATE RESOLUTIONS.

FIFTEEN days passed thus; the month of February was drawing to a close, and the last *fêtes* of the Carnival caused great excitement in the town. General Titolof at first came every other day — then every day; finally he was invited to dinner, and what a dinner! the cook had never spent such a hard day! However, Antonine gained one point; she had kept up her Saturdays at Madame Frakine's. The despised Titolof had never been invited to the good lady's, and Madame Karzof attached so little attention to the receptions, that she did not think it worth while to present him herself.

This one night of freedom, so different from the constrained and ceremonious evenings which the persistent suitor imposed upon her, made an extraordinary impression on the young girl. Scarcely had she come within the reach of the familiar sound of the piano and the buzz of youthful voices, of which many were dear to her, than she lost all self-possession; her courage failed her for a moment and she burst into tears, in the middle of the salon.

The young people present — there was not a single mamma in the room — crowded around her; the young men to protest, the young girls to question and caress her.

"What is the matter, Antonine? Has any one grieved you? Can we do anything for you?"

These questions and many others were thrust upon her, as she leaned on the shoulder of an intimate friend, trying in vain to check her tears.

"Jean! Where is Jean?" asked some one. Jean was at the Italian Opera, as usual, on Saturday nights. Dournof, who had just arrived, towered above the entire group, and advanced towards Antonine.

"I know what is the matter with her. They want to force her to marry a man whom she detests," said he, in a loud voice; and passing his arm around the young girl he led her to a sofa, and sat down near her.

"It is you she loves!" they exclaimed on all sides.

"Certainly!" replied Dournof, promptly; "and she will never marry that General with his decorations."

"No, no!" exclaimed the young men, in chorus.

"Go on, amuse yourself," said Dournof, with a certain authority, which he indisputably possessed in this little world, where he was the chief leader, "we are going to settle it between ourselves, quietly."

While the quadrilles were forming, Madame Frakine, with her good heart, tried to comfort the poor child, but there was no possible remedy for her ill.

Madame Karzof was too determined upon this brilliant marriage to renounce it; her future son-in-law had won her through her vanity: he had lost his mother, and naturally his mother-in-law would assist his wife in doing the honors of his house!

Titolof had a great deal of very fine family silver, his apartment was well furnished, with carpets and mirrors everywhere.

Madame Karzof had been to see it, and had come back perfectly enchanted.

"What do you hope to do?" asked the good woman, of the crushed young girl.

"I will say — no — forever no, — even at the steps of the altar. What more can I do?"

During the following week Antonine had not a minute to herself, except in the evenings. While Niania was combing her long hair at night, she wrote long letters to Dournof, and re-read those daily received from him.

The old servant, standing behind her, trying to be as gentle as possible, so as not to disturb her darling child, would watch Antonine's fingers run over the paper, and the tears fall on the written pages; Niania was deeply grieved to think she could do nothing for her young mistress.

One evening, Antonine, tired of suppressing her sorrow, laid her head on her arms, which were crossed upon the toilet table, while Niania braided her silken hair; the young girl, crying as if her heart would break, felt two scalding drops fall upon her neck; suddenly lifting her head, she looked up at her old nurse, who was bending over her, streams of tears were pouring from those weary eyes, down those withered cheeks.

"Don't weep, Niania," said Antonine, "it will do no good!"

"Not cry, my darling!" said the faithful nurse, "when I see you putting out your dear eyes by sobbing all night! I would gladly grow blind from weeping, if that would restore your old gayety. Yes, I would weep all your tears until the end of my days, if God willed it. I would lose my eternal salvation, if it would make you any happier!"

Antonine put her two arms around the poor servant's neck, and said:

"You are more of a mother to me than my own mother."

"Yes, indeed," cried Niania; "except to bring you into the world, your mother has never done anything for you. Who has watched over you in sickness, soothed you in your little troubles, laughed and cried with you in your infancy? Who is it cares for you now and knows all your griefs? You are right, my dear, it is I who am your true mother! You can at least weep before me; but your mother forbids tears because they spoil your eyes. Weep, my beauty! let us weep together. Perhaps the good Lord will be moved."

The following day was Saturday. Madame Karzof came the next morning to her daughter's room and attentively watched the operation of dressing her hair. Antonine had sent for a very simple dress, which she wore ordinarily; but her mother put it aside and selected another, much lighter in color, particularly gay and conspicuous; she added a knot of rose-colored

ribbon to her daughter's hair, and, after examining her carefully, embraced her more affectionately than usual, and led her into her own room.

"You know, Antonine," said she, sitting down by her, "it is the duty of all young girls to be submissive to their parents, who know what is best for them; you have been an obedient daughter, you will be a good wife and mother. The time has arrived for you to leave the paternal roof, and I hope you will never forget the pains we have taken to assure your happiness. General Titolof will come to-day to ask your hand in marriage, you will consent, and we will give you both our blessing.

Antonine arose:

"Mother," said she, prostrating herself three times in the ancient fashion, "you know I love Dournof. Do not force me to marry a man against my will."

"That is nonsense!" exclaimed Madame Karzof; "you do not love him."

"I love him and am engaged to him! We are willing to wait, and only ask a little patience from you. Spare us this misery, and we will bless you."

Madame Karzof was a little uneasy; she now discovered that she estimated too lightly the love of these two young persons, and realized how little she had understood her daughter's character. She could not comprehend that Antonine's gloominess, of late, was caused by this deeply-rooted love for Dournof, and was not the perversity of youth, as she had supposed."

"One cannot love a beggar," said she, angrily. "How is it that you do not see he loves you for your money? If you were poor——"

"Mother!" interrupted Antonine, with her eyes flashing, "do not insult Dournof; he is better than I. It is you who want to marry me to a general, because he is rich!"

Madame Karzof started up, and the two women faced each other for a moment. If Madame Karzof did not slap her daughter's face, it was because she found a more cruel way of wounding her.

"Dournof only wants your money," she repeated, in a contemptuous tone. "Men of his stamp are always looking for a rich girl."

"Mother," repeated Antonine; "do not abuse a worthy man; for I will marry him without fortune, and in spite of you!"

Madame Karzof, infuriated, uttered a shrill laugh.

"If you marry him without money, he knows you will inherit it some day. This will be a death-blow to both of us, and we will curse you and your children."

Antonine staggered—her strength seemed to abandon her—but she would not please her mother by showing herself conquered. Clinging to a chair, she looked up into Madame Karzof's face, and there saw the most violent anger and hatred.

She could not look upon her daughter as part of herself at this moment; but regarded her as an ungrateful creature, who owed her everything, even life, and yet

who dared to defy her. Niania was right: women who only bring children into the world, are less mothers than those who rear them; it is the joys and sorrows of maternity which make its real strength.

"So be it, mother," said Antonine, without dropping her eyes. "I will not marry Dournof without your consent, since you threaten me with such a cruel punishment. Neither will I marry Titolof."

"You will marry him at the end of Lent, or I will disown you."

"I will not marry him, mother; I would rather die."

"One does not die in that way," said Madame Karzof, smiling satirically; "I answered my mother in the same words thirty-seven years ago, when it was proposed that I should marry your father."

"All natures are not alike," said Antonine, slowly.

"Fortunately; for I believe you are possessed by a demon, and it is Dournof who inspires you to this resistance. I should have forbidden him the house on the day that he made this ridiculous demand. You have both been conspiring against me, and I intend writing him never to show his face here again."

She sat down and hastily wrote a few lines, which she sent to Dournof. A thought came to her at the time:

"You see him at Madame Frakine's, since she is so easy to please in the choice of those she receives, but you will not go there any more without me; and more

than this, if she wishes my friendship, she must close her doors to this fortune-hunter."

She dispatched a second note, almost as quickly as the first, then looked at her daughter, who stood before her:

"Go to your room!" said she, "and reflect."

Titolof arrived in the afternoon; a table with the Holy Images had been prepared in the salon, where Monsieur and Madame Karzof awaited him. When he came, they sent for Antonine, who appeared, pale and trembling, but proud and defiant.

When she heard this man ask officially for her hand, she felt like pleading with him — like telling him that she loved another. However, all outward demonstration was so foreign to her nature, she tried to avoid a scene, which appeared to her foolish and unnatural. She determined to reason with him some time when they were alone.

Monsieur and Madame Karzof answered for their daughter, who did not open her lips, and blessed the betrothed pair with the Holy Image. A conversation then followed between the three persons, which was so uninteresting and so dull, that the General made a pretext to retire in a quarter of an hour, after respectfully kissing the lifeless hand of Antonine. As soon as he had left the apartment the young girl retired to her room, refusing to come to dinner.

Whilst Monsieur and Madame Karzof, somewhat disconcerted at this result, were taking their lonely meal,

Niania, who never served at table, slipped away to be near Antonine, and finding her completely overcome, and reclining in an arm-chair, gently kissed her hand.

"They have given you away, my angel," said the old woman, to her adopted child.

"Yes," replied Antonine, "but I will not marry him."

"Alas! my dearest," sighed Niania, "one can neither disobey the Czar, nor one's parents."

"Niania!" said Antonine, after a moment's silence, "I must see Dournof!"

"Well! my beauty, you will see him this evening, at Madame Frakine's!"

"I cannot go to Madame Frakine's, my mother is afraid of my seeing him there." "Niania," continued Antonine, straightening herself up, and looking at her old nurse, "I must see Dournof to-day."

"Good Lord! How?" cried Niania, raising her hands to heaven.

"That is my affair," said Antonine, looking earnestly at her; "go, and tell my mother, that I want to go to vespers this afternoon!"

"To vespers! that is a happy thought, my dear; prayer will calm your poor afflicted soul. I will go at once."

In a few minutes, Niania returned, bringing the desired permission; the hour for vespers was not far off. Antonine changed her showy costume, tore from her hair the pink ribbon her mother had placed there,

and washed the hand which Titolof had kissed. She was then ready for Niania.

About seven o'clock Niania appeared, duly equipped, bringing a cloak, which her young mistress lost no time in putting on. They went out together, but before going very far, Niania stopped Antonine, and said:

"You mistake the way, my dear, the church is here."

"We will go to the church later," said Antonine, "follow me."

Niania took a few steps, but was soon compelled to run to keep up with the young girl.

"My little dear, where are you going?" she asked, timidly.

"You said you would peril your soul for me," replied Antonine; "follow me now, without asking any more questions."

Niania acquiesced; and breathed not another word.

Antonine crossed two or three thoroughfares, then, without hesitation, turned into a narrow, dark street, which she had often traversed during the winter——entered a humble dwelling, went up a stone staircase until she reached the second floor; there she rang the bell violently. The door opened, and a ray of light fell upon Antonine's uncovered head.

"Antonine! God bless you!" cried Dournof, and without further speaking, he took the young girl in his arms.

Niania carefully closed the door, and followed them to the salon.

CHAPTER VII.

AN OLD ROAD TO CHURCH.

DOURNOF'S little parlor, where he had taken his *fiancée*, was an uninviting room. A few plants stood on the window sill, and seemed to make it brighter; a small desk, covered with papers, heaps of books and journals on the floor, a cup of tea on the table; such was a bachelor's quarters!

Dournof soared above terrestrial miseries, for when Antonine was near he felt neither any wrong or wrath. Niania stood in the doorway, looking at them, and wept silently; she knew from the emotion shown in that meeting, how serious and profound was the love of those two young persons.

Finally, Dournof offered Antonine a chair, which was covered with papers like every thing else, but he pushed some aside, and made room for Antonine, placing himself opposite. Niania always stood, of course, in the presence of her superiors.

"I came," said Antonine, timidly, "because I was anxious to talk with you; my mother has insulted you, and I want to ask your pardon."

Dournof was indifferent to the insults of others, so long as he was certain of Antonine's love.

"We can no longer see each other," said the young

girl, "my mother says I can never go out without her; I told her this evening I was going to vespers. That will do for once."

She was silent. The idea of not seeing Dournof was so painful to her, she had forgotten the other danger, that of the marriage they were going to force upon her.

"What does all this mean?" questioned the young man.

"Titolof has asked my hand in marriage," said she, looking up at him.

"Well?"

"And they have consented!"

"It is impossible!" cried Dournof, as he sprang to his feet, "they could not have done that!"

"But it is precisely what they have done."

"Did you not resist?"

"I told my mother I would rather die than marry him."

"What did she say?"

"She said all young girls talked in that way."

Dournof, with folded arms, walked back and forth the narrow room, lighted by one flickering candle; his head was bowed, as if to suppress the bitter words that Antonine might not hear. After making several tours around the salon, he stopped in front of the young girl, and said:

"Antonine, let us go away, immediately; my mother will receive us; we can be married there. Will you do this?"

He still stood before her, with his arms folded.

"No," said Antonine," looking at him with a heart-broken expression. "She has threatened me with her curse, if I do this."

"And by what right? What right has that unfeeling mother, who wants to sacrifice her child for her own pride and interest, to threaten with her malediction a faithful soul for being unwilling to sell itself? God will not listen to her!"

Antonine wrung her hands, but did not speak.

"Then you mean to marry this ridiculous man?"

"No," said the young girl.

He commenced walking again, as he said:

"I have determined this day to leave my work, and seek for a place in an office."

Antonine arose, and said, with authority, "I do not wish you to do this."

"And why?"

"Your career is elsewhere; I will not marry you if you show such weakness, for, when one has a grand thought, neither Fortune or Woman should tempt one to abandon it. Suffer, rather, and die!"

"Antonine!" exclaimed Dournof, prostrating himself before her; "you are more than saint, you are a martyr!"

The young girl looked down sadly upon her friend as he knelt, and laying her hand on his dark curls, said,

"I love you, and I wish you to be a great man."

"Then follow me;" replied her lover. "I shall never be great except with you, and for you. Alone, my life will be nothing!"

"You worked before you knew, and loved me," she said, gently; "you have still the same aim and ambition in life."

Dournof assented, humbled indeed; then continued.

"Antonine, you are a thousand times better than I. Before I knew you, I was only a child, now I am a man. Do you know what makes me so happy? The serious thoughts you have inspired—from the day you promised to marry me, I have changed entirely. I have dreamed of the fireside I must prepare for you, of the difficulties of the life I have asked you to share. Often have I suppressed thoughts which seemed unworthy of you—for the temptations of youth are many—but I would not disturb your peace of mind. More than once, money has been offered me which I did not think fairly earned; but once I came very near giving way, for I was so poor at the time of your fête, Antonine, that I racked my brain to find means enough to buy you a trifling gift. Yet, I resisted, destitute as I was, and it was neither my principles nor my education that restrained me—it was my love for you. Had I yielded, I never would have dared tell you the truth. Are you not my conscience, Antonine, my honor? Tell me then how I can live without you!"

She turned upon him eyes swimming with tears of pride and joy.

"Ah!" she said, "you console me for all my griefs."

They gazed at each other a moment, forgetting their many sorrows.

"You are a good man!" said Niania's voice at the door.

They started, for they thought they were alone. This voice called them back to earth.

"Ah!" sighed Antonine: "men like you are rare. It will be my life-long joy to have been loved by you; but listen, Féodor, there is something in this world besides a woman's love. Have you not talked to me of your country? Has she no need of devoted hearts — of disinterested patriots? Those cankerous officers who are feeding upon her very vitals must be displaced by honest men, who work for the honor of being useful. Do you not want to be one of them?"

Dournof pressed fervently the two hands which she extended towards him:

"You must renounce me and love Russia. She will return it."

"I will never renounce you," said Dournof, in a calm but determined tone.

"If my parents object?"

"I will run away with you in spite of yourself, and marry you by force."

"Féodor," said she, "you will not do it, my mother would disown me."

"What difference does that make?" said he angrily.

"It would kill me! I could not bear the shame."

She was silent, and buried her face in her hands.

Niania's voice — herself unseen —

"Are you not ashamed, Féodor Iramith," said she; "to try to lead astray our pure dove? You know a marriage would not be valid before God, without the parents' consent, even if they have the priest's blessing. Would you tarnish the spotless name of our child—she, who speaks well and you ill? A while ago you talked fairly enough, but evil seems to come now to your lips."

Niania said no more. The young people dropped their clasped hands, and stood before her like culprits.

"Adieu;" said Antonine to her friend, without lifting her eyes.

"No, not adieu;" he replied. You will be mine yet, and if your parents force you to marry Titolof — if you have not strength enough to resist, although you have kept me off — I will still claim you. Antonine Karzof might not be my wife, but I would run away with Madame Titolof."

Antonine shrank back, covering her face with her hands.

"Shame! shame on you!" said the voice of Niania, from the darkness. "You speak like a profane man."

"So much the worse!" cried Dournof, almost beside himself: "others live and prosper who do evil without excuse; we will do likewise; we, who wish to be good but are forced to do wrong."

"You talk like a crazy man," said Niania. "If your

mother could hear you, she would disown a son who insults his God, and his betrothed."

"Pardon, pardon!" said Dournof. I am a miserable creature; so unhappy, that I wish I was dead. Forgive me, Antonine!"

Antonine offered him her hand, and made the sign of the cross on the young man's breast.

"May God comfort you!" she said. "I will try to do right. If I was only sure you would not be very unhappy!"

"Then you do not wish it?" said Dournof; pressing her to his heart.

"Never! without our parents' consent."

"I will ask them again," said he; "in spite of their rudeness and injustice."

"They will not consent!" continued Antonine. They want a general for a son-in-law."

"What will you do?"

She smiled strangely, and said:

"Fear nothing; they will never marry me against my will. I swear to you that I will never be Titolof's wife."

"Do not swear," said Niania; "you don't know what you may do!"

"I swear!" cried Antonine, kneeling before the Image in the corner of the room; "I swear, here, for the second time, never to be any one's wife but Dournof's."

"And I," said the young man, swear to be faithful to Antonine until death!"

"That is not right, not right!" said Niania, emerging from the darkness. "You must not make any vows. Come, my dove, come to church, and ask God to pardon this sin; and you, young man, — whose bitter words are sometimes good and sometimes bad, — your soul is not yet delivered from the wiles of a demon; we will pray the Lord to deliver you!"

"Farewell!" said Antonine, gently; "farewell my fiancé, until it is God's will to unite us."

"That will not be long," replied Dournof. "In one way or another ——"

"Never," repeated Antonine, "without my mother's permission. She has said she would curse my children, never ——"

He clasped her in his arms again, but without kissing her; then the two separated — Antonine passing out first, Niania following — making the sign of the cross, as if leaving a consecrated place.

Dournof, now alone, gazed at the open door, without thinking of closing it. It seemed to him that all his happiness — even his very life-blood — had gone from him. A shudder passed through his frame; then he decided to close the door.

This made him feel more dreary than ever. He threw himself upon the spot where Antonine's feet had trod, and wept bitterly — he who had never shed any tears — even in his deepest sorrows.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FEVER OF IMPATIENCE.

TIME rolled on, and Madame Frakine came to see Antonine. She was astonished to find her thinner, her eyes flashed and her cheeks, usually so pale, had now a brilliant color.

"Has she not fever?" asked Madame Frakine of Madame Karzof, when Antonine left the room.

"No, indeed; why do you think she has fever?"

"These young girls," said the old lady with some hesitation, "sometimes fall ill when they are opposed."

"But who opposes Antonine?"

"You, my good friend. "Did you not tell me she loved Dournof?"

"Ah! that childishness is over; it is a long time since she thought of that!"

Madame Karzof prevaricated knowingly; for every night, before retiring to rest, Antonine reiterated her supplications. Madame Frakine also knew it was a falsehood, for Dournof had confided to her their secret —at the same time begging her to give him all the intelligence in regard to the young girl as often as possible; but what good was there in contradicting the lies of those who will not listen to the truth?

"Then," continued the worthy dame, "you will marry her to Titolof?"

"Certainly — in five weeks — immediately after Lent. It will be a pretty wedding; for my son-in-law understands doing things well."

"And Antonine — what does she say about it?"

"What should she say? Young girls never say anything."

"I remember they did, in my young days," replied Madame Frakine.

"It used to be so!" said Madame Karzof; "now they behave with more propriety."

"So much the worse!" said Madame Frakine,— "pardon me — I should say so much the better. And what does Antonine say?"

"But did I not tell you that she says nothing," the mamma replied, impatiently; "nothing — absolutely nothing."

"I understand," said the old lady; "she says nothing at all to him; and he — what does he say to her?"

Madame Karzof shrugged her shoulders; but her kind friend was in no mood to leave her without getting all the information she could in regard to Antonine; for she, poor girl! was never left alone with anybody."

"Would not your future son-in-law like to converse a little more with her?"

"I have said that M. Titolof is a true gentleman; he consequently approves of this reserve, which is necessary at all times."

After taking this little revenge, Madame Karzof seemed willing to change the conversation, but her friend continued, with an innocent air:

"You mean to say that my dear dead husband and I were not of high lineage. My father was Comte Dörezof, however, and we have had the unfortunate custom, in my family, of marrying for love; it is bad style, to be sure! Among the aristocracy, they prefer marriages *de convénance*,—I confess that they are more fashionable. By-the-by, will your sweetmeats last till Spring? Would you believe that mine are all gone? It is true that the young people have helped me to get rid of them."

The chain once broken, Madame Karzof was not clever enough to return to the first topic of conversation; she tried very hard to bring in another bit of sarcasm; but her friend left before she found an opportunity.

Antonine literally said not a word to Titolof. Any one else would have been embarrassed; but the General was a man who never lost his self-possession. He had heard of an excellent position, but a married man only could fill it—a married man always inspires his employers with more confidence, strange to say—but in this particular case, it was absolutely necessary that the man should be married. Titolof began canvassing; that is, he asked one of his lady friends to find him a pretty wife, with a good figure, small fortune, and, above all, an excellent education, both mental and

moral, which is indispensable in the wife of a man in public life.

Titolof was not a bad man, but he was silly, which was rather his misfortune than his fault, for he tried, assiduously, to correct it; but in vain. Divine Providence had given him, instead of intellect, an unalterable contentment with himself and others. He was an optimist—particularly in anything concerning himself, and therefore found Antonine perfect. Never having before paid his *devoirs* to any woman worthy of mention he scarcely knew how to address a young girl, and consequently preferred the society of his future brother-in-law, with whom he could jest and jeer as he pleased.

Such was the husband chosen by the Karzofs for their daughter.

Antonine had thought of begging Titolof to withdraw his claim; but his folly and impertinence were enough to convince her of the uselessness of her efforts. What remained for her to do, then?

This was the question she asked herself every night during her moments of solitude. Niania would sit on the foot of the bed and weep silently when she saw her beloved child suffering from such bitter thoughts. It was not necessary for the old woman to ask the reason of her sorrow; she divined, too well, the cause of that knitted brow, the feverish wringing of the hands, her continued lassitude. The young girl was weary of struggling, and would sometimes say to herself, "there is no help for me but death!"

Death!—at nineteen! The first time this thought came to Antonine, she trembled with fear, and dared not dwell upon it; but gradually this vision of a hideous, revolting death disappeared, and she dreamed of a poetic death, slowly advancing and demanding sympathy,—a death which sets a halo around the brow of a young girl,—a sort of invisible pathway between earth and heaven, where the heart-strings are so gently severed and the sufferings are imperceptible!

The season of Lent was extremely cold, this year of which we write. Antonine, burning with fever, was in the habit of throwing open her windows at night, to cool and freshen the heavy atmosphere, always found in Russian houses. Niania never failed to close the shutters, but while she lingered in the kitchen over a late supper, Antonine would throw them open again, and stand contemplating the stars, drinking in the cold wind which seemed to cool her feverish frame. At the least noise she would close the window like a culprit. Was she not a culprit?

In a few days she commenced to cough; the fever increased, so that Madame Karzof made her daughter remain in bed.

Antonine submitted without resistance, for she was better in bed than anywhere else, because she was sure Titolof would not come to her room to see her. The doctor found a slight irritation of the lungs, and prescribed a potion, which Madame Karzof gave her daughter every hour. The next day, Antonine was so

much better that she rose and obtained permission even to go out, provided she would continue to take her powders regularly.

Titolof was charmed to see his fiancée restored to health, and brought her a magnificent bouquet, and took a box at the circus, an amusement which was allowed in Lent. Until the last few years, the theatres were closed during those days of penitence.

CHAPTER IX.

TO THE CIRCUS.

WHEN the day arrived, Antonine was ordered to have her hair dressed, and the cook told to prepare dinner for four o'clock. It was scarcely three, however, when Madame Karzof came to her daughter's room.

"Pink ribbons to-day, Niania," she said to the faithful servant.

Niania grumbled as she went off for the box of ribbons, leaving Antonine alone with her mother.

To Madame Karzof's great surprise, Antonine jumped up, threw off the wrapper they had put over her shoulders, and came towards her mother.

"Mother," said she, "I implore you not to make me wretched. I do not ask you to give me to Dournof, but do not marry me to Titolof."

Madame Karzof shrugged her shoulders. She had heard this supplication with a few variations so often, that it had no effect upon her heart.

"Mother," began Antonine with more energy; "this is the last time I am going to ask you."

"I am thankful for that," replied Madame Karzof; "for you weary me to a degree!"

"Do not be inflexible, my dear mamma," said

Antonine, making a desperate effort to become coaxing and tender. "I will not marry Titolof, because I hate him."

"He is a charming man," replied the mother; "you are hard to please."

"He is horribly foppish and silly!"

"I find him intellectual; but it is understood now, children know more than their parents!" said Madame Karzof, sharply; for she did think her future son-in-law clever.

"Well, mamma, I must be wrong; you know I am an odd, capricious girl; but, such as I am, I am your daughter; you love me, and I love you, mamma; and I despise M. Titolof.

Madame Karzof was always irritated when Antonine talked to her in a calm, dignified manner. Now that she was excited, the unnatural mother was somewhat affected, and made her child sit by her, as she played with the long brown braids, and spoke gently to her, saying:

"You know, my darling, you will be very happy; you will leave for W——"

"Leave?" cried Antonine, with fear. She thought until that time, Titolof would remain in St. Petersburg.

"Well! where have you been wandering? We have been talking of this for the past fortnight!"

Alas! it was true; but Antonine never listened, when her future husband and her parents were conversing; their words were to her like a monotonous

buzzing, which served as an accompaniment to her thoughts. This idea of going away, gave the final blow.

"I do not want to leave you, dear mamma! My father is old; he loves me; do you wish to grieve him by taking his daughter away from him?"

She did what she had never done before: kissed her mother's hand, and wept, and implored her sympathy with bitter tears.

"Listen, Nina!" said Madame Karzof, somewhat moved; "if the thing had not gone so far, I might take back my promise, but your marriage is announced; everybody would be surprised; your trousseau is made, the invitations are ready, there is nothing to be done but your wedding dress tried on. It is impossible, my dear child, think over it yourself!"

Antonine quitted her kneeling posture.

"You insist?" said she tremblingly. "So be it! but you will repent it, bitterly."

"Threats!" cried Madame Karzof: "and I was just beginning to regret this marriage. How foolish one is to listen to children's talk! Niania," she said to the nurse, who had just come in; "put pink bows on Antonine, and make her pretty, at all hazards."

Saying this, she walked majestically out of the room; provoked with herself for giving way to her feelings.

"Niania," said Antonine, sadly; "make me as handsome as possible, so that every one will have pleasant remembrances of me when I am no more."

"What do you mean, my darling?" said the frightened old woman. "Don't speak of death at your age! Could one die at twenty? Look at my old bones, that I can scarcely drag along — God does not yet summon them to rest — no, you will not die yet. Die! we have time enough to think of that, thank God."

A strange smile passed over Antonine's face, as she sat down before the little table. She examined herself in the mirror, as she seldom did; how much youth, and quick, warm blood flowed through those blue veins. While she was dressing, Antonine looked at her round dimpled arms, her pretty pink shoulders, and thought how sad it would be when all this was six feet under ground. Tears came to her eyes, but she bravely shook them from her long lashes.

"Weep, my child, that will do you good;" murmured Niania, as she finished dressing her; "it will do you good, you have been so oppressed, lately!"

"I have not time;" answered Antonine, abruptly. "Give me my gray barege dress."

"Barege! my dear it will be cold in the circus! It is not close and warm like the theatre! It is cold there, and many draughts!"

"Do as I tell you," repeated the young girl, imperiously; "my mother wishes me to look well, and I must obey her."

Niania went for the dress. She found the waist had no lining, and was open across the chest, but Antonine put it on with a sort of triumph, thinking she never

looked so well. She added a ribbon or two, and then glancing in the mirror, made a jesting curtsey before her own image.

"Those who are about to die, salute you!" said she, then passed into the salon where Titolof, who had been invited to dinner, was patiently awaiting her.

"Is it not so, General?" asked the young girl, with a little mocking smile; "one must dress when one goes into society."

"Will you not be cold in that dress?" asked her mother, anxiously.

"How can I be cold if I am having a good time?" replied Antonine. "I am counting upon amusing myself this evening. Since the first of Lent I have not had any fun. It is none too soon to begin!"

She had never talked so much; Titolof stood aghast, looking at her, not daring to utter a word. Antonine was certainly changed, she, who never conversed, was now gayly chattering. When they went to the table, Antonine, who never drank anything but water, asked for wine. Madame Karzof was alarmed, and thought her daughter devised this crafty scheme to disenchant the General, by feigning such defects as might displease him. When dinner was ended, and they were talking of leaving, Antonine slipped into her room, and called Niania.

"Go," said she "to Dournof's house."

The old woman gazed at her, attentively, but could divine nothing from her expression.

"Go, immediately, and tell him we will see each other very soon."

"You are losing your mind, my dear," murmured Niania, much disturbed.

"I was never more serious, and you know I never jest. Tell him that I love him, and we will see each other again, soon."

"I will obey, my deary, I will obey," said Niania, sadly.

Antonine passed her hand caressingly over the bony face of the old servant, threw a light shawl over her head, and went out; her mother had already called her three times, and the carriage was waiting.

CHAPTER X.

DETERMINED TO DIE.

THE box which Titolof had taken was the best in the circus; it was in the balcony, near the doors, where one had the first view of M. Bonthor's wonderful dogs and monkeys. It is true that there was a terrible wind every time the house doors were opened, but no rose is without its thorns; and another disadvantage was that the horses kicked the sand in one's face. But what does one go to the circus for, except to swallow dust?

In those days, long ago, alas! they did not have men and women who lifted each other with their teeth, or tight-rope dancers, or flying *trapéze* performers, making every one shudder as they jumped from ring to ring. Circuses in the past had only dogs, horses, and monkeys; sometimes an elephant would be exhibited, but it was not a place that was considered very respectable, or even moral, so that girls over ten or twelve years were not allowed to go, unless they had special performances for children.

Therefore the entrance of a gay family to a box, ordinarily occupied by tradespeople, created quite a sensation, and fifty opera-glasses were leveled upon Antonine. She blushed at first, as if insulted, but soon

regained her self-possession, and submitted with perfect indifference to the general admiration. She occupied the best seat in the box, that is the one nearest the balcony, and as she turned her back to the stables, there would be such a draught now and then, on her scantily covered shoulders, that she shivered with cold.

"You are cold," said the mother, as she saw the color go and come in the young girl's face.

"No, mamma, I feel very well."

"Put this over her shoulders, M. Titolof," said Madame Karzof, as she handed him a light mantle; "We must not forget she has just been ill."

Titolof gracefully arranged the cloak over the young girl's shoulders; she thanked him, and continued gazing around the house. In a few moments the covering slipped down on the back of her chair. During the *entr'acte*, Titolof ordered ices, for it was very warm in the crowded, brilliantly-lighted house, in spite of the occasional wind. Antonine asked the second time for an ice so that her mother feared she would seem too greedy, and shook her head, but Antonine would not understand the mute language of those terrible eyes, and calmly ate the ice.

"Is that not imprudent?" Madame Karzof asked.

"No, mamma," said the young girl, who was hurrying to finish it.

She handed the empty plate to Titolof, and again watched until the circus was over. The crowd passed slowly out through the narrow passage, and every time

the door opened the air poured in from the street. The gentlemen went to look for the carriages which were difficult to find in the crowd of equipages always waiting at the doors of theatres.

"Heaven favors me," thought Antonine, as she dropped the fur-lined cloak she had been almost smothered under.

"What are you doing?" said her mother to her, "you are losing your cloak, and will take cold, put it on, immediately."

"Yes, mamma," replied Antonine. A moment after the mantle was down again.

A strong hand suddenly folded it around the young girl; she started, and recognized Dournof, who had not lost sight of her for the last hour.

"Be silent," said he, in a low tone, "thanks for your message."

"Go away, go away," whispered Antonine, while her mother stood on tip-toe, scanning each face that passed through the door, in search of her husband and son-in-law.

"No, no, go away," repeated Antonine, with impatience. "Not here, not now, go on."

He pressed her hand, and was soon lost in the crowd. Immediately the cloak fell again from her shoulders. She shivered from head to foot, and a strange sharp pain in the chest, as she opened her mouth to breathe in the cold air, struck her lungs squarely.

"That 's it," said she with a wonderful joy, as she

felt the fever increasing. "Merciful death is coming to relieve me."

"There they are!" cried Madame Karzof, as she rushed to the door. "Follow me, Nina!"

It was some time before they were seated in their carriage, then they drove off. Antonine retired immediately into her room upon the pretext of fatigue, and found Niania awaiting her.

"I saw your friend," said she; "he was very happy, and he went afterwards to the circus."

"I know it; I saw him," replied Antonine.

"How strange your voice is!" said Niania, frightened; "how red you are! Have you taken cold?"

"What an idea!—go, bring me some tea."

Niania returned with a cup of tea, boiling hot, which the young girl swallowed down at once.

"You will burn yourself!" observed the old servant.

"Oh," said Antonine, smiling, "what a grumbler you are! 'You will burn yourself! you will take cold!' Is there not any happy medium between heat and cold?"

Niania looked at her darling with a scrutinising glance.

"I do not know," said she, slowly, "what you are contemplating, my child;—but your good angel has not been whispering to you of late."

Antonine passed her arm around her old nurse's neck and said,

"Do you know, Niania, I love only two persons in the world—Dournof and you. Remember those words."

"Ah, my dear!" said Niania, looking at her with tender reproach; "you are adding one sin to another! Has not the good Lord said, 'Honor thy father and mother, that thy days may be long?'"

Antonine smiled; but this strange expression rested only a second upon her face.

"Go to supper, nurse," said she; "I can get into bed alone, and you can come after supper to arrange my room."

Niania obeyed. Scarcely was the door closed, when Antonine turned the key and ran to the window. The hot tea she had taken made the perspiration stand in great drops on the girl's forehead and temples. She threw her dress on the bed and remained before the open window, with neck and arms bare, until she was chilled through and through. A deathly pallor covered her face, but she continued to breathe the fatal air with the firmness of a martyr.

Whoever had told the young girl that suicide was a crime, would have found a deaf listener at this moment. She did not want to live; although the death she had chosen would be slow, yet she would have time to repent and ask God to forgive her for her sin.

A clock struck midnight in the ante-room. Antonine closed the window, opened the door, and went quietly to bed. In a moment, her mother came in.

"How cold it is here!" said she, in drawing her shawl tightly around her shoulders; "you do not have it warm enough here, Nina; your room is a regular ice-house! Do you feel well?"

"Very well, mamma, thank you!" replied the young girl.

"You were very pretty, to-night, Nina; that is the way you must dress, and not like a nun. Monsieur Titolof was delighted with your beauty and amiability. You are a good child, in spite of your caprices. Good night."

She leaned over her daughter to embrace her. Suddenly Antonine clasped her two arms around Madame Karzof's neck, and asked in a quivering voice:

"You love me, mamma?"

"Certainly, I love you. Do you doubt it?"

Antonine did not reply, but tightened her embrace and again kissed her mother's cheeks.

"Give me your blessing, mamma," she said, in a low voice.

Her mother blessed her, kissed her once more, and left her. Niania came in, softly.

"Well, my dove! you have made peace with your mother?"

"Yes, — eternal peace," replied Antonine.

"What strange words you speak! God alone can understand you."

"God alone," repeated Antonine, thoughtfully.

Her cheeks flushed from time to time, and she would unconsciously start. Niania watched her persistently.

"Are you sleepy, Niania?" she asked, hoping to distract her attention.

"No," replied the old woman.

"Nor I. Sit down there"—and she pointed to the foot of the bed—"tell me something."

"What shall I tell you?" said Niania, sitting down on the edge of the low, narrow couch; "an old servant like me has nothing to tell."

"What—nothing? Have you never had anything happen to you?"

"Nothing worth relating."

"That is not possible," replied Antonine. I don't know whether you are spinster, wife, or widow. You must have had some experiences, even if it were only to get married."

Niania shook her head, looking very melancholy.

"I was married; but it is not very interesting."

"Tell me about it, all the same, I beg of you."

With some hesitation, Niania began twisting the corner of her apron, as country girls do, when they talk, and commenced her history in a low tone:

CHAPTER XI.

THE NURSE'S STORY.

"MY FATHER—God have mercy on his soul!—was an active, lively man; he loved to work as he loved to laugh and eat. I remember him coming from the *fêtes*, Sunday nights, singing and shouting; but he was more intoxicated by songs and gayety than wine — for he did not love brandy, he said it made him sad. When he drank anything, it was generally honey and water or sweet cider, but it was very seldom.

"We were a house full of children, and I was the eldest. From my earliest recollection, I don't remember being without a baby in my arms; as soon as she learned to walk, there would be another to take its place. I had reached the age now when little girls begin to be serious and wonder if their hair is well braided. I was the daughter of a farmer, and not a servant. I had never been out to service; and yet you see, my darling, that I came to you. When my poor mother died, I was already quite tall. She was a very stern woman — as serious as my father was gay — still I did not love her as much as my father; but when I laid her in the tomb, I felt my bright days were over. I had not time to carry the children about any longer — even the

youngest — then only twelve days old, although I loved him the best of all.

"My father was sad for a few days; but he was naturally so light-hearted that he did not long mourn, but sought relief among his comrades, while I was left at home with the little ones."

"And you so young!" exclaimed Antonine.

"What could I do? We cannot resist the will of God! It was He who took our mother from us, and His will that I should rear the others.

"Several years passed like this; the little children had grown large, even the last one could run around now, which gave me more time to myself. I took advantage of the fine weather to gather mushrooms and wild fruit, to dry for winter, for these were the only delicacies we had.

"One day, I went in the woods with my basket to gather strawberries; it was warm, and when my basket was full I sat down on the grass. Your mother's mother — your deceased grandmother — came that day with some friends to take tea in the forest.

"There were about a dozen, who came in a coach and four. Your grandmother, who was very good, spoke to me as she passed, but I was too shy to meet her, so ran away and hid. Now and then, I would hear the horses' feet clatter, and the bells jingle; it amused me for I never had any pleasure myself, and did not know how the grandees enjoyed themselves.

"While I was there, I heard a footstep near me; I

turned round ready to run, but was curious to see what creature was coming. I recognised a man whom I had seen but twice; it was Afanasi, your grandmother's coachman. He was only eighteen, but he knew how to drive a four-in-hand better than any one in the neighborhood. If you could have seen him drive your grandmother's coach to church, Sundays!"

Niania stopped a moment, sighed, and made the sign of the cross.

"Afanasi," she continued, "appeared to me handsomer than the sun. He had a blonde beard, and when he smiled I thought the Heavens opened and I saw the Father with his angels. Afanasi asked me my name, and told me I was pretty ——"

Niania stopped again.

"I recall my old sin," said she; "it is the evil spirit that inspires me, of yore."

"No, no;" said Antonine, who was leaning on one elbow, with eyes sparkling; "tell me all. You loved him?"

"I loved him more than my life!" said the old woman. "No one, except my father and the children, had ever said a kind word to me. The neighbors said I was proud and would not speak to the villagers; but I was not proud, I was timid.

"With Afanasi, I was also timid; but he knew how to reassure me. At first, I would look at him under my elbow, which I put before my face like our young girls when they are ashamed, but I ended by looking

him straight in the eyes. I loved him so much that when I failed to see him, if only at a distance as he was washing his master's carriages, I was sad all day, and at night cried so that I could not sleep.

"It was six weeks since I first met Afanasi in the woods; I had seen him in the barn and different places, but I was so shy, I dared not trust myself with him for a minute. It was very funny! Before seeing him I was so uneasy I could scarcely stand still; hours seemed years to me, and when I went to meet him I went slowly, and then if he attempted to put his arm around me, or kiss me, I would run away across the field and hide behind a tree or hay-stack, there to watch for him, and if I saw him I was happy until the next day.

"One evening, I was standing at the corner of the avenue which led to the gentleman's house, and I saw Afanasi going towards the stables, I thought him so handsome my heart went out to him, then I knew when he disappeared behind that wall I would be sad again. As I stood there, my father was coming home from work earlier than usual, he crept up behind and tapped me on the shoulder, which made me jump with fright!"

"What are you looking at?" said he, jestingly, "handsome Afanasi's long legs?"

I had never told a lie, so I was all in a flurry. My father continued:

"They say he is courting you! Trust him not, my child, he is a deceiver, don't believe one word he says."

"But, father," I answered, for I was offended at the

manner in which he spoke of my great friend, "he has never said anything bad to me."

"I should hope not, the scamp! He makes love to the miller's daughter and Madame's maid at the same time; if he cannot have one for a wife, he will take the other. He is deep! and will never marry a poor girl! he does not like wooden shoes, he prefers a woman who wears kid boots!"

"I looked down at my bare feet, my father shrugged his shoulders, and went off. Must I believe my father, and suppose Afanasi was deceiving me? It was true he had never spoken of marriage, and I dared not broach the subject, but believed he loved me enough to be willing to spend his life with me. I went home, gave my little flock their supper, and put them to bed, then curled myself on the floor as usual for the night, and began to reflect. No, I could not admit that my father was joking me, although he was fond of jesting, yet this was a serious matter, and he would not knowingly grieve one of his children, for he loved them all. I determined to ask Afanasi if he were courting the miller's daughter and Madame's maid, but was afraid if I asked him that question, he would get angry, and would cease to love me.

"The maid was a girl who had been brought up in the great house, and thought herself much better than we country girls; she scarcely spoke to us on *fête* days. I determined to go and see the miller's daughter, she lived only a short distance from us on the river, and we

were nearly the same age, but she had nothing to do, and I was busy all the time.

"The next day, after putting the house in order, I told my father I was going to find some crawfish in a hole that I knew just beyond the mill, and started off with my basket. As I passed behind the commons of the manor, I heard Afanasi laughing and joking in a loud tone. I recognized his voice for it always went to my heart, and I heard a woman's voice also, but could not tell if it were the maid or some one else, for I ran by so fast. From that time I was very sad; I felt my trip was useless, I had seen enough to open my eyes; but you know my child when we are sorrowful we don't want to believe anything that grieves us more; we want to stop up eyes and ears, and wait until Evil knocks them on the head, and cries out, 'Look me in the face,' and when we turn, we see that the picture is not new to us, but has been familiar for a long time.

"I went to the mill all the same; Paracha, the miller's daughter, was sitting in the door feeding the young chickens with the grain that had dropped when the men unloaded the wagons.

"'Good morning,' said she to me, 'we don't see you often now!'

"'I do not have the time,' said I, 'there are too many children at home.'

"She made me come in, offered me kvass, buttermilk, macaroons, and other good things, and placed on the table a loaf of spiced bread, with her name on the top in red sugar letters.

"'Who gave you this?' I asked with beating heart, for I almost knew what her answer would be.

"'It was my *fiancé*, the coachman Afanasi,' replied she, blushing with joy and pride. 'My parents allow him to come to the house now, and make me presents; we are engaged, and if the folks do not go to town for the winter we will be married at Epiphany; if they go, we will wait until after Easter."

"'Indeed!' I said to myself, 'we learn our troubles!'

"'Well! are you not going to congratulate me?' asked Paracha, looking at me with astonishment.

"I don't know how I managed to get up, kiss her three times, and make a low curtsey. I complimented her, then she took me up stairs to see her *trousseau*. It was magnificent, for her mother had been working on it since she was twelve years of age. There was everything; embroidered towels, which she intended giving to the groomsmen, to the priest, the deacon, the church, in fact, everybody. There were at least forty. She had Crétonne laces in red and blue, jackets trimmed with gold buttons; silk handkerchiefs, and dresses like those of Madame's maid.

"'My parents will not allow me to wear them until I am married, because I am only a country girl, but when I am the wife of Afanasi I will put on fashionable dresses like a lady.'

"While she showed me all these things I thought, what a rich bride she would be; she was as pretty as I,

and wore one long braid, which hung down as long as yours, my dear. You know our girls plait all their hair in one braid. I concluded I was very foolish to think of Afanasi's love when such a beautiful, rich girl, did not think herself too good for him.

"'Has he been courting you long?' asked I, hoping she would say 'no.'

"'It will be a year at the *fête* of the Virgin,' said she, triumphantly.

"All the winter and the spring! he had trifled with me then, as one picks a flower on the roadside only to throw it away when something more attractive is found; he thought me pretty enough to tell me so, and had I been less wise, he would have taken advantage of my folly and blindness! Fortunately, God and my guardian angel protected me! and then one is more careful when she has the care of eight children!

"'Well! I am going,' said I to Paracha, getting up.

"'Already? where are you going?'

"'To look for crawfish in the river.'

"'And you?' said she suddenly; 'are you going to get married soon?'

"I don't know what demon prompted me to throw my head back, proudly, and say:

"'I hope so, indeed! I will invite you to my wedding.'

"'And you will come to mine,' said Paracha, as she accompanied me to the door.

"I started off bravely, under the midday sun, and

pretended to be very gay; but when I reached the hole for crawfish, I had not the courage to look for any, but sat down on the thick, green grass in this retired spot and cried until I had no more tears to shed.

"When I was tired of crying, I bathed my swollen face in the river — the water was always cold in this shady spot — I took my empty basket and went on.

"I had to pass by the mill; I walked fast, so that Paracha would not stop and ask if I had good luck. She did not see me; but I had not gone many steps before I saw Afanasi striding towards the mill, with his usual contented air. When he saw me, he appeared a little astonished, but smiled, as he said:

"'Where are you coming from, my pretty maid?'

"'From the mill,' I replied. 'Let me congratulate you, Afanasi, that you are going to marry such a beauty, and she will be rich enough to strut up and down the town! You are right, since she loves you!'

"I started to go, but he held my hand.

"'The wedding is not yet,' said he, cunningly, and tried to make me believe it was some time off.

"I felt the blood boil in my veins. 'For shame!' I cried,—'shame on you! You trifle with young girls—you are a deceiver, a vile hypocrite — and I have but one regret, and that is, that I ever looked upon your coward's face or listened to your treacherous words. Leave me!'

"I tore my hand from his with such indignation, that he drew back a little.

"'My dear!' he stammered; 'don't be angry. I was only jesting; excuse me. Did you tell Paracha?'

"'What did I have to tell her?' I replied, folding my arms and looking him full in the face.

"'You did not tell her that—that I flirted with you?'

"He looked so cowardly, so cringing, that I forgot my anger.

"'No,' I replied, picking up my basket, which I had let fall in my temper; 'no; I told her nothing. I was wrong, perhaps, because she believes she is marrying an honest man, and she will marry a wretch.' But I was ashamed to admit my folly. 'Go and claim your rich bride!'

"And I laughed in his face, and ran away at full speed. When I came home, my father asked why my basket was empty. As he seldom scolded me particularly for trifles, I told him I stopped at the miller's.

"'That is right,' said he, 'you should amuse yourself, your life is not very gay, for you have all the cares of a married woman without having a husband.'

"He said no more about it. It was a long time, my dear, before I could think Afanasi was a miserable scamp, without any heart; when I thought of him, it hurt me as much as if one had run a knife through my heart. I tried my best to forget it, but when one has drunk of the poison of love, it takes a long time to get over it."

Niania, who had been talking with her eyes cast

down, looked up piteously to Antonine, who said to her;

"There are some, Niania, who never recover."

"So they say," replied the old nurse; "as for me, I was too busy, I had not time to think of the wretch, and at night, was so tired I sometimes forgot my prayers; but nobody knows what tales Afanasi told of me, for Paracha never looked at me afterwards, pretended she did not see me, as if I had done her some harm. This grieved me, and I married a farmer in a short time, without thinking about it. I wanted to be married before Paracha, because young girls have to wait for married women to recognize them first."

"Well, were you happy with your husband?" asked Antonine.

Niania was silent a moment. "He was a wicked man," said she, finally; "but he is dead, God have mercy on his soul!"

"How was he wicked?" inquired the young girl.

"He beat me, and as I was not accustomed to such treatment, it was hard to bear — but a married woman must submit."

"He is dead?"

"He died a few years after our marriage, leaving me with two children. I grieved for him, because a wife should always mourn her husband, but his death was a relief to me rather than a sorrow."

"And your children?"

"That was my greatest trial. I lost them, one after the other, with a fever which was prevailing through the country. It was then that I realised that no grief was like the sorrow of burying one's children."

Antonine turned her head away, and her face was in the shadow.

"Yes," continued Niania, dreamily, for she seemed to be following the same train of thoughts; "the children that you have brought into the world, nurtured and reared, are dearer to you than any thing else. After my husband was taken, my children were left me; when they were gone, there was nothing. I could not eat — your deceased grandmother took pity on me and took me to wait on her. God have mercy on her! I can well say, she saved my life, for my dead children were dragging me down to the grave!"

Antonine put her white feverish hand on the cool wrinkled palm of the old servant.

"Yes, I know you love me," said the humble woman; "and the reason I love you and your father is, because you remind me of my children. Heavens! how long ago that seems!"

Niania wiped her eyes with her apron, and arose.

"Your mamma would scold if she knew we were talking so late, instead of sleeping. But my darling, I must pour out your cough-mixture for you."

"Put it on the table; I will take it in a moment," said Antonine.

Niania obeyed; arranged the little room, so that all

was delicately fresh, lighted the taper, blessed the young girl, and went out. When left alone, Antonine got up, opened the window and threw the potion in the street; she intended to stand in the night air, but her courage failed her.

"Enough! enough!" she murmured; "my strength is fast ebbing away!"

She went back to bed, but her sleep was feverish and disturbed by horrible dreams. Niania's story and Dournof's face distracted her weary brain.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRUTH IS TOLD.

"I don't know what is the matter with Antonine," said Madame Karzof to her meek husband, as they sat alone in the dining-room. She seems so weary, and coughs a little — I am afraid she is going to be ill!"

"You must send for the doctor," said the good man, sententiously. "One should never neglect the first symptoms of a malady. Sometimes a slight indisposition becomes dangerous, merely from ——"

"Heavens! How seriously you talk!" cried Madame Karzof, impatiently. "The doctor came yesterday."

"Ah! Well, what did he say?"

"He said, to continue the potion, and he gave her a powder, too."

"Antonine will be better in a few days," added M. Karzof, who professed great veneration for the words of the Faculty. His wife had not as much faith in the efficacy of their remedies. She was silent a moment.

"Do you know, Karzof," she said at last, "I have an idea that Antonine loves Dournof more than we think!"

"Why should she love him? Have you spoken to her lately about him?"

"No! Since we went to the circus, she has never opened her mouth on the subject!"

"That proves she has not thought of him!"

Madame Karzof shook her head.

"Antonine is not the girl to forget the man she has been begging me so long to permit her to marry!"

"Well, what then?" said Karzof — intelligence was not one of his virtues.

His wife looked at him, as much as to say: "You are not one of Nature's gifted sons!"

She leaned towards him, and spoke more confidentially.

"We have, perhaps, been wrong in wishing Antonine to marry one man, when she loved another. I thought she would have forgotten him, but she has not! She may in time — not now. If the thing had not gone so far, I would rather break my word with Titolof."

"Break your word with the General!" cried Karzof, as much horrified as if a house had fallen on him.

"Don't talk so loud! she will hear you. Yes, I would break my promise to the General. After all, I don't care for him! Antonine is our child, and I want her to live!"

Madame Karzof burst into tears. Her husband, more stupefied than ever, stood looking at her, until finally, gathering up two or three ideas, stammered out:

"Is she so ill?"

"I don't know that she is so ill, but the expression of her eyes pains and alarms me. She has the air of forgiving me, and I have tried to be angry, but could never find words to express my feelings."

"Why don't you question her?" said Karzof, completely upset.

"I know perfectly what she will reply. It is not worth while to talk to her until I have broached the subject to Titolof. You are a man, Karzof, you should take this upon yourself. See if he would release us from our promise."

"I — I will try," declared the good man, bravely — somewhat moved by his wife's tears, but terrified to think of talking to Titolof about anything except the ordinary affairs of life. He felt that he was created neither an orator nor a diplomatist.

Antonine came into the dining-room, making excuses for rising so late. For some time she had not risen early, as she often could not sleep until morning.

"It makes no difference, Nina," said Madame Karzof; "kiss us, my child — we are not compelled to rise at a certain hour, fortunately."

Surprised at such unusual indulgence the young girl looked at her mother, and saw she had been crying. Remorse seized her, and not for the first time; she thought, with a contrite heart, of the sorrow she should soon cause her parents.

The old people looked at Antonine. How changed were those beautiful eyes! Her colorless skin indicated an impoverishment of her blood; her hair seemed thinner and lighter on the temples, where a network of veins was perceptible. They exchanged a look, and Madame Karzof began talking in a playful, familiar manner with her daughter.

"Would you like to go to the concert this evening?"

"Yes," replied Antonine, carelessly.

"There is to be a charming concert at the Assembly Hall, and if you wish, your father will take two tickets for us."

Antonine looked at her mother, scarcely believing her ears.

"For you and me, mamma?" she asked.

"Yes, for us; we will take a carriage, and go alone in fine style."

Without Titolof! This was an unexpected joy for Antonine, who consented with more vivacity than she had shown for some time. As her father went to his business he promised to stop and buy the tickets. In the afternoon the General arrived with his usual grace of manner, and met several persons in the salon. Karzof, being detained by going for the tickets, found his future son-in-law just taking leave of the ladies, so he had not time to say a word to him.

Antonine was very much overcome as she entered the concert hall; the heat, perfumes, lights of a crowded room, made her feel quite faint, but she summoned up strength enough to walk across the hall, and sit down by her mother. During the past fifteen days her disease had made rapid progress. Her medicines she had thrown out of the window, the powders which still remained in her drawer, were indeed wasted; prescriptions from the family physician, who was skillful enough, but never dreamed that his patient was neglecting his

orders. He thought Antonine's malady was only a slight cough, augmented by the unusual severity of the season. Under the excitement of dressing and coming out, she looked far better than usual. She glanced around the upper galleries where those persons who were unwilling to take the trouble of making a toilette, could enjoy the music just as well for a moderate price — thinking she would see Dournof there, as she had sent word to him by Niania that he must certainly come.

Sure enough he was there, just above the orchestra, immediately in front of her. He sent her a quiet kiss, by touching his fingers to his lips, which sign she returned by bowing her head; after this they never lost sight of each other. Their spirits floated together upon that music into space where all was light and gay, where even suffering becomes etherealized.

Antonine's nerves, which had been so long on a stretch, vibrated like the strings of the violoncello; she was so happy to feel that she was breathing with him that impassioned atmosphere, laden with sweet harmonies from the orchestra, that she entirely forgot the horrors that awaited her.

The symphony finished after the first *entr'acte*, when a favorite tenor came on the stage. After the orchestra played the introduction, Edgar commenced in Italian the air in *Lucia:*

"Bientôt, l' herbe des champs croîtra
Sur ma tombe isolée!"

Antonine, brought back to the realities of life, uttered

a little scream, threw back her head, and fainted away. There was soon a crowd gathered around her, but the trombones drowned the sound of the noise made in taking her out, and the tenor sang his aria with the greatest well-merited success.

When Antonine recovered consciousness, in the little reception-room where they had carried her, she heard the enthusiastic applause which announced the end of the piece.

"Excuse me," said she, as soon as she could speak, "I am very sorry, mamma; take me home!"

Some one offered to find their carriage. Antonine's extreme beauty, and the almost superhuman expression of suffering in her eyes, had attracted around her several men of the best society, and two old noblemen, well known in St. Petersburg, would not yield their place to any one, in putting the young girl in her carriage. On the steps, near the door, stood Dournof, pale and agitated. Antonine looked up at him with such a sad, sweet smile, that the young man was moved to the very depths of his soul.

"She will die," he said to himself, bitterly. "How is it that no one sees the truth?"

He followed the little procession, and stood near the carriage-door; as Antonine put her foot on the step, it was Dournof's hand that assisted her. Madame Karzof, however, was so disturbed, that she did not even see him. After the conversation with her husband in the morning, this fainting alarmed her very much;

she overwhelmed Antonine with such tenderness that the girl was conscience-stricken that she had doubted that mother's love. Monsieur Karzof was much distressed when he heard of his daughter's illness, and assisted by his son Jean, they carried her to her room, in spite of Antonine's entreaties and assurances that it was simply giddiness, caused by the heat. Madame Karzof insisted upon undressing and putting her daughter to bed, unassisted, and Antonine had to submit to her mother's tearful cares. At last she persuaded her she was sleepy and wanted to be left alone. Madame went out of her daughter's room, wrote a note to the doctor, asking him to call the first thing in the morning.

"Niania," said Antonine, sweetly; the nurse, thinking she was asleep, was moving around the room, on tiptoe; "Niania, go down, quickly, to the street, Dournof must be there, and tell him there is nothing serious the matter; we will see each other before long. Go quickly!"

Niania lingered to ask a question, but Antonine repeated, "Quickly," so the poor old woman hastened to obey.

She returned in a few minutes, and said:

"You were right, my angel, he was there; he told me to tell you to be careful, that you frightened him very much, and he loved you madly. Ah, my children! what game are you playing? It is enough to kill you, my sweet one!"

A sad smile brightened Antonine's face as she murmured, "Good-night," and turned away from the light.

All the household were asleep a few hours later, when Niania awoke with a start, thinking something had happened. In her bare feet, she ran to Antonine's room, opening the door cautiously. She found the young girl kneeling in her white night dress before the Holy Images, praying and weeping with clasped hands. Incoherent words fell from her lips; she had wept so much that she had not the strength to rise.

"Forgive me, Father," she murmured, "and receive me into Paradise. I suffer, I suffer too much! What sorrow for him, and for them! Sinner that I am, if God rejects me, what will become of me? I am so young! Oh, my God, I, — I cannot"—

She would have fallen on the floor if Niania, who had been listening in breathless horror, had not caught her, and with unnatural strength given her for the moment, laid Antonine again on her bed. The young girl recognized her faithful nurse, smiled, then closed her eyes and relapsed into unconsciousness.

"Help! help!" cried Niania, "The young lady is dying!"

Every one was soon aroused, and the usual remedies applied, but Madame Karzof determined to send immediately for the physician.

In an hour's time he arrived; he loved Antonine devotedly, but his skill was not equal to his affection. He pronounced her case nervous prostration, and ordered perfect quiet. The next day, or rather the same day, when Titolof came, Monsieur Karzof was embarrassed when he met him.

"Is Mademoiselle well?" asked the gallant *fiancé*, after the first greeting.

"Not precisely," replied the good man, "we will have to tell you ——"

"How? is she sick?" asked the suitor, assuming the sad expression which he thought necessary in such a case.

"Yes, that is — she fainted twice last night."

The General lifted his eyebrows, which play of feature meant "what a misfortune! how you astonish me!"

"And the doctor, what does he say? I suppose you have called in medical aid?"

"Certainly! The doctor said she must avoid all excitement; he orders absolute quiet," replied Karzof, who had learned the phrase by heart.

Titolof again raised his eyebrows.

"It is unfortunate! very unfortunate!" said he, "a young person who seemed to enjoy such excellent health!"

"She has always been well — it is only since she has been engaged, that she"——

Titolof looked so serious that Karzof dared not finish the sentence; he commenced another, thinking it might be easier.

"When do you leave St Petersburg, General?" he asked, fawningly.

"The second week after Easter, at all risks," replied the officer with a melancholy air.

"Indeed! That is bad! You see, General, I am afraid my daughter will not be well enough by that time."

Titolof jumped up as if some one had run a needle into him.

"But then?" he asked with numerous interrogation points in his voice and gesture.

"Well yes, General!" replied Karzof, bowing his head as if he had received a reprimand.

"How yes? I dare not understand you, Sir; if I hear rightly you intend going back on your word."

"I am not going back on my word," said Karzof, looking up, "but my daughter is ill, and the physician says she should have no excitement; marriage is exciting, and under present circumstances — even if she should recover, as soon as we sincerely hope, she could not be married before four or five months, yes, four or five months," repeated Karzof, with complacency, thinking what a trick he was playing on the General.

"Four or five months! And I ought to be married before my departure, and I must go a fortnight from Easter. You ought to have told me that before," he said, turning furiously towards Kerzof, who was very much disconcerted. Fortunately Madame Karzof came in the salon at that moment. Without even bowing to her ex-future son-in-law she said sharply:

"You might have known you did not please my daughter!"

"She never said anything disagreeable to me," said Titolof, somewhat confused by this unexpected attack.

"As if that were necessary!" Do you think we are so badly brought up in our family as to say disagreeable things to persons whom we receive?"

A general *mêlée* followed, and Titolof retired, repeating in an irritated tone:

"We must tell everybody! Where can I find a woman who will become my wife fifteen days after Easter? I must be at my post in five weeks, and married! Nobody makes visits in Holy week! Good heavens! Everybody must be informed — where to turn I can't tell!"

Jean Karzof, hearing this chapter of lamentations, put his head out of his door which opened in the hall, and quietly contemplated the discomfiture of the abhorred Titolof. When the door was shut on the conquered General, he took his hat and coat and started out, but changed his mind, for he stopped in his sister's room.

Antonine, who was no longer able to stand, lay on a couch; her dressing-gown concealed how thin she had grown. When she saw her brother, she smiled and offered him her hand.

"They have sent off your General," said Jean. He stopped. His sister sprung up, clung to the back of the chair and looked wildly at him.

"What do you say?" she asked, all out of breath.

"Zounds!" thought Jean. They said she could bear no excitement. But this can do her no harm of course!"

He resumed cautiously:

"My father has just told Titolof that you were ill,

and as the General is in a greater hurry to find a wife than we are to get rid of you, he must look elsewhere. Are you satisfied?"

"Ah!" cried Antonine, with a despairing cry. "Too late! Too late!"

At this sound, her parents who were in the salon — not dreaming of their son's folly — ran to her in haste.

"Forgive me, my dear parents," stammered Antonine. "I doubted you and thought you did not love me enough! Forgive me. What have I done!"

She wrung her hands, and looked supplicatingly at them, as great tears rolled down to her dressing-gown.

"She is delirious!" cried the mother. Some soothing-powders, quick! Her powders!"

She opened the drawer where these powders had been kept. Alas! they were all there!

"Unhappy girl! what have you done?"

"Forgive me," said Antonine, sinking back on the pillow.

"What is the matter?" asked Jean in a frightened voice.

"The powders are all there; she has not taken one! Wretched child! do you want to die?"

Antonine, without replying, began coughing terribly, and put her handkerchief to her mouth. The handkerchief was stained with blood when she removed it.

"Ah!" said Madame Karzof, clasping her hands; "if we have been harsh towards you, my child, you have punished us severely enough!"

Antonine did not speak. She, too, was punished!

CHAPTER XIII.

WE ARE TO BLAME.

THE next day at eleven o'clock, the most celebrated specialist of lung diseases, Dr. Z——, was at the bed-side of the young girl. His *confrère*, whose negligence had caused such serious results, was near him, contrite and full of remorse, while the medical celebrity made a thorough examination of Antonine's lungs.

When the illustrious practitioner had finished, he put the poor child gently down on her pillow.

"It will be nothing," he said, smiling; "a little patience, and we will cure you! It is only an affair of six weeks."

He smiled again, pressed her hand, asked for paper to write a prescription, and passed into the sitting-room where the parents and Jean were. Niania and the old physician stayed with Antonine, repeating to her those consoling words.

"Then Doctor," said the father, looking timidly at him; "you think——"

Dr. Z——, when assured that the door was closed, said in a low tone:

"It is useless to deceive you; in six weeks she will die."

"It is impossible!" cried the mother. "It cannot be! God can not——"

"Do not make a noise," interrupted the doctor; "it is galloping consumption which cannot be stopped; her sufferings we can alleviate, but not cure. Give her what she wants; refuse her nothing, even the most extravagant demands, for you will never have to execute your promises."

The two old people wept silently and bitterly.

"But, Doctor," said the mother, through her tears, "how did it happen?"

"A neglected cold. You told me she did not take her medicines; they were well prescribed, why did she not take them?"

They looked at each other like two culprits, caught in the act.

"She had some secret sorrow," murmured Madame Karzof.

"Ah! heart sorrow? That happens sometimes; they desire to die, and when death comes, they want to retreat — but it is too late now. So she is in love?"

"Yes," answered the father, solemnly.

"Well, you know what you are to do," said the doctor.

He wrote a prescription, finished the consultation, and continued:

"I may be mistaken, for no one is infallible. Send for another physician, he may find her condition less serious than I suppose, but I do not think she can live more than six weeks."

When he left, the parents continued to weep; the

blow had been so sudden, so unexpected, that they were completely overcome.

"All physicians lie!" said Madame Karzof. "I am sure it is not true; we will have a consultation of three, to-morrow, will we not, Karzof?"

"Certainly!" he murmured; "I will see to it at once. Ah! wife, what a misfortune! Our Antonine, who was so beautiful, and so well a month ago, when we gave that ball!"

"Six weeks ago," said the wife, who was in the habit of rectifying her husband's mistakes. "She was so bright the day we went to the circus!"

"It was that day she took cold! her cloak would not stay on her shoulders, and she was so lightly clothed. Why did she not take her powders?" said the terrified father; "she would have been cured by this time! She was told often enough, why did she not obey?"

This thought nearly broke his heart. A solemn silence pervaded the apartment. Jean suddenly arose, and went to the door.

"Where are you going?" asked the mother mechanically.

"I am going for Dournof," replied the young man, in a voice that should have been firm, but his strength failed him, and he burst into tears, as he closed the door.

Left alone, the two old people looked at each other and said, simultaneously:

"We are to blame!"

CHAPTER XIV.

HIS FOREVER.

JEAN found his friend busy at work. It was seldom one saw him otherwise than bending over his desk.

Young Karzof's face was so changed by grief that Dournof led him towards the window to question him more closely.

"What misfortune now?" he asked, briefly.

Jean dropped upon a chair, and made a gesture, which meant "all is lost."

"What!" cried Dournof. "Is she to be married in spite of every thing?"

"No," replied Jean, "worse yet."

"How worse yet?"

Dournof drew back with wild despairing eyes and leaned against the wall for support.

"She is not dead, speak," he said in a low concentrated voice.

"No," said Jean, "thank God!—but she is dying!"

Dournof passed his hand across his eyes.

"I thought so," he said, "and she vowed she would not live."

After he had recovered sufficiently from the shock, Dournof listened to all that had transpired at the

Karzofs': Antonine's illness—her concealment of it as long as possible — the reception Titolof had received — the fiat of Dr. Z—— and finally the tacit permission granted by the parents for Dournof to resume his visits.

"If happiness can save her, you will do it," said Jean, in finishing his sad story. "Although the doctor has said so, I cannot reconcile myself to the idea that she is doomed. She does not look really ill, and except excessive weakness, and sometimes a little blood on her handkerchief, no one would suppose she was seriously affected. Physicians are sometimes mistaken. If you would only bring her back to life."

"They would shut the door on me again," interrupted Dournof, bitterly, "and find another General for Antonine! I understand the world my friend! Your parents are neither better, nor worse than the rest of mankind. Come, let us be off!"

He threw on his overcoat hurriedly, and the two young men walked towards the Karzofs' house; as he came near the door, he could not control his temper.

"When I think," said he, "I went out from here scarcely a month ago, leaving Antonine the picture of health, and that now it is too late to save her! She has succeeded too well in her work."

"You will save her!" said Jean, trying to comfort his friend, fully believing moreover, in the efficacy of joy; "I assure you that the doctor was mistaken, and if he be wrong, you will owe your happiness to his blunder."

They went out and took their way to Monsieur Karzof's office.

During their absence the old couple had suffered a severe trial. After the consultation Antonine was so fatigued that she fell asleep, and Niania—full of hope—came to them to hear this hope confirmed. When she learned that the Doctor's soothing words were a pious fabrication intended merely to deceive Antonine, the old woman was completely crushed.

"What?" said she, "it is not true, and our young lady must die?"

Tears were Madame Karzof's only answer.

The old woman seemed to grow in stature as she said reprovingly:

"It is your fault; you have disobeyed those laws of God which leave every heart free to love. You have preferred a worldly position to the happiness of your child, and God will take her from you as a punishment."

"Niania," interrupted M. Karzof, "you are losing your mind! How can you speak so to your employers?"

"It is your punishment," continued Niania, without being disconcerted; "your daughter never grieved you, never caused you anything but pride and joy, and you have afflicted her without cause. The young man was poor it is true, but he had merit and loved your daughter."

"He loved her for her money," said the incorrigible Madame Karzof.

"It is not true," retorted Niania, vehemently, "it is not true, and you know it well. You mortally wounded Antonine by that falsehood, it broke her heart, she has never been happy since that day."

"But," said the mother, without seeing that she was defending herself against her servant's accusation, "she should have said so! It was not necessary to keep silent, doubting our love in this way."

"She told you," replied the old woman, still rigid, and almost threatening, "for weeks past she implored you every day not to marry her to that old imbecile you had chosen, an empty-headed creature with not a grain of sense in his brain, while she loved that boy who had more in his little finger than all of us put together. She begged you to spare her; did you listen to her prayer?"

"I did not believe it was serious," said the mother, ashamed of herself.

"That is your only excuse! It is nevertheless your fault. Why did you not bring up your child yourself? and why did you oppose her in everything? I am but a poor peasant, but I knew she was in earnest when she said to me, 'It will kill me!' I felt the angel of death hovering over her. Yes," continued Niania, and the old couple bowed their heads under the weight of her words — "Antonine has committed a great sin in voluntarily seeking death; but you are responsible before God for this sin. He gave you this soul to guard, and you did not watch over it. We, who loved her so

much, must be unhappy too, because you preferred gold and titles to the happiness of your child!"

All this pierced through the heart of the mother and father like so many arrows. Poor creatures! they had sinned from foolishness, ignorance, and lack of caution; but their cross was heavy to bear.

"And what will you tell the young man?" asked Niania. "The good Lord destined Antonine for him, since their love was mutual, and you have put asunder what God had joined together."

"If Antonine lives, I swear he shall have her," sobbed Madame Karzof.

"I swear it," repeated the husband, solemnly.

At this moment the door-bell rang.

"Go, Niania, and if it be strangers, say 'we are not at home.'"

Niania, suddenly restored to her *rôle* of servant, humbly opened the door. It was Jean and Dournof. She asked them to enter the office, and went to tell the parents.

"Already!" said Madame Karzof; she felt a sort of terror at the thought of appearing before Dournof. She felt that the young man would hold her responsible for Antonine's life. Finally, drying her eyes, and composing herself, she went in.

Dournof arose at her appearance and saluted her coldly and respectfully. Madame Karzof intended to intimidate him, and make him feel that he had returned to the house under peculiar circumstances; but at the

sight of his well-known face, welcome in her home for so many years, she threw herself on his neck, utterly overcome, and sobbed out:

"Try to save her, and she is yours!"

"I want Antonine, without her dowry," replied the young lawyer.

"Yes, certainly, but try to save her, dear Féodor, and we will love you as our own son."

Dournof kissed Madame Karzof's hand, and received a silent embrace from the father.

"Can I see her?" he asked immediately.

"She is not prepared," replied the mother; "but such a joy." She hesitated, as if she wanted to speak, but was silent.

"I dare not," she said, finally, "I am afraid."

"Niania will tell her," said Jean, "she knows her better than any of us."

Madame Karzof sighed. It was hard for her to hear it openly asserted that an old servant knew her child's heart better than she, but it was a humiliation well deserved.

Niania was told to prepare Antonine, who had just awakened, and all the family anxiously hovered near the door.

"My birdie, what will you have?" asked the good old nurse.

"Give me something to drink. I feel better after my sleep."

She looked around with a contented air.

"Is it true, Niania, that Titolof has gone away, and they will never speak of him to me again?"

"Indeed it is true. He is looking elsewhere for a wife," said Niania, gayly, "he is in a hurry you see!"

Antonine smiled. It was the first step towards happiness, to be rid of that odious person.

"We are going to give you anything in the world you ask for now, to hasten your recovery. Anything, without exception! Now, ask for something."

"Oh! Niania! Everything! That is impossible. There are some things they would not give me."

"And what is one of them?"

Antonine blushed. The color lighted up her face like a fugitive sunbeam playing upon her emaciated cheeks.

"They will not let me see Dournof!"

"Do you think not? I believe they will. Let me try?"

"Oh, no!" said Antonine, holding her back, timidly. "No."

"I am going to see," persisted the old nurse, as she went towards the door.

She went out, but returned immediately.

"He is coming," she said.

"Ah," exclaimed Antonine, sadly, "I must be very ill!"

This remark was like a sword-thrust to Madame Karzof; but this mother's heart, so indifferent before, began now to measure her love by her sufferings.

Dournof could wait no longer; he rushed towards Antonine, and threw himself on the floor at her side.

"You are mine, forever," he murmured.

She took his head between her hands, and looked incredulously in his eyes.

"You are mine," he repeated — "mine forever!"

Antonine leaned her head on the young man's shoulder, closed her eyes, — and they exchanged their first kiss.

Niania shut the door, and left them together, while the family wept in the adjoining room.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GRAVE.

DURING the first days of their *réunion*, the young people thought they had defied fate, for in that atmosphere of peace and happiness Antonine revived. Dournof gave up everything, and passed his entire days with Antonine, only going home to sleep. Their repasts were the happiest part of the day, for the table was laid by the side of Antonine's couch, which she never left, and Niania waited on them, while the family dined in the next room.

To look at the young girl, no one would have supposed her life was in danger. Her complexion, always pale, had become a clear white, a faint flush on either cheek grew brighter only when she had fever; her cough was not very painful, but she did not recover her strength. Every one thought Dr. Z—— was mistaken, so Madame Karzof called in three other physicians for a consultation.

The result blasted the hopes of the parents, for that "their daughter would not live to see the roses bloom," was the sad sentence.

They, in their despair, insisted that this decision was stupidity or deception, for their daughter was better, and "all doctors were fools!" This last opinion emanated from M. Karzof's brain.

Antonine's room had become the family rendezvous; it was there dinner was ordered, and that all discussions took place. Jean read the papers aloud, and M. Karzof there distributed his stock of news and gossip. Dournof brought flowers, but flowers without perfume, for Antonine could not bear any strong odors. The friends of the family, warned of the young girl's danger, came in numbers to see her, each bringing some trifle or *souvenir*, and could scarcely believe such radiant beauty could be doomed. Soon the tables and the *etagéres* were laden down with presents.

The band of young men appeared at the first intelligence of Antonine's state. Among them, was a medical student who had nearly finished his course; if Dournof had any doubts, they vanished when he saw the affectionate pity exhibited by his friend towards Antonine; how he humored her slightest whims, and watched her with such sadness when she was not looking.

The young girls, her old companions, came in numbers to see her also, and no one knew how much they thought of her until she was about to be taken from them; how much good advice she had given them, how many sorrows she had alleviated by word and deed! Each one wanted to see her once more, as if they had never seen her before.

Antonine received all these attentions, these proofs of love, as the most natural thing in the world. Her brain, a little weary from so long a struggle, and so much sorrow, began to grow weaker from the progress of the

malady, so that she did not wonder at the number of visitors constantly in her room, and only thought how pleasant it was to have her friends with her. This diversion prevented the great joy she experienced in seeing Dournof, having any ill effect upon her. When they were left alone after one of those busy days, and Niania — always silent and sad — had rolled the table near her couch, Antonine stretched out her hand to Dournof, who bent over her as she fell back on the pillow, and whispered to him:

"I am so happy!"

Towards night, her fever came on, when Antonine's eyes sparkled with an unnatural fire, a red light flamed on her transparent cheek — they talked of traveling in a foreign country for her health.

"As soon as the fine weather comes," she said; "the first warm days of May, we will leave for Italy; we will be married then!"

Dournof pressed her hand affectionately, smiling, but his heart was full.

"We will go to Florence; they say we cannot fancy how many flowers grow thereabouts. Then in the autumn, we will return here; mamma will have a bright sunny apartment for us. My room will be blue, I love blue! Will you not furnish in blue for me, mamma?"

"Yes," replied Madame Karzof; "pale blue."

"Very pale, with white curtains, embroidered. They will be expensive, but one only marries a daughter once; papa, is not that so?"

Karzof murmured something like an assent, and went out with his great silk handkerchief to his eyes, his wife looking anxiously after him.

Several days passed thus; Antonine hoping always that the next day she would be able to get up, but she was too languid to leave her bed. They would lift her to the sofa, but even this effort was more than she could bear at times.

One evening, burning with fever, she sat up some time.

"I am better, much better, you see, Dournof! I want to go in the salon to surprise mamma and papa, and then it is so long since I have had any music. I want to play the piano."

She got up, took a few steps, then staggered, still leaning upon the young man, but as she turned her sweet face toward him she grew deadly pale, and clung to his shoulder. A cruel cough shook that fragile frame, and she sank down from exhaustion. He carried her back to the sofa, bent over her and watched wistfully every change of countenance, as she threw to the floor her handkerchief spotted with blood.

"It is too late! too late!" said she, with a heart-rending expression. "Too late, my friend; we will pay dearly for these days of bliss!"

The reflection of this happiness of which Death would so soon rob her, was sufficient punishment for Antonine. This life she was to leave ere long, suddenly became so bright that it made her regrets all the more

bitter. So much tenderness and devotion in everything! All obstacles were removed as by enchantment. It was a beautiful dream; paradise seemed to open before her — and she must leave all these joys.

Antonine buried her face in her hands and wept. Dournof knelt down by her.

"Do not weep," he said; "you break my heart."

She looked at him with her beautiful eyes, hollow and sunken by physical and mental suffering.

"The very time when all is so lovely, and we have only to be happy, to see life ebbing away from me —! What bitter mockery!"

Dournof covered the little feverish hands of his *fiancée* with kisses.

"Were you not suffering," said he, in a low tone, "I should not be near you!"

"That is true," she replied, sorrowfully; "I should have married Titolof. Ah!" cried the poor child; "I am not wicked! What have I done, to suffer so much!"

"The Lord chastens those whom He loves!" said the solemn voice of Niania, who had come in stealthily. "You did wrong, my child, to bring down His hand upon you. When you wanted to die, you offended your Saviour. Your malady is the chastisement He sends."

"But she will recover, Niania, she will recover!" replied Dournof, looking supplicatingly at the old woman.

"No," said Antonine, "I shall not recover. God is not the plaything of our whims. I asked him to send me Death as a blessing. He has sent it!"

She buried her head in her hands, and remained absorbed in thought.

"Let His name be praised!" she said. "I should think of nothing now, but obtaining my pardon."

When Dournof had gone, and the girl was arranged for the night in her little bed, she called Niania, who was sleeping near her on the floor, and said to her:

"Pray with, and for me, Niania, that God may forgive me."

"Poor martyr," thought the old woman, "you have won Heaven at last."

Henceforth, Niania and her pupil talked of Heaven every night; a celestial peace seemed to descend upon the girl at that time. The day belonged to Dournof, to her family, and friends; the nights were reserved for prayer.

It was not without cruel regrets, tears and frantic despair, that Antonine renounced life; often she would lift up her hands to God, and cry out:

"I will not, I cannot die!"

When she thought she was most resigned, the love of life returned, even stronger and keener than ever. These struggles were very exhausting.

The doctor, finally, to prolong a life so dear to those around her, ordered her to be taken to the country. They rented a house at Pargoloro, beautifully situated

in the midst of pine trees and larches. If anything could strengthen the sinking Antonine, it would be this soft, sweet air among the resinous forests.

In the first days of May, she left, not for Italy, the land for which she longed, but for Pargoloro. This journey, of about twenty leagues, nearly cost her her life.

Dournof, who helped to support her on pillows, thought more than once she would not reach there alive; she did however, and the next day she seemed better; the view of the lake, the hills, the woods which surrounded her, the fresh vegetation, all this gave her new life, and she began to be hopeful.

When Antonine was able to look at the landscape, she noticed a little hill overlooking the lake, on the summit of which was a small chapel built of wood.

"What is that?" she asked.

This unexpected question obtained no answer, for no one dared tell her a falsehood.

"Ah!" she said, looking at the faces around her, "I understand; it is the Cemetery. I want to be buried there, near the lake," added she, pointing to the extreme end; "I desire the last rays of the setting sun to rest on my tomb."

She lived one month longer, notwithstanding the predictions of science; kept up probably by the great love of him she was so soon to leave, helpless as a child, friendless as an orphan; — then suddenly her strength gave way.

"Listen," she said one evening to Dournof "I shall die to-morrow, I am sure. Remember, you will live for your country, and your fellow creatures. You will become rich, and celebrated; think of me then, for I have renounced everything to obtain this end. You will marry" ——

Dournof made a gesture of impatience.

"You will marry," she continued, "and you will do right. You will have children, who will grow up to be men like you, — then, if I can look down from Heaven, I shall be happy, — perfectly happy."

The following day, as she had said, Antonine breathed her last, without a struggle.

Her death was as great a blow to the family as if they had never expected it.

She was laid out in the handsomest room in the house, where old Karzof, half crazy from grief, walked backwards and forwards, pressing his daughter's hands, trying to persuade himself that stiffness was not death. The mother, busy about many things, had not time to feel so keenly; remorse would sting her when all was quiet, the house in order again, and nothing to divert her from that terrible sorrow.

Dournof, who had not slept one hour out of the twenty-four, watched by Antonine's body with the Priest, who read prayers; they relieved each other every three hours. Every now and then Dournof would leave his chair, to arrange a ribbon or a fold of that white dress, or change the position of the flowers which were

scattered everywhere; then he would solemnly kiss the forehead and hands of Antonine, and sit down again. Sometimes sleep would overcome him, and he would lean his head against the wall, and fall asleep. He reproached himself for losing those few moments in his watch by the precious remains, which were so soon to be taken away forever.

The third day, the house was filled with the family, and friends; they bore the casket containing the body of the young girl to the church.

She was very beautiful, and her expression so angelic that they did not cover her face, but enveloped her in a muslin vail, as if she were dressed for her wedding; and thus, under the bright June sunshine, they carried her to the little church.

During the burial service Dournof stood near the coffin looking at it with jealous eyes. When the time came to give a parting kiss to the deceased, he followed her parents, and imprinted a long, cold embrace upon the waxen hands of his *fiancée*. When all had performed this sad duty, the sacristans came forward with the lid, but he ordered them to stop, and asked in a low tone:

"Is there any one else?"

They looked at him with astonishment, but answered not.

He then bent over the cold form, kissed passionately that pure forehead, those sunken cheeks, and emaciated hands, and as if in desperation, himself screwed down the lid securely without assistance, then walked away.

The relatives of the young girl understood his wishes, and did not oppose him; after the lips of Dournof, no human being would touch that beloved face, which could never be his on earth.

He heard a voice near him, as they carried Antonine to the grave, in the place she had selected, where the last rays of the setting sun would rest upon it, saying:

"You and I alone loved her; the others did not know her."

Dournof turned, and saw Niania. She was not weeping, but the joy of her life was buried in that tomb.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECOND THOUGHTS.

THE Karzofs did not remain long in the house where their daughter had breathed her last. Very different from Dournof, who could have passed his life in Antonine's room, looking upon the spot where she had ceased to breathe; but it was too painful for her parents to stay in a place where the associations were so sad. They returned to the city. Madame Karzof, always practical, rented her villa to some English people, who could find no other house, as the season was so far advanced. They went back to St. Petersburg, and resumed their accustomed occupations.

Karzof went to his office in the morning, mechanically doing his work, scolding some negligent clerk, signing papers, and seeing a few men on business; then would return home. There was nothing changed. In former days, Antonine's piano, now silent, could be heard at the foot of the stairs. As soon as he would ring the music stopped, and the young girl's graceful form appeared in the doorway. Now, he entered the lonely house with his head bowed, gave his overcoat to the heart-broken Niania, went hurriedly through the salon without looking around him, for every article recalled to the afflicted father his lost daughter.

He found his wife sitting by a window with glasses on—her eyes had grown old from much weeping—knitting woolen socks for her husband and son. Karzof would breathe a sigh of grief, as well as of fatigue, and, according to his habit for the last thirty years, would ask, what had happened during his absence.

What was there to tell? Nothing had happened. Formerly the house was full of merriment and life, Antonine's young friends and their brothers coming and going incessantly; there was never a day but the bell rang at least ten times. Who would come now? Jean shunned this house, so full of painful souvenirs, and would not remain in it except at night. He reproached himself for thus forsaking his parents, but he did not love to be with them, and their grief rather excited his anger than pity.

"It was their foolishness," he would say, "their pride, which lost us our beloved Antonine!" and finally all compassion in his heart died out.

Jean was one of those who could not understand any one committing errors from ignorance. His education and natural talents elevated him far above his parents, although he did not boast of it, for he had too much sense to be proud of any superiority, but he could not understand the weaknessess and defects among the less enlightened. He might pity but not excuse.

After the first pangs of grief were over, Madame Karzof began to rebel; she could not bear the idea of being in fault. Her conceit, which had been unalterable

through life, would not suffer her to think she had committed the least error. She pondered over this subject for several weeks, debating the accusation made by her own conscience, and after long research, found some one else guilty of Antonine's death.

"Do you know, Karzof," said she to her husband, after a solitary dinner, and the two were alone in the old man's library, "do you know, if it had not been for Dournof, our Antonine would have been with us still, living and beautiful?"

Karzof shook his head, sadly; his conscience could not accommodate itself so easily to a defeat, but he did not wish to contradict his wife, so he said nothing.

"Yes," repeated Madame Karzof, "it is Dournof's fault that we lost our daughter! It was he who led her into that absurd love affair! If he had had any heart he would have understood immediately, that she was not for him, and given up the chase. I said from the first, and still maintain, that he was only a fortune hunter."

"Antonine was not so very rich," said Karzof, timidly, "I believe he loved her for herself alone."

"You know nothing about it, then," replied the indignant mother, with vehemence, "if he had loved her for herself he would have preferred the girl's happiness to his own, and would have advised her to make a judicious, brilliant marriage, to satisfy everybody. But he thought only of himself, the egotist!"

"He loved her," said the old man, quietly.

"He loved her! that is a nice thing to say! so did I

love her, and because I did, I wanted to see her rich and well married. What kind of love is that which cannot deny itself?"

Karzof thought to himself that there was a time when he loved his wife with a love similar to Dournof's; as she did not return it, her happiness consisted in her selfishness. But the old man had had no will of his own for years, and, even if he felt his wife was in the wrong, he dared not say so, but was silent.

For some time, Niania had been in the room preparing the tea, but Madame Karzof did not notice her.

"It was Dournof," she continued, "who was the cause of our misfortune, it was his persistence which forced her, poor dear, to seek death! He is a miserable wretch and coward, and was thinking of his own interest!"

Niania stepped toward the table and gazed at Madame Karzof, who still in an angry mood, continued:

"He wanted to marry Antonine, but not without our consent, for he was afraid she might be disinherited, and without money, he had no wish for her hand."

"Madame," said the solemn voice of Niania, suddenly; "you offend the Almighty!"

"What?" said the mother, who could scarcely believe her ears.

"You insult God when you slander the innocent! Dournof loved our Antonine for herself, and offered to run away with her!——"

"If she had only listened to him!" groaned the

unhappy woman, "she might have been living now, and we would have forgiven her."

"You told that poor saint in heaven, that your curse would follow her forever if she married without your consent. She believed you, but she was wrong, and you have just admitted it."

Madame Karzof had nothing to say. Her husband listened in silence, scarcely understanding what was passing around him.

"You are like most other women," Niania continued; — "you threaten very fiercely, then give way to those who flatter you. Neither Antonine, or the man she had chosen, were like this; they listened, were silent, and obeyed, however painful it might have been. But what you asked of them, was contrary to the will of God. Yes, they were wrong to believe you; they should have disobeyed you. But Antonine was too conscientious; she would rather die than sin."

Madame Karzof sobbed violently, and tears streamed down the old man's face.

"You said, just now, that Dournof was the cause of our lamb's death. It is not true, Madame, and you know it is not true! Antonine died from grief, and it was your fault, Madame! She told you she would die, but you did not believe it, because you once said the same thing yourself. You should have known her character was different from yours; she did not speak meaningless words, our Antonine, but acted without

talking about it. Yes, somebody killed our Antonine, and that somebody was her mother!"

"Niania! Niania!" cried Madame Karzof, hastily rising from her chair.

"I am not afraid of you," said the old woman, quietly. "I have grieved so much, I don't care if I die or not, then you could do me no ill. But it was you who killed Antonine, all the same."

"Leave this house!" cried Madame Karzof. "Impudent woman! to blame your superiors! I order you to leave at once!"

"Wife," interceded the old man; "she loves us, and has reared our children. She is foolish, leave her alone!"

"Depart immediately!" repeated the indignant matron. "I command you to leave! You were the cause of our misery! you dragged our angel into harm!"

"Ah! Madame!" said the old nurse, crossing herself; "may God forgive you what you have said! I am going away, and I leave without regret, now that Master Jean is able to take care of himself. The nest is empty! I go, Madame!"

The old nurse curtsied almost to the floor before the woman she had served thirty years, then left the room in a dignified manner. A moment after, a young servant entered, who had been engaged since Antonine's sickness, bringing in the tea service to prepare for the evening meal.

Madame Karzof, more annoyed than angered, was

silent for a few moments; then, unable to control herself longer, she asked,

"Where is Niania?"

"She has gone out," responded the girl, respectfully.

"Where has she gone?"

"I don't know, Madame. She did not say."

Karzof looked at his wife reproachfully. Her eyes fell, and she continued to knit faster than ever, without saying a word.

CHAPTER XVII.

GRATITUDE.

DOURNOF was alone in his room, after a hard day's work. He pushed aside the papers which encumbered his desk, and sat with his head resting in his hands, and eyes fixed on vacancy — he was dreaming.

It was the hour that he devoted to the past; after spending the day running hither and thither, making researches, preparing briefs, he took a little respite just at sundown.

During the hot summer-days, which are so dreary in the city, a continual line of carriages rolled along towards the islands, filled with weary passengers sighing for the cool breezes and green grass. Dournof did not go to see the sun set at the "Point" as was the custom, but remained at home, alone, absorbed in thought; living over those past few weeks he had spent with her who had been restored to him and lost again, and in that time he had drank the cup of joy, and naught was left but the bitter dregs. The distant rumbling of the carriages on the Troïtsky bridge, made a solemn accompaniment to his melancholy thoughts, and often, long after the noise ceased and a band of red in the east announced the sunrise, did Dournof make up his mind to go to bed.

When the first sting of sorrow was over, he reached

that period of mourning when one takes cruel delight in recalling the most harrowing souvenirs; he thought of the dying Antonine, of the last tender agonizing look of the young girl, who tried to recognize him even after the shadow of death had blinded her eyes; it was these mournful pictures he loved to dwell upon, while they wrung his very heart-strings, thinking of her who was lost to him forever.

The last rays of the sun had died away, dust had settled on the open window-sill, when the bell rung. He shrugged his shoulders impatiently, cursed the intruder, and sat still.

After a short interval, the bell rang again. Dournof hesitated, made an effort to rise, but it was too much trouble to open the door for some bore who would divert him from his thoughts, and ask a thousand questions, so he buried his head in his hands again, and resumed his revery. A third quick and violent ring, as if some person was in great distress, made him start. In spite of himself, he rose and opened the door.

"Niania!" he exclaimed, recognizing the old woman's rigid face. "Niania! where did you come from? Come in! come in!"

He stepped inside, and she followed him.

"Sit down," Dournof said. "What do you want with me, my dear? Ah! I am glad to see you——"

He was so overcome he could say no more. He sincerely and tenderly loved this old woman, who had been Antonine's real mother. He felt a certain respect

for those asutere lips, which had uttered the last prayers ever heard by the dying girl. He loved those wrinkled, trembling hands, which had shrouded the body of his beloved; those eyes which had watched her last agony, and wept over her bier; this old woman was all he loved on earth, for Antonine's parents were nothing to him.

"I cannot sit down," said the old woman, still standing before him. "I have a favor to ask, and one does not ask favors sitting."

"A favor? anything you ask!" said Dournof, "I am not rich, but all I possess" ——

The old woman shook her head and said:

"It is neither money nor clothes I want. I have come to ask you, master, if I may be your servant?"

"My servant?" said the young man much surprised.

"Yes," repeated the woman, with a deep reverence. "Your servant until my death, which is not far off, I hope. I want no wages, I have plenty of clothes, I only ask you for bread, and salt, I want to wait on you."

"I am willing," replied the astonished Dournof, "but why do you not wish to remain with the Karzofs?"

"She drove me away!" said Niania, responding rather to her own thoughts, than Dournof's question, "she drove me away, she pretends that you and I are the cause of our angel's death; so you see we can do nothing else but live together, if we are such sinners as she says," and Niania made a gesture of profound contempt.

In saying this, she showed such intense feeling, that Dournof realized the profound hatred she had for her former masters; all her fidelity was concentrated upon Antonine, and that was buried in the tomb.

"Come to my house," said he, "come, and we can talk of her, for we loved her, we——"

Niania took the young man's hand and carried it to her lips, before he could withdraw it.

"You are my master," she said. "I am going to tell them down stairs that I am engaged by you, and will come to-morrow. Can you lodge me?"

"That is all the place I have," he said, opening a little, dark room where he kept his clothes, and books.

"That is nice," answered Niania, "You will see what good care I will take of you."

Without further words, she left. The next morning she returned with a small package of garments, and settled herself in Dournof's home.

"What did they say?" he asked with some curiosity to know what had happened at the Karzofs.

"That I was ungrateful, wicked, and miserable!—The old man wept. I would have remained for his sake, but I never want to see her again."

"She is to be pitied," murmured Dournof.

"It is all her fault and so much the worse for her," replied the old woman fiercely. "We all suffer on her account, why should she not suffer? it is only fair."

Dournof never again saw the Karzofs; a little later the old man took to his bed, and in six weeks died,

more from worry, than grief. Madame Karzof, tormented by remorse, which she would not accept, always struggling with herself, and quarreling with others, retired to the provinces to live with a relative.

Jean alone preserved his friendship for Dournof, and his kindly feeling for the old woman.

Sometimes he came to see them, and all three would spend their time recalling the bitter past; then Jean obtained a position in the provinces, and Dournof was left alone with the old nurse to battle with life, wherein one must either conquer or perish.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FIDELITY.

DOURNOF was not a man to give way under trials, his immense vitality and great energy proved by his constancy to Antonine, inspired him with the courage for the battle of life. He knew what poverty was, for, during the young girl's illness he had spent his little capital to furnish her with a few delicacies; the old nurse and he, often dined on a handful of oatmeal bought on credit, but the black bread of fruitless labor, instead of enfeebling them, seemed to increase their strength. During these months of trial, Niania was more than ever convinced she had done well to choose Dournof for a master, as she loved him more and more.

Desperate work overcomes all obstacles: this maxim of Dournof's, was finally successful; about eighteen months after Antonine's death, a curious law suit brought out his talents, and as often happens he woke one fine day and found himself famous. Consultations and orders flowed in from all sides; he received offers from the Minister of Justice but could scarcely believe his ears when he found himself Judge of the Court of Appeals, yet could not tell how he got there; he heard whispers of favoritism towards himself, broken promises to others, for grumblers were numerous; however, the Minister soon silenced this by saying:

"If those who have more talent will only prove it, I will promote them higher still."

Dournof was considered a sort of intruder before this, and out of pure benevolence was received into a circle far above his rank; but now, President Dournof was a most wonderful man, who had given remarkable proofs of astonishing ability, and every one was very glad and proud, to meet him. The aristocracy held still somewhat aloof, but that would be done away with in time.

The young president bore his good fortune with the same calmness with which he endured his poverty; the Judicial Ermine did not affect his brain. Niania, who had spent the half of her savings in burning candles before the Images for him during his obscurity, still resided with him, but he took an apartment becoming his new rank, had a man servant who opened the door, and a foreign cook replaced Niania in the kitchen, who was promoted to the position of housekeeper. Dournof always retained his simplicity of manner and profound indifference to worldly things. The mourning which he wore in his heart, still prevented him from appearing in society.

During that trying time whenever he felt himself giving way, he had a sure refuge for his overtaxed brain, and heart, broken down by sorrow. After he had spent a day of profitless work, his eyes paining him, and his head feeling heavy, he would on a summer's night start off on the road to Pargoloro.

This journey never seemed long to him. He knew each post on the road so full of memories, along which he had borne his fast-failing Antonine.

The clear darkness of a summer night was falling gently on the peaceful scene when he started, the atmosphere became grayish rather than dark, for in those northern climes the twilight lingers so late that one can read even at midnight.

The sun was just rising in the east, about two o'clock, when he reached the Cemetery. Nothing marked its limits — in Russia they never think of protecting graves, for desecration of tombs is a thing unknown there. He climbed the side of the hill, and soon reached the iron cross, resting on a granite base, which marked the last resting place of Antonine.

There, seated on the cold stone, he confided to the beloved dead all his griefs, his lost hopes and disappointments; he wept without shame upon this grave which contained the best part of himself. The dawning day found him there still, for it was at that hour that the young girl's soul took flight, and then fell his most bitter tears, from a heart brimming over with sorrow. Then, relieved and consoled, he returned to the city, dejected it is true, but hearing the echo of Antonine's last words:

"You will work, for I desire it, and become useful to your country."

"What weakness I show in comparison to that indomitable courage necessary to meet death!" he

thought, and, ashamed of his little strength, Dournof returned to his labors with new resolutions.

Niania, who knew his habits, awaited his coming all night. She wiped away the tears in her weary eyes, and while preparing a frugal repast, asked in a low tone:

"Is everything in order there?"

"Yes," replied Dournof — "everything."

She uttered a deep sigh, and looked compassionately at him, as she carefully attended to his wants.

Winter interrupted his visits to Antonine's tomb, for the roads in that deserted place were almost impassable in the winter season, although Dournof went out several times in a sleigh. He would leave the vehicle at the inn, and wade through the snow to the hill which overhung the frozen quiet lake. But this pious pilgrimage was spoiled by the presence of the coachman, who, sometimes drunk, was always vulgar, as he would often curse, in an undertone, the simpleton whose idiocy would compel a servant to go over forty kilomêtres of deserted roads in mid-winter. Dournof waited with impatience the return of spring to resume his visits to the Cemetery.

At the first signs of vegetation, he was there. Fortune had not then changed for him, but he felt he was on the eve of success; a thousand insignificant signs, precursors of this new dawn, filled his heart with joyful impatience. This suppressed agitation was like the restive pawing of a horse ready for a journey, or the

flapping of a bird's wings preparing for flight. To-day it was almost with joy that he whispered his prayer to Antonine, full of his hopes and ambitions, and it seemed to him the dead girl answered:

"I knew it would be thus."

The following year, when his nomination fell so suddenly upon him, like the royal purple, he was so astonished, so upset by this unexpected honor, that it took him several days to recover. Everything had changed around him, indeed those who approached him were not the same towards him; his subordinates, only yesterday his equals, and even his superiors, showed a certain respect in their manners to which he was unaccustomed. All this obsequious flattery, which must be expected by those elected to power, instead of turning his head, rather disgusted him.

"I am the same as before, why should they be changed?"

However, he adapted himself to his new position; and Niania, always the same to him, offered her sincere congratulations to her master only in the expression of heartfelt joy in her eyes — and she showed no more deference or attention than before. Her usual kindness prompted her to see that everything surrounding her young master was in conformity with his new circumstances; and when he was disgusted with the gross flatteries of public life, he would turn to the humble woman for comfort.

"Are you happy, Niania?" he asked, one evening, upon his return from a dinner at the Minister's.

"I am content," she replied, gravely. "How happy the beloved dead would be to see you, now!"

Dournof blushed. During the whole evening, while he was enjoying the fresh honors thrust upon him, he had not once thought of Antonine, and yet it was she who bade him have strength and courage to pursue his labors.

He slept little that night, and in the morning took a carriage, went to the florist's, and ordered a superb white wreath.

An hour later, the perfume of the flowers filled his study; notwithstanding the rigorous season they had found roses, camelias, jasmines, tuberoses, and lilacs, all of immaculate whiteness. Dournof contemplated his offering for a few minutes, when his ambitious joy was swallowed by keen regret.

How happy would she have been, that noble girl who had consented to bear his name! What pure, disinterested pleasure would have filled her soul! With what dignity would she have shared his fortune!

He remained silent and thoughtful, so that he did not notice Niania, who came in quietly, and stood by his side.

"Poor child," said the old nurse, in so low a voice that Dournof did not hear, "that is her wedding crown!"

She bent over and piously kissed a bunch of orange flowers hidden in the green leaves.

Dournof carried the funereal wreath himself, for he

would not trust it to any one else. Just as he was stepping into the carriage a sleigh turned the corner of the street, and in it, surrounded by swan's down, he saw the pretty little rosy face of a young girl, sitting by the Minister, who bowed to Dournof. The young man recognized Mademoiselle Marianne, his patron's daughter, with whom he had conversed the evening before at her father's dinner. She wore white at the dinner.

The sleigh passed, and Dournof succeeded in placing his enormous wreath in the carriage. Soon after the houses of old Petersburg, partially covered with snow, began to disappear, as he followed the route to Finland.

The snow concealed Antonine's tomb, for the unfaithful, indolent gardener had neglected his duty. Dournof found a pickaxe, and by the sweat of his brow, dug out the block of granite.

When this work was finished, he placed on the cross his fragile offering which would so soon be withered by the chilling winds, then stood aside to gaze a moment upon the simple monument.

Less than three years before, he had placed there all that was dear to him. Bending over the border of that grave, he thought life had no charm for him, and wished to die — he had lived, notwithstanding! What an abyss separated the poor nobody — rejected by an ordinary family of the middle class — from the President, now respected by everybody. It took only three years to accomplish this work! and yet ——"

Dournof thought, had it not been for Madame Karzof's obstinacy, he might have now claimed Antonine, and that far from refusing him, her family would consider his proposal an honor, and he pitied the vanity of human nature. Then another thought flashed across his mind. Any family would accept a proposal from him; at present, the world was open to him.

"You will marry," Antonine had said. This thought, which he had never considered before, presented itself in a new light. He must have a wife — but not now — he would put it off as long as possible. It would be merely to establish a family and have heirs, that he would marry.

"Ah! darling Antonine!" he murmured, as he put his lips to the cold granite; "it will be a cruel sacrifice, for I can love only thee!"

He returned to the city about four o'clock. Night was falling; the merry bustle which precedes the dinner-hour, dazzling lights, all the din of a luxurious, pleasure-loving city, led his thoughts into a new channel. Worldly life had thrown its lasso upon him. The poor student, without fortune or future, could afford to neglect appearances, but President Dournof dared not.

He went home, and dined. He was cold, and in order to get warm he put on a white cravat and went to the opera.

Fortunately, they did not play "Lucie," because it would have recalled too vividly the sad past. A very

good company, were giving "Don Pasquale." They made the *entr'actes* long, as it is a short opera, for they could not dismiss the audience until half-past ten o'clock.

During the *entr'acte*, Dournof, examining the house with his opera glass, recognized the Minister in his box. He bowed respectfully; the salute was returned by a little sign of invitation.

The young man left his seat, and soon found his way to the box. He was not the only one who came to pay his respects to His Excellency, but, being the youngest in age as well as promotion, he was particularly noticed by the Minister.

"Well, M. Dournof," he said, good naturedly, "we are waiting to see your wreath presented. It ought to be here ——"

"Excuse me, your Excellency! I do not understand. What wreath?"

"Why, the one you could scarcely get in the carriage, this morning," replied M. Mérof. "Seeing you here, to-night, I thought, of course, your floral offering was for Patti!"

The pretty Marianne, who was seated in the front of the *loge*, ceased to use her opera glass and looked earnestly at the young President. A man who will give a wreath worth five hundred francs to a cantatrice, is always interesting.

Dournof turned pale, and started back.

"Excuse me, Your Excellence," said he, in a low

tone; "that wreath I carried to Pargolora, and placed it on the tomb of my *fiancée*, who died three years ago."

Although he spoke in the lowest possible tones, supposing no one but the Minister could hear him, the answer reached Marianne's ears, for she pointed to a vacant seat near her, and said to the young President:

"Sit down, Monsieur Dournof."

The Minister, who was a most excellent man, made a thousand apologies. He was not born on the steps of a throne, and his origin was as humble as Dournof's; but having reached his high position by extraordinary talents, and coming into these honors comparatively late in life, he did not bear them gracefully; not that he was wanting in merit, but in that taste which one finds among men of the world, accustomed to society; if he had been, he would never have been guilty of this breach of etiquette.

Again and again, did he apologize for his mistake, and Dournof, being very kind-hearted, tried not to show that he was wounded.

The end of this little scene, was an invitation to dinner, the following Monday, which the young man accepted graciously, then left the theatre.

Marianne's opera-glass searched in vain for him, during the third act.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT MARIANNE THOUGHT.

"YOU don't know, my dear! A man who will place flowers on a *fiancée's* grave, after three years! That is fiction, a dream of fidelity! Those things seldom happen!"

"You are right, Marianne; they rarely occur!" replied the knowing Véra; "and I don't believe a word of that story."

"But what could he have done with the flowers?"

Véra shrugged her shoulders significantly. "There would be no difficulty in disposing of flowers, I fancy. There are plenty of ladies in St. Petersburg, of all kinds, who would be glad to accept them."

"Yes, flowers! or a bouquet! but a pure white wreath, is different!"

"The fact is," continued Véra, "a white wreath would only be offered to some adored one — one who stands upon a pinnacle higher than Alexander's column!"

"See here, Véra, you are teasing me! That is not fair, when you see I am interested."

"Oh! if Monsieur Dournof interests you, I will say nothing more, you may be sure."

"Interests me! — well, yes, he interests me on

account of his fidelity. I thought one only found that in romances."

"Bah!" exclaimed Vera; "that is all put on. It gives a man a certain position."

"Aren't you ashamed?"

And Marianne, horrified, stopped the conversation by getting up and walking around the room.

"A proof that it gives a man a position is, that you are interested in this one; otherwise, you would not notice him! Is he handsome?"

"I don't know," said Marianne, with a pout.

"Can one see him?"

"He is coming to dinner, this evening."

"Very well, then I will come to tea, for I am curious to see in the flesh, a man who has been faithful three years to a memory. What was the name of that young girl?"

"I don't know, I must find out," said Marianne, with an air of decision.

"I want to know too, since I don't believe a word of it. Don't be uneasy, for I will know."

"And how?"

"We have in the court of Chancery, a crafty old door-keeper, who knows everything; if we give him the young man's name we can find out all we want to know."

Mademoiselle Véra was the daughter of the Minister's Assistant, an official position unknown in France, but very much sought after in Russia, as it gives a man

much power and little responsibility, as well as a chance of bringing into play all the talents he possesses.

Mademoiselle Véra departed with an injunction to her friend to make herself beautiful that night.

Marianne was a pretty blonde, of seventeen summers, with a complexion like mother of pearl, eyes blue as forget-me-nots, small and graceful in figure. But for her bright expression, and quick movements, she would have resembled a beautiful little English doll. Her mother had appropriately named her, "*Perpetuum mobile.*"

The daughter of a Minister is always surrounded by admirers, even if she is ugly, and stupid; but Marianne would have been admired anyway, for her dainty grace, her good humor and coquettish ways—for her admirable qualities in short, and for her faults. Many young men, and some not so young, aspired openly to win her pretty little plump hand. Marianne kept them all at an equal distance—we are figuratively speaking—for the distance was very unequal; but the freakish girl always rectified matters by snubbing those she had flattered the day before, and the one highest in favor to-day was ignored on the morrow. It was thus Marianne balanced accounts.

In ransacking her drawers to find a becoming toilette, the young girl commenced to reflect seriously, and the object of her thoughts was Dournof.

Three years faithful to a grave, was a thing unheard of, except in novels; but the hero of this story really

existed, she had seen him, and would see him again. What an event in her life!

Marianne in her own mind wove a little romance of the two lovers and decided that he had met Antonine at a fête — fallen in love with her — asked her hand in marriage, and she had given it; the evening of the marriage, a dreadful accident struck her down, even with the bridal veil on; the inconsolable *fiancé* had sworn to devote his affections to the remembrance of his lost happiness.

"The woman he loves," thought the young girl, "would be sure of his love."

A second reflection naturally followed:

"It would not be easy to combat a souvenir, consecrated by such devotion!" she thought.

Then a third reflection, as just and not less logical than the others, was:

"What glory it would be to supplant such a souvenir, to take the place of that adored shadow, to make him unfaithful to the dead!"

A last thought, less clearly defined, concluded the series:

"Would that be very difficult to do?"

And Marianne's busy fingers stopped in their task of arranging the masses of golden hair which curled all over her head. She resumed her task, and soon succeeded in accomplishing a simple, girlish style of coiffure.

During the dinner, where Madame Mérof nominally

presided, but virtually her daughter did, Dournof paid no attention to the eminent men invited to meet him. It was something so new and strange for him to be brought in such close proximity with illustrious personages he had only known by name. When dinner was over, and the company dispersed in the salons, the young man was somewhat wearied from the extraordinary strain on his brain in the past few weeks, and now that he had been admitted in this charmed circle of high officials, where one never is willing to leave, he felt a certain languor overcome him, with his success.

He admired the pictures, the furniture selected in good taste, the elegant toilettes of some of the ladies, friends of Madame Mérof; then his eyes rested with pleasure upon Mademoiselle Marianne, who was sitting just in front of him.

She had her back turned toward him, but could see him in the mirror. He could not see her unless she turned around, so she made it a point to move her beautiful head to a position where the young man could see her most advantageously. The soft, light hair, carefully arranged, fell over that pure white forehead; no jewel, except a simple cross attached to an invisible chain; no ribbons, nothing but white muslin over white silk — all one soft cloud!

"The Minister's daughter is a beautiful girl," said Dournof to himself, then thought no more about her. In a short time he looked again at this attractive object — and said again — "She must be charming!"

Marianne seemed to have divined his thoughts, for she arose quietly, unlike her usual petulancy, perched herself like a bird close to Dournof, with a little movement that was very fascinating, and said to him:

"Have you forgiven us, Monsieur?" in a voice full of tenderness and humility.

"Pardon, I do not understand. I do not think, Mademoiselle, I have anything to pardon."

"Oh! yes," replied the young girl; my father and I wounded you the other evening at the theatre. I saw it. If you knew how much we regretted it. Had I only known Monsieur! Believe me, such souvenirs are sacred even to the most indifferent, — I hope you will look upon it as heedlessness."

Dournof at first frowned. Any allusion to his most cherished souvenirs was like stabbing him to the very heart; but the young girl was so ingenuous in making her artless excuses, and finally the word "heedlessness," applied to Minister Mérof, appeared to him so comical, he could not suppress a smile.

"Don't mention it," said he good-naturedly.

That was not Marianne's little scheme; she wanted to mention it, on the contrary; and returned to the subject by rather a circuitous channel.

"Where did you find those superb flowers?"

Dournof gave the florist's name.

"I hope they arrived fresh. Did you take them far?"

"To Pargolora," responded Dournof, with some little

feeling of shame to be talking of Antonine's tomb in this brilliantly-lighted salon, with a young girl in full ball-dress, who, the evening before, was a total stranger to him. But for some time past everything was strange and new around him.

"So far! and it was so cold! You deserve much credit, Monsieur."

Not knowing what to reply, Dournof looked fixedly at his fair interlocutress, who returned his glance with an expression full of deference, admiration, and tender pity, — one of those looks by which a woman shows that she finds the man with whom she is speaking greatly her superior.

Dournof was somewhat affected, even touched by this, for he had been little spoiled by the world thus far.

"This is a good girl," he thought, "and really she is very pretty. What candor!"

Yes, it was true, Marianne was candid. She acted well her part in this little comedy; to use a Parisian vulgarism, which expresses her frame of mind exactly, she thought she had "struck it." She really felt a tender compassion for this young man who had been so severely tried. First of all, she was anxious to know his history, and was willing to endure anything to learn it, even her mother's reprimands, who would certainly scold her daughter for talking so long with a man who was almost a stranger to her.

"You are very happy, Monsieur?" said Marianne, sighing softly.

Dournof looked at her in astonishment, and could not understand how any one's felicity could excite the envy of a young creature like this — beautiful, wealthy, and of high position.

"And why?" said he, surprised.

Marianne arose, and left the room, without replying.

Dournof reflected a moment, and wondered what this meant, then remembered that he was not alone. These words, thrown to the winds by Marianne, as one throws a gold piece "*heads or tails*," struck upon his imagination, and made a deep impression.

"Why should I be happy?" he asked himself that night when he went home and recapitulated the day's doings. This question, annoying, because it was an enigma, came into his mind many times afterwards.

Marianne said to herself, as she stood before the mirror undressing:

"It seems to me it will not be such a difficult matter after all."

CHAPTER XX.

TELLING FORTUNES.

THE next morning, Mademoiselle Mérof was seated at the piano, where she spent several hours of torture every day, when her friend Véra entered the room with a triumphant air. After the usual kissing and caressing, jests and jokes, the young girls sat down on a sofa, away from any door, consequently far from indiscreet listeners.

"I know all!" whispered Véra.

"What all?" said Marianne, innocently.

Véra placed her fore-finger upon her little pink, flattish nose, significantly.

Marianne began to laugh, and pulling her companion nearer by the watch-chain, said submissively:

"Tell me all you know."

Véra, proud of her superior knowledge, assumed an ossianic expression.

"She was from an obscure but honest family. They loved each other for two years ——"

"Two years!" interrupted Marianne, lifting her eyes heavenward. "There are persons who can love two years, then!"

"Two years," continued Véra, without being disconcerted. "A young girl, from the middle class."

"What was her name?"

"Mademoiselle Karzof."

"I want to know her first name."

"I don't know it," answered Véra, a little confused; "my old detective did not inform himself of that."

Marianne pouted a little, and Véra went on with her story without paying any attention to her.

"Mademoiselle Karzof's parents wanted a rich, titled son-in-law, therefore refused to give their daughter to this — this handsome young man."

The narrator looked at Marianne out of the corner of her eye, but the latter did not frown.

"And the young girl, who, it seems, madly loved the young man, purposely went into a rapid consumption.

"Oh! heavens!" exclaimed Marianne, shuddering; "and is she dead?"

"She died in three months. The parents consented to the marriage only when it was too late."

Marianne's hands fell in her lap.

"This is a romance! Impossible! Those things never happened in real life!

"It did happen, however," observed Véra.

"How he must have loved her! Ah! how hard it was!"

"What was hard?"

Marianne shook her head, but did not answer.

"You are not going to amuse yourself by fascinating this poor widower?" asked Véra.

"Why not?"

"The young enthusiast pronounced these words with so much energy that they opened hostilities.

"And why not?" she repeated. "This widower has never had a wife, has only known the bitter part of life; would it not be a noble task to teach him the sweets?"

"What? would you marry him?"

"Certainly!" said Marianne, proudly, brimming over with charity, and perhaps a little coquetry.

Véra was silent, and looked thoughtfully on the floor, then finally said:

"Your parents will never consent."

Marianne shrugged her shoulders.

"The example of the first —— of Mademoiselle Karzof, would be in my favor," she replied softly.

"But if he does not consent? If the remembrance of his *fiancée* is stronger than you?"

The Minister's daughter shrugged her shoulders a second time, and looked at herself in the psyche glass, where she saw her lovely face reflected with its confident smile.

"Bah!" said Véra, rising from her chair; "in two days you will think no more of this nonsense."

"Listen to me," said Marianne. "In six weeks he will be in love with me."

"What an idea! It is impossible! Mademoiselle Karzof was no ordinary girl; in fact — with all due deference, be it said — exactly your opposite. How can you think ——"

This contradiction exasperated Marianne to the highest degree. She answered petulantly:

"In six months, I intend to become Madame Dournof."

Véra laughed.

"Yes, in six months," said she; "at the same time that I marry old General Bonne."

This General Bonne, whose name was Autropof, was an incorrigible old bachelor, who had lost one arm and one ear by a bullet at Sebastopol, and was a sort of scarecrow for all the children between five and seven years of age, in St. Petersburg.

This solemn declaration from Marianne, made both girls laugh heartily, and the piano had a rest that day.

Business often called Dournof to the Minister's, who had taken a great fancy to him. Kind-hearted Madame Mérof, having heard his sad story, always received him cordially; in fact, he was more warmly welcomed at the Minister's than at any other house. He went there often, and one evening found himself in the midst of a merry society of young people, invited to a party between Christmas and New Years.

Madame Mérof had collected all the superstitions of her youth, and with the aid of her old German housekeeper had arranged innumerable games by which fortunes could be told. Nothing was wanting. Hot lead, roasting nuts, a large alphabet hung against the wall where the loved ones' initials were to be pointed out with a cane — first, however, be it understood,

the eyes were blinded—red and yellow apples whose parings, thrown over the left shoulder formed letters; these and a thousand other amusements were offered to the young guests.

Every one appeared at an early hour, for many a timid lover waited before speaking openly, to see if Fate would not indicate to him that he would receive a favorable reply. It is so easy, too, to give Destiny a helping hand; a corner of the bandage can be lifted, a nut pushed into the fire or the curve of an indistinct letter made by the apple paring slightly changed.

Fortune is very indulgent to youth.

They began by dancing quadrilles, but dancing was not the great attraction of the evening, and lacked spirit; it was evident that they impatiently awaited the time to test their fortunes.

At eleven o'clock, under the supervision of Madame Mérof, a large silver basin about a metre in diameter, filled with water, was brought in; a basket accompanied it full of gilded walnut-shells. Half of these shells held small pink candles, the other half were blue; the first representing the girls and the others the young men.

Each one chose a shell, then wrote his name on a piece of paper, rolled it up and placed it under the candles, which were then lighted. They then launched the little crafts in the basin; Madame Mérof, with a long ivory wand, stirred the water around three times, and the frail barks danced on the troubled waves.

It was a curious sight to see all these young heads bending over the basin; a dozen girls, and as many men. Madame Mérof, being a prudent mother, was careful in selecting the company, for oftentimes there were marriages brought about by these games, but they were considered quite harmless in Russia, and not dangerous when properly managed.

The heads of blondes and brunes, lighted from below by the miniature wax candles, anxiously followed the slightest movement of the gilded nutshells. Each one watched his own after the grand embarkation, to see if it met friend or foe. Whenever a blue candle upset a red, then there were bursts of laughter, shouts of joy. Madame Mérof had added to this flotilla, which represented the guests, another fleet of nutshells, bearing the names of heroes and heroines in history and legend, so that too pointed allusions might be avoided. There was more fun when two of the same color met; but, after a few moments, Marianne declared this was not serious enough, so she fished out the fictitious characters, leaving only those representing her friends.

Several times chance seemed to confirm certain rumors that had been afloat during the winter. The bark of a young ensign floated directly towards Marianne's young cousin, so that both blushed consciously when they were teased by the merry crowd.

Marianne's little boat, up to this time, had floated on a little apart. As soon as one tipped over it was taken out, which left more room for those remaining to indulge

their superstitions. When the basin was comparatively clear, the young girl leaned thoughtfully on the edge and attentively watched the movements of her shell.

A great bark, bearing General Bonne's flag, was floating slowly along until it came nearly upsetting Marianne's, she looked up and caught Véra's malicious eye, then plunged her pretty jeweled hand into the water to save her bark from such a fate, in so doing she very nearly ran into another which heretofore had taken no part in the fun.

"Monsieur Dournof!" cried Vèra's mocking voice.

"That is not fair!" protested several youthful voices. "No cheating."

"I won't have General Bonne!" said Marianne, poutingly, like a spoiled child, turning away from Dournof to conceal her blushes.

Her reply disarmed the indignant young friends; then the basin was removed, and a new game started.

Dournof took part in all these plays, good-naturedly, like an indulgent philosopher. Although he was young he had never had any youth. The pressing work of his best years gave him no time to acquire a taste for the world; although he did formerly like society, for it was there that he met Antonine! He was fond of dancing, he liked gymnastics, and also swimming; but since Antonine slept in the cemetery of Pargoloro, he had shunned ladies' society, as he had sought that of older and more intelligent men, from whom he might learn something.

The society which he frequented before was entirely

different from this, there was none of this extravagant display which makes the rich man's home a sort of museum; the toilettes were a matter of surprise to him, for, in spite of Antonine's exquisite taste, her dress was very inexpensive, because of her mother's stinginess. It was not that so much silk and velvet were worn here, but there was a certain cut and combination of colors which showed the dressmaker understood her art, and made them pay for it too.

He had never seen satin and laces treated with such contempt, and could tell a parvenue from a lady born, amid folds of Valenciennes, by the way she managed her lace flounces. The parvenue's lace might be handsomer, but she was conscious of it, whereas the *lady* never concerned herself about hers. There are in the world infinite degrees and shades which one can feel rather than describe.

Dournof felt this, and began, by degrees, to be affected by it, and to find a certain charm in luxury and high station.

The earnestness which Marianne showed in avoiding General Bonne's bark made Dournof smile, as it did every one else. What was all this childishness to him! The seven and twenty years of the young President made him look down upon all these trifles! However, chance having several times united his destiny with Marianne's, finally he was amused at it.

Witchcraft has some cheating about it, particularly when a friendly hand assists, and that hand was Véra's.

Whether it was a jest or merely a feminine instinct, born of that passion for match-making — dear to a woman's heart — she never lost an opportunity of bringing Marianne's and Dournof's fortunes together.

Mademoiselle Mérof was very much excited when the time came to test her fortune; and finally, to finish the evening, she started a game of cards, where a number of surnames were written and distributed among the guests. This was very amusing, for the names of both sexes were given out promiscuously.

When it came to Dournof, she changed his card, and in so doing let one fall. Dournof stooped to pick it up ——

"No, no," she said, "here is one."

He took it, and read aloud:

"Marianne."

"The one that fell on the floor belongs to Monsieur Dournof," observed one of the spectators.

Somebody picked it up, and handed it to him.

"Antonine," he read aloud.

Dournof turned pale, and showed how deep his feelings were, and Marianne understood it all.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said in a low tone, "I did not know her name, I do assure you."

Before he could recover his self-possession Marianne had passed on to the next, with some jesting remark. Finally the circle was broken up, a mazurka was proposed, and the graceful figures glided around the room.

Dournof did not dance; so he took refuge in a dark

corner of the room, shaded his eyes with his hand, and thought of the little Cemetery, of the flowers that the winter winds must have frozen stiff long ago; of how he had neglected that simple tomb at Pargoloro since his new fortune. A shadow passed before him, and stopped.

He looked up.

"I have been very unfortunate, sir," said Marianne, "you will hate me."

Monsieur Dournof did not hate her; he admired above everything that natural grace, the girlish candor of this beautiful child — more like a butterfly or a flower — charming and fascinating.

"However," she added, sitting down near him, while her mother thought she was looking after the supper, "I assure you that your sorrow touches me deeply. I have been very curious, yes, and much to blame, perhaps, because I have desired to know all about your sorrow; I have heard that she was worthy of your love; I have heard of her beauty and grace; I can understand how deep, almost unbearable your grief must have been; and yet you are young, life is full of hope for you, you have many friends to love you. Do you think it well to live apart from all these joys?— perhaps you have made a vow to the beloved dead?"

Marianne's voice was so full of tenderness, her expression showed so much compassion, that Dournof replied:

"No, she forbade nothing."

"Did she permit you to love, and to marry?"

"She begged me to do so."

Silence followed, then Marianne's musical voice, as soft as a zephyr, murmured:

"Your wife will be a happy woman, for you know how to love."

She disappeared, leaving the young man struggling with an emotion unfelt for years.

CHAPTER XXI.

ANTONINE'S FORESIGHT.

"LOVE is contagious," so it is said. A loving heart has a sort of magnetism, which it is difficult to resist, unless there is something to counteract it. Dournof was no longer guarded. Antonine's spirit had ceased to watch over him, and gradually Marianne took her place in his heart.

This was not a serious, deep love, like the first; it was more an infatuation which took possession of him, little by little. Marianne's voice, her dress, her blonde hair floating in capricious ringlets, the touch of her delicate hands, her magnetic glances, submissive, and faithful like that of a pointer—all this, turned Dournof's head.

When he returned from the Minister's, he sat in his arm-chair meditating, before a large portrait of Antonine. Heretofore, he had looked to this picture for courage, and strength, but now, he rather avoided it. While he was longing for moral courage, Marianne was administering to him the same poison that Hannibal took at Capone.

Niania had become more serious, and graver than ever, for she had noticed a change in her master; she waited upon him as usual that evening, giving a last

survey of things, as she did in Antonine's time, for the old woman had lost nothing of her assiduity, but she had grown sadder of late.

One evening, when Dournof returned earlier than usual, she ventured to speak to him.

"The Minister has a daughter, has he not?" she said, bringing him his dressing-gown.

"Yes," replied the young man, avoiding the old woman's glance.

"They say she is very pretty?"

"That is true."

Niania shook her head.

"Excuse me if I am lacking in respect, sir, but they tell me she loves you."

Dournof's heart beat quickly. They said she loved him—was it true then? How sweet to be loved by that goddess!"

"I do not know," replied the young man somewhat embarrassed.

"If she loves you, and she is a good girl, you should marry her——"

Niania wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. Dournof looked at her, without saying a word.

"You should marry her," continued the old servant, "for a man must not always remain single. She is the daughter of a Minister, and will make a good wife. Our Antonine bade you marry."

Dournof looked at Antonine's portrait. Had it not been for Niania's pious care, a veil of dust would have

screened it from view; the goodness of the dead girl, her self-denial, her virtues, her unselfish devotion, — all came to his mind.

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" he cried as he drew the neglected picture near him. "You are an angel!"

He burst into tears, and passionately kissed the hands of that portrait which seemed to look down upon him with that same calmness and dignity, which placed the living Antonine so far above all other women.

Niania wept also, but not with that gush of penitence which pierced Dournof's heart.

"Yes," she answered, putting her hand on the young man's shoulder, "she was an angel, but she is in Heaven, for God has certainly pardoned her for wanting to die. You are a man, and you have already lived too long alone."

Dournof lifted his head, looked at Niania, and said:

"Then do you believe she will pardon me?"

The deep-set eye of that old woman who had suffered so much, and knew so much of life penetrated the very depths of the young man's thoughts.

"For loving another as you did her? It is impossible!" she said.

Dournof felt she was right, and that he could never love another as he had loved Antonine.

—"But to love a good woman, and to have children! She told me to tell you in her name when the time came. We have mourned together, master," continued Niania, lowering her voice; "I love you, because she

loved you, and I love you as if you were my own child, but I did not before. When she was dying she told me I must serve you, and protect you from evil spirits. She said I must be submissive to your wife, and rear your children. I will obey, master, I will obey!" and the old woman's voice broke down completely. "I will be an obedient servant, but do not let your wife drive me away, for I love you now for the love she bore you, and you are all that remains to me of her."

The old servant said no more, and hid her wrinkled face in her apron. Dournof pressed her hand, and she felt then she would never be driven away.

"Then she said," he asked in a low tone, "that I must marry?"

"It was the night before her death; she called me to her side and gave me this paper for you."

"A paper?"

"Yes, to give you when you thought of marrying!"

"Go and bring it; quick, quick!"

She obeyed, and brought the piece of yellow paper, folded and sealed.

Dournof opened it with a trembling hand, and read Antonine's last words:

"My dearly beloved, when you have found a woman you can love, do not allow my memory to be a barrier between you. I will be happy to know you are happy, and my blessing will rest upon your wife, and upon you."

"She was better than I!" exclaimed the young man, overcome by this generosity. He kissed the sacred letters traced by a hand weakened by the approach of death. She was a thousand times better than I! Dear Saint! you did well to die, for no living man is worthy of you!"

Niania was discreet enough to leave Dournof alone; and that night he dreamed more of Antonine than of Marianne.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE LIVING!—ANOTHER DEAD!

MARIANNE very soon was in the ascendant again, for Antonine's charms were sleeping under the block of granite, whereas Marianne's were ever developing and increasing.

Her light and frivolous nature had many redeeming traits, and it was compassion that won Dournof; she loved him sincerely and truly, and could love none other.

Prompted by this deep feeling, she went one day to the Minister's study.

"Papa," said she, pushing aside a pile of papers, "who stands first among our young presidents?"

"What do you mean by the first?" asked the astonished father.

"Yes, the most intelligent, the one who is the most promising, who will take your place if you should become wearied with it?"

Surprised at this foresight, the good father reflected a moment.

"I believe," he said, "if appearances are not deceptive, and circumstances do not change, that Dournof will be my successor."

"Well, papa," said Marianne, triumphantly, "I want to marry Dournof."

The Minister turned half round in his chair, and looked at his daughter in astonishment.

"You? Dournof? Why, what is this new fancy of yours?"

"I will marry Dournof, or die from grief. Do as you please about it!"

Quite upset by this assertion, Monsieur Mérof led his daughter to her mother, who did not appear as much surprised at this declaration as himself.

"It does not astonish me," she said, "I always knew Marianne would marry differently from other girls."

"But after all," exclaimed Monsieur Mérof, "Dournof is only a President."

"Yes, papa, but you told me he would be Minister in time! then I would not have to leave this house!"

"But this is nonsense!" said Monsieur Mérof, in absolute exasperation.

"As you like, papa," replied the incorrigible Marianne, bowing her head in feigned resignation. "Mademoiselle Karzof's parents were the cause of her death, my fate will be the same."

"Who is this Mademoiselle Karzof?" asked Monsieur Mérof," more enraged than ever.

With great eloquence, and many embellishments, Marianne related the history of Antonine.

"Well," she continued, "it will be Dournof's fate never to marry the woman he loves, they will all die because of their parents' cruelty."

"Does he love you?" asked the father, unable to reason against such absurd logic.

"Does he love me?" echoed she, and the cheeks of the young coquette flushed with joyous pride.

"Love me?" she repeated, "ask him, papa, and see what he will answer."

"Then you wish me to offer him your hand!" asked the Minister, ironically.

Marianne assented with a low courtesy.

"If you please, my dear papa. You know he would not dare make the first advances, and it will not be at all derogatory to us, for marriages of princesses are negotiated thus when they marry simple mortals."

The mother and father exchanged looks over the head of this spirited child, and could not repress their smiles.

"See here, papa, be very nice now! Let me marry Dournof and I will love you so much! I have not asked mamma, because she never opposes me, and she would never have threatened to let me die from grief."

"Did I ever threaten to let you die?" asked Monsieur Mérof, angered beyond control.

"Certainly, since you will not consent to my marrying Dournof."

There was no getting out of this; and the Minister, with great difficulty, obtained his daughter's consent to wait eight days, that he might procure information.

The information did not enlighten Monsieur Mérof in any degree, because he knew perfectly well the intellectual and moral worth of the young man whose position he had himself made. Eight days later Dournof

was invited to the Minister's private study, and went out of it the happy *fiancé* of Marianne.

This result, which he never thought would have been so brilliant and facile, astonished him a little. He thought the young girl had displayed great acuteness and cleverness to attain her end so quickly. What to him was most extraordinary was that she should have divined his love, and made so many advances without being assured of his consent. What if he did not want to marry her?

Dournof reproached himself for this evil thought, and looked upon this as the ingenuousness of a young heart, and another proof of true love, — nothing more.

He went home infatuated and bewildered; and yet he would be able to give his wife a very high position, as he hoped to be Minister, and when the first vacancy occurred would be his father-in-law's assistant. What a future!

"I am going to marry," he said to Niania, who, faithful in her attentions, had followed him to his bedroom as soon as he came in.

The humble servant looked at him, crossed herself, and murmured a prayer, and then prostrated herself before her master, and kissed his feet, according to the ancient custom.

"I congratulate you, master," said she. "I hope you may be happy with your wife, and that your posterity may be blessed!"

She was silent and gazed vaguely out of the window, while the bright sun of an early spring shone upon the dripping roofs.

"The snow must have melted, down there," said Niania, hesitatingly; "it is a long time since she had any flowers."

"You are right!" exclaimed Dournof, seizing his hat. "I am going there immediately."

He stopped. What would he say to that tomb, which had heretofore been the confidant of all his thoughts?

Could he confide to that chaste granite, these feelings which caused his cheek to pale and his heart to beat when Marianne placed her hands in his?

"I am going to thank her," said he aloud; "thank her for the blessing that she sends down from Heaven upon me."

He had the carriage filled with flowers, just as it was some months before — when he first met Marianne — and could not refrain from making a comparison of the two days.

"It was Antonine who sent her across my pathway," he said to himself. "It is her wish that has been fulfilled. God bless our Antonine!"

Antonine was now as cold and far off as the marble statues on the tombs; she was a saint watching over him, to whom he offered his prayers, but no longer the friend and the confidant of every thought.

He remembered, while they were arranging the

flowers, that Marianne also must have a bouquet that day, so he ordered two alike; after comparing them a moment, he ended by attaching his card to the handsomer and sending it to his *fiancée*.

This act cost him some remorse, as he thought of it during his long drive.

"Pshaw!" he said, at last coming near the Cemetery. "What difference can it make to Antonine?"

He carried his offering to the iron cross, reaching it with difficulty through the half-melted snow. Arriving at the top of the hill, he tied the bouquet with a ribbon to the arm of the cross, then leaned on the tomb to rest himself.

The stone was so cold that he shivered and withdrew his hand. For a moment he stood in deep thought. He wished to ask her to share his joy, but he felt he could not speak to Marianne of Antonine. It flashed across his mind like lightning, and as quickly vanished —that Marianne was not the woman Antonine would have chosen for his wife, the woman who would assist him in making a fortune for himself.

He sighed as he kissed the stone; it felt colder to his lips than to his hand; then he quickly passed his handkerchief over them as if to warm them.

Then, light-hearted, like a man relieved of a burden, he jumped into the carriage, whipped up the horses, and all along the road Marianne's golden curls floated before him like Will-o-the-wisps.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WEDDING.

DOURNOF was invited to dine socially with the family that evening. When he entered, Marianne met him, holding the bouquet of white flowers in her pretty, little plump hand, which Dournof kissed passionately.

It was soft and warm — this small, white hand, and caused his blood — which had been chilled so recently by contact with Antonine's tomb — to flow freely. Marianne read at a glance in Dournof's eyes, how much he loved her, and did not try to conceal her happiness. The evening passed pleasantly, and the parents congratulated each other upon the characteristics of a statesman exhibited by their future son-in-law; and Dournof, for the first time, really enjoyed living.

As for Marianne, she was gay and happy; she had gained her point, what more did she want?

The marriage was appointed to take place as soon as possible; only three weeks would separate them now. All the arrangements had been made. Dournof would keep the apartment so recently rented and furnished. Madame Mérof intended to fit up one room for the bride, and the young people would dine at the Minister's until Marianne should have some experience in housekeeping.

"If it is a housekeeper you are after, Dournof," said Madame Mérof, "you have made a mistake, for Marianne knows nothing about it."

The young man looked lovingly upon his *fiancée*, and answered:

"I do not need a housekeeper. I have one who is excellent."

"Really? Who is it?" asked mother and daughter in one voice.

"Old Niania."

"Your nurse?"

Dournof felt a little embarrassed. Few men marry their first love, and yet, when the time comes to take a wife, it is embarrassing to allude to the past; so it was with some hesitancy Dournof decided to unveil the secrets of his heart.

"This is a faithful servant of a family I formerly knew intimately. She came to me in my days of poverty, for I have known poverty," he said, as he turned towards Marianne and smiled.

She opened her eyes wide, for this word poverty was to her, like a tiresome page in a romance; it was the traditional bed where the poor woman lies, or the cold stone on which the little Savoyard shivers. Poverty, the most real she had ever known, she found in the commencement of the "*Allumeur de réverbéres.*" These words of Dournof's seemed to her, therefore, utterly meaningless; for a man wearing a white vest like his, and who was to be her husband, never could have

known poverty. She smiled because he did, but said nothing.

"How did she come to live with you?" asked Madame Mérof, desirous to know more of a person who was to be her daughter's housekeeper.

Dournof hesitated, but his honest heart hated deception, so he decided to speak frankly; taking Marianne's hand in his, he replied:

"This Niania, was the Niania of Mademoiselle Karzof, of whom you have heard me speak."

Marianne's hand trembled, but he still held it in a firm grasp.

"She watched over her young mistress with untiring devotion, and when we laid her in the tomb, she left her old employers, because they did not make it agreeable for her, and came to me, and has served me faithfully during the most trying years of my life, when I was nothing, and nobody — you would not have deigned to notice me in the streets, I was so badly dressed."

He looked up at Marianne, who replied by shrugging her shoulders, as much as to say, "I would have looked at you under any circumstances, since you are to be my husband."

"But," insisted Madame Mérof, "do you think this woman will be kindly disposed to a new mistress? I can understand your attachment for her, it does you honor, after such devotion to Mademoiselle Karzof —"

"It was she who suggested my marrying," replied Dournof. "She saw me sad, and dejected, —" he

looked at Marianne, who guessed the subject of his reveries, — "and she entirely relieved my mind when she placed in my hands a note written by her young mistress shortly before her death, advising me to marry when I met the woman I could love."

Another look assured Marianne that she was that woman.

Madame Mérof, delighted that circumstances had placed a devoted, faithful person at the head of her daughter's house, congratulated Dournof upon his great good luck.

"It was fortunate for me," replied the young man, "as Fortune seemed to frown upon me for so long a time."

Peparations were soon finished and the evening before the wedding arrived.

That night, before retiring, Dournof took a candle, and went around the apartment where he was alone for the last time; inspecting each piece of furniture, curtain and picture, and thought of the joy Marianne's presence would lend to everything.

Entering his study he looked at Antonine's picture which always remained on his desk. For a long time this beautiful face had been concealed by a paper, or a letter carelessly thrown before the frame. It had been eight days since he had looked at the portrait.

He reproached himself for this negligence, and tried to concentrate his thoughts upon the young girl, but the effort was too painful.

"I cannot leave this portrait here," he thought, "Marianne would be shocked."

After hesitating a moment, he took the ebony frame, wiped it, put it on the secretary, the face turned to the wall, intending to hang it up later — as he had not the keys with him — left it for the following day, and passed into his bed-room.

There he found Marianne's picture in evening dress crowned with flowers, smiling upon him in a gilt frame on a table near his bed. He took it and pressed a kiss upon the beautiful image.

"To-morrow she will be my wife," he said joyfully.

Scarcely had he retired, when he heard a slight noise in the adjoining room. He called, and having no response, concluded he was mistaken. However, the next day when he looked for Antonine's picture he could not find it, and intended asking Niania, but the day was so short, and he so occupied, that he forgot it.

The memorable evening came; the marriage was splendid; after the wedding, Dournof took his young bride home beaming with joy and beauty. The apartment was gorgeously lighted, flowers everywhere, and Dournof scarcely believed his eyes when he saw Marianne's white silk skirt trimmed with orange flowers floating over his study carpet.

Niania, always stiff and sad, left off her mourning upon this occasion. She made a low curtsy before her new mistress. Marianne patted the old woman familiarly on the shoulder, and complimented her.

When the domestics had paid their respects, Dournof showed his wife into their private apartment.

After the folding doors of the nuptial chamber were closed, Niania looked for some time at the dark, heavy curtains which vailed it — bowed her head in resignation — brought out Antonine's portrait from behind some old pictures, and placed it on the desk.

"Pardon! pardon!" she said, "angel in Heaven, pardon! When he is unhappy, it is to you he will return! Forgive a weak man, who has been bewitched by a woman!"

She kissed the portrait, returned it to the hiding-place, blew out the lights, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE YOUNG MOTHER.

ONE year after Dournof's marriage, on a rainy morning in the spring time, Niania heard some one call her. It was her master's voice, louder and more agitated than usual.

She arose from the chest that served as a seat in the great anteroom, called the servants' chamber, which opens into the room of the mistress of every Russian home, and there she saw her master, who said to her:

"Quick! Come quickly!"

They both entered Marianne's room, when Dournof almost fell back when he saw the doctor hold up a new born babe.

"A girl?" asked the father in a trembling voice, without daring to approach.

"A boy, a real Dournof, the image of you!" said the doctor joyfully, "come and see!"

—But Niania had the baby in her apron, and was already bending over him, murmuring a blessing upon her master's son.

Dournof soon joined the group, and silently gazed upon that little being which was his own. What thoughts passed through his mind when he first heard

the wail of that new-comer to this vale of tears! Did the young father think of the beautiful childish mother, or, of her who should have been the mother of his children? What he thought, Niania understood, and listened attentively, when he said:

"Love him, Niania! love him, for he is the dearest thing on earth to me."

"Never fear, master," replied Niania, "He is a Dournof."

"Alas! yes — Marianne was no longer the dearest thing on earth to Dournof, he already loved this baby, which had only breathed a quarter of an hour, more than the young wife he had brought to his fireside a year ago. It was not that a paternal feeling had developed in his heart with such wonderful intensity, but that Marianne was not everything to him; she was only sweet, and frivolous — a flower, which one smells, then forgets for other things more important and interesting.

Soon after his marriage, after the first days of infatuation, Dournof felt an irrepressible melancholy whenever he was near his wife. Marianne was still the same charming, fascinating woman he had loved so ardently, but she was not a wife to whom a man could confide his cares and troubles, or ask advice in moments of doubt. Marianne was not an Antonine, and hereafter, Dournof would have to turn to the memory of his first love, whenever he was sad and weary.

Marianne loved him though, and he loved Marianne,

but mingled with this joy was a sort of bitterness, to think his wife was so inferior to him, so different from what he expected.

He pitied her for having been educated in that light, frivolous school, where the serious side of life is ignored, and worldliness is made predominant. He still looked upon his wife as amiable but irresponsible, created for the smiles of the world, so he tried to satiate her with theatres and *fêtes*, hoping she would tire of them, and that the cares of maternity would give her more dignity.

One hour after this solemn moment, and still leaning on the foot of the bed, Dournof watched Marianne sleeping peacefully under the half-drawn curtain. The baby had been carried away to the next room, and the young mother was sleeping quietly. Dournof studied that lovely face, somewhat thinner, but still fresh and youthful.

"What kind of a mother will she make?" he asked himself, his heart filling with a thousand fears. "Will she devote herself to the child, or abandon it to strange hands?"

The question of nursing had not been thoroughly decided; a robust countrywoman was waiting in the kitchen, for the decision — whether the new mother would or could bear the fatigues of these maternal duties? When the question had been asked, she had always responded:

"We will see when the time comes."

Dournof felt that she would not consent, and a painful fear took possession of him.

"Shall I love her as much, if she refuses to nurse the child?"

Somewhat dejected and discouraged, he tried to drive away this thought, but he was sure of loving her less if she evaded this duty, as she had done many others. In order to divert his mind he went to look at his son again.

He found the child in a large, well-lighted room, which had been selected for the nursery. Everything looked comfortable and neat; the atmosphere seemed calm and peaceful; the cradle, draped with blue silk, was placed in a corner, well protected from the sun and draughts. Sitting on a low stool was the wet nurse, waiting until something should be decided.

Niania came up to her master, and asked with that tranquillity natural to her:

"Is all going well, master?"

Dournof glanced around the room, saw that everything was right, and with a contented air walked up to the cradle. There slept his son — he who would transmit his name to future generations — born amid silks and satins, while his father first saw the light in poverty. Now, the son seemed destined to be greater than the father. The heir to so much dignity, slept his first sleep on earth, but his little, round, red face indicated no particular ambitions or brilliant future. Dournof closed the curtains gently and went into his study.

Before his marriage, in seeking to find a spot where his wife might read or work and still be near him, he had removed several pieces of furniture, to make room for a small sofa, a table and lamp, made expressly after his own ideas; the carpet which covered this little Eden was softer and thicker than any other in the house; but alas! it had not lost its freshness, and the lamp had never yet been lighted. The books had disappeared, and been carried into Marianne's boudoir, which was bright and gay. Dournof, renouncing the hope of having his wife near him in his hours of labor, resumed his solitary work, while Marianne, always out or dressing, continued the same gay life of a wealthy girl, with all the liberty marriage gives a woman.

All these souvenirs came up before Dournof, and in order to forget such tormenting thoughts, he went out for a walk; on his return, he found the house full of relations, come to offer their congratulations.

The next day, that important question came up again. Marianne could nurse the baby, the doctor announced triumphantly. Madame Mérof, always prudent and discreet, looked on in silence. Niania, standing near with the infant in her arms, awaited the decision, which she was already sure of. Dournof took his wife's hand, kissed it tenderly — for Marianne was still dear to him, and what would he have given to have had one more proof of her love for him.

"Well, dear Madame," continued the doctor, "what do you decide?"

Marianne glanced around at the numerous faces, then at her slumbering babe, who seemed entirely content.

"I will not nurse him," she said. "I have been ill all winter, and I fear I shall not be able to go through with it."

Dournof felt his courage fail him. Another fond hope blasted, although this last was but a faint one. He tried to feel satisfied, complimented his wife upon her wisdom, and saw his son handed over to the wet nurse and both banished to the nursery, where the father soon followed them.

What were his feelings when he saw that hungry little creature press the breast of the nurse and drink the stream of life? He sadly contemplated this scene. Uttering a deep sigh as he turned away, he found Niania was also watching the child.

"May God's will be done!" said she in a low tone. "In His goodness, may He give a long life to this poor little innocent. But our Antonine ——"

A severe look from Dournof cut short the sentence. The old woman humbly hung her head, but her master understood too well what she meant.

"No, Antonine would never have allowed her son to be nourished by a stranger; she would never cede to another the pleasure derived from his first looks and caresses. She would have claimed with jealous tenderness the eager pressure of those lips and fingers of the unconscious little creature who attaches himself to the one who feeds him."

Dournof left the nursery without looking back, and Niania respected his silence. The grandmother came in often to see her grandson, and found him surrounded by enthusiastic friends and aunts, but Niania listened neither to advice or suggestions. This child was hers, because Dournof had given it to her! She was deaf to the words of everybody else as long as the father was satisfied.

CHAPTER XXV.

HE ASKED HIS WIFE'S OPINION.

MARIANNE, blooming as ever, soon resumed her worldly pleasures. She was frequently seen at the "Iles," in an open calèche, often accompanied by her husband, sometimes her father or mother, often alone. A perfect bevy of young men grouped around the carriage just before sunset, which in that latitude and in summer is quite late.

Many persons came on foot, on horseback, or in carriages, to enjoy the beautiful view of the river Néva, from the extreme point of the Isle of Yelaguine. The sun set at half-past nine over the Gulf of Finland, illuminating with its last rays the fresh verdure on the banks of the river, which meandered in and out among the islands dotted with handsome villas. This promenade was every evening like Longchamps during the season.

It was there that Marianne, after several weeks of repose, resumed the gay life she preferred to all others. She was always delighted when her husband accompanied her, for the novelty of being the wife of President Dournof had not yet worn off. Her husband had very little leisure to follow her into the fashionable set of which she was the centre. She was never so handsome

and brilliant as at this time, and her heart filled with pride when she returned the smiles that were wasted upon Dournof; but when he was not there she did not make herself miserable, on the contrary, she laughed and chatted with the young men as they leaned upon her carriage door, flattering the young wife and teaching her to love this admiration and coquetry, so dangerous to her now.

"What was the harm in it? was she not the most devoted of wives?—did she not love her husband as much as on the day of their marriage? Was she not a devoted mother? Morning and evening—often during the day, she would go and see little Serge, kiss him, make him coo and chirp, as only mothers and nurses can, and leaving the nursery, left also behind her a strong perfume of wild violets.

It would be a very bad tongue that would say Marianne was not the most irreproachable wife in the world.

Madame Mérof was not contented with all this. She was too wise and experienced, however, to draw her son-in-law's attention to a dissipation which may have passed unnoticed by him; still she often tried to keep her daughter at home, by coming to dinner, or supper, if for nothing else, to save Dournof the painful sight of bare walls, and a deserted dining-room. Marianne preferred passing the evening anywhere rather than at home, and no one could prevent her doing so.

The Session which would soon close, and permit the gentlemen to leave town, wound up, with a most important case. It was so singularly presented, that Dournof was sorely perplexed, and could not form an opinion for the accused; evidences were against the man, and yet, his past life, his honest face, and noble bearing, contradicted the numerous accusations. Public opinion was in his favor, but his accomplices brought such heavy charges against him, the state could hardly uphold him in his crime.

For eight days past, the whole city was talking about this case. One evening, for a great wonder, Marianne remained at home, working on her piece of embroidery, which was never brought out except on rainy days. Dournof, who was very thoughtful, looked at his wife, studying her fresh, young face earnestly. The bloom of youth was still upon those rosy cheeks, and swan-like throat. Her expression was so innocent and pure, that it seemed as if her conscience must be free from fear and doubt; so Dournof decided to consult her.

"Marianne," said he, "you have heard that affair of Sintsof spoken of?"

"Oh, Heavens! yes, they have been dinging it in my ears for a long time!" replied the young wife, threading her needle with pink wool.

"What do you think about it?"

Marianne looked up perfectly astonished.

"I? I don't think anything about it," she said quietly.

"Try to think of it then," replied Dournof gently. "You know the points of the case, of course?"

Marianne assented.

"Well, do you consider Sintsof guilty?"

The young woman smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"I know nothing about it," she said, counting her stitches.

"Marianne," insisted Dournof, "I beg you will answer me seriously; you know my word will have great weight in the issue of the suit. Suppose I condemn an innocent man?"

"Would that annoy you?" said Marianne laughingly. "Suppose you toss up and see—if it is tails, your man is guilty—if heads, he is innocent, or vice versa if you please. I understand that is the way grave questions are decided now-a-days."

"My dear wife! I pray you will not joke in this manner," answered Dournof, more disturbed than he was willing she should see; "you don't know how badly it makes me feel to hear you speak so lightly."

"Ah!" said Marianne poutingly, "sermons again? I did not ask you to talk to me on a subject I know nothing about. I am not a serious nature, therefore I do not want to hear about law suits, criminals, etc., it tries me."

Whereupon she folded up her work and left the room, much out of temper.

Dournof watched the door of the boudoir close upon her. Must he follow her to make peace? Was he

wrong to talk to her of these things? Or was she wrong not to understand them?

He rose, but stopped when he reached the door of Marianne's room.

"Oh, Antonine!" he thought, "where are you? Will you not deign to look upon and speak to me?"

He bowed his head as if to listen for advice from some inward voice, and after a moment went into the room.

"Marianne," he said, tenderly, "you are right, I should not talk to you of things you know nothing about."

The young wife looked at him, with eyes full of tears.

"You are cruel," she said, "to scold me! I am neither a Judge nor a President; and is it my fault if all these serious discussions weary me?"

Dournof kissed that little white hand, respectfully, but without feeling.

"Yes, you are cruel!" continued Marianne amid her tears, "say at once that you will never do it again. No, never! never!"

"I promise you," replied Dournof.

Antonine would have divined with what bitterness he made that promise, but Marianne was satisfied, and her childish caresses diverted for a moment this man full of cares. As he returned to his study, he repeated, ironically: "No, I will never, never do it again!"

Seated in an arm-chair, his head in his hands, he reflected a long time. The night was far spent; Marianne had been sleeping for some time. Overwhelmed

with painful doubts, Dournof rose. Antonine's portrait had remained in the drawer where Niania had put it, but he had found it; and often in his perplexity secretly contemplated it. After gazing some time at the picture, he hung it on the wall, near the lamp, which Marianne never lighted.

"Take your old place once more," he said; "my guardian angel, take that place which you never should have left! It is you who should illumine my life, my own forgotten love! But in Heaven there is no resentment!"

He sunk down on the little sofa, his eyes fixed upon that loved image, which time and exposure had somewhat faded. When his meditation was over, the sunbeams penetrated his study windows.

"Thanks, my conscience," he said. "If I deceive myself, it will be from the sincerity of my heart."

He dressed himself, re-read his brief, and at seven o'clock, was at the court-room waiting for judges and lawyers, that he might consult freely with them.

Contrary to expectation, but in conformity with public opinion, Sintsof was acquitted; the jury decided he was innocent.

The Minister, when he met his son-in-law that very evening, said to him:

"Do you know, Dournof, you played for high stakes?"

Dournof smiled. A wager was of little importance to him; money, and even life, were nothing in comparison to conscience.

"Are you sorry, your Excellency?" said he to his father-in-law.

"I am proud of you, but ——"

"That is all I want to know," replied Dournof.

Antonine's portrait remained hanging on the wall.

That morning, when Niania brought little Serge in, as was her custom, she noticed this change, stopped, and fixed her eyes upon that frame which enclosed so much.

"Master," said she, finally, "if your wife sees this, what will she say?"

"Bah!" replied Dournof; "she never comes here."

Niania's look was full of pity, as she glanced from the young father to the child she held in her arms.

Dournof stooped and tenderly kissed his sleeping infant.

"May he not resemble her!" he said, thinking of Marianne.

"We will teach him to love his aunt, in Heaven," said Niania, divining her master's secret thoughts.

Dournof, without replying, made her a sign to leave him alone.

At this moment, Marianne stood in the doorway, dressed for a promenade.

"Monsieur is at work," said Niania in a low tone.

"Oh! then I am going to run away!" said Marianne, pretending she was terrified.

The door closed; Dournof, left alone, returned to kneel before the portrait, and shed bitter tears.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HEARTLESSNESS.

TWO years passed without bringing any changes to the Dournof household, except the birth of a daughter. The following winter, Madame Mérof took cold while acting as chaperon to Marianne to a masked ball, where Dournof would not consent to her going alone, and the good woman died, after great sufferings, repeating continually to her son-in-law:

"Be kind to Marianne."

Dournof promised solemnly to be good to Marianne, and kept his promise to the best of his ability.

He was accustomed now to having this pretty little creature by his side; she filled the house with millinery, smiles, music, dancing, and gay, frivolous people like herself. He let her alone — why oppose her? — for he detested scenes, and feared above everything any disorder, pouting, or tears from Marianne — they completely upset him.

How could he reason with this child, who declared that common sense wearied her? How moralize with a woman who had no object in life but her own pleasure? With all this, Marianne was not bad; she was charitable, lavish with her words of sympathy and tears of compassion; but, as soon as the object of her

compassion was out of sight, she banished it from her mind to think of something more agreeable and cheerful.

Marianne's mourning compelled her to be quiet; for eight long months she deprived herself of the pleasure of balls and theatres; but as poor Madame Mérof died in the midst of the carnival, the winter season was in full blast before the year of mourning was over.

Marianne had a box at the opera by the year, and resumed her accustomed place — first all in black, then Parma violets appeared in her beautiful blonde hair. At Christmas, on the pretext that she must do honor to the church festivals, all mourning was taken off, and white and pearl color were adopted.

The carnival was later this year than the preceding, therefore Madame Dournof's mourning expired before the end of this brilliant season. A grand ball at the Austrian Embassy, to be given the last Saturday of the carnival season, would bring together all the fashionable society of St. Petersburg. Monsieur and Madame Dournof received an invitation, which the President put upon his desk, forgetting it entirely.

"Do you know, my dear," said Marianne, one morning at breakfast, "I think it very strange we have received no invitation for the ball at the Embassy?"

"We are invited," replied Dournof, quietly eating his cutlet.

"Invited?" exclaimed Marianne, clapping her hands petulantly; "and you said nothing to me about it?"

"I did not suppose it could be of any consequence to you."

"And why not? Must I not have time to order my dress?"

"You have no intention of going?" remarked Dournof, stopping in the midst of his repast.

"Why, of course I intend to go. It has been a year, now, since I have had any pleasure ——"

A look from Dournof, silenced her.

"I have been cruelly tried," she continued, "and mean to enjoy some diversion now; we will go, will we not, dear husband?"

"You will go if you like," replied the President, "I will not go."

"But papa will," cried Marianne, ready to burst into tears.

"Your father will go in his official capacity, but not as a widower of one solitary year. Go with your father, I do not object."

"But why?" exclaimed Marianne.

"It seems to me," replied Dournof, "it is not for me to tell you."

He rose, and left the dining-room. Marianne already consoled, went to her dressmaker's to order a pale blue dress, which she said to herself, "would look gray by gas-light."

If Dournof was more and more annoyed at Marianne's worldliness, he did not complain. His anger suppressed and dormant, but never totally extinguished,

was aroused at each new folly committed by his wife. If his pride as a husband was wounded, he did not allow his heart to suffer; he had one consolation, that with the exception of Niania, nobody in the world understood him. It was during the morning hours, when Marianne enjoyed her best sleep—between eight and ten o'clock, — that Niania and Baby appeared in Dournof's study.

The large, dark room, was no longer dreary. In the corner reserved for Marianne and which she had never occupied, a pile of playthings, carefully covered during the day, was turned upside down every morning. Little Serge would hide behind the curtains, and cry, "Cuckoo!" when his father would leave his desk, no matter how important was his work, and sit down on the carpet opposite Niania and Baby, to play with his child.

It was there, between those loving hearts, that Serge learned to stand upon his little pink feet, and take the first steps, as he fell into his papa's outstretched arms. Nobody knew the many silent thoughts Dournof and the old woman exchanged, while they were teaching the little one to prattle. No one ever suspected how deeply the celebrated President felt, when Serge looked up for the first time, and pointing with his little finger to Antonine's portrait, said, "Mamma!"

No one knew that Dournof held his son up in his arms to kiss that portrait, while Niania, suddenly disturbed in her Spartan immobility, threw her apron hastily over her wrinkled face to conceal her tears.

The President stooped and kissed this furrowed brow, dropping upon it a scalding tear, while the astonished Serge patted them both, trying to console them in their grief.

"That is not mamma," said Dournof, finally, "it is an aunt you will never see."

"Why not?" asked Baby.

"Because she is in Heaven," was the reply.

Baby had a most indefinite idea of Heaven — Niania, however, added this to his little prayer, "My aunt Antonine who is in Heaven," she had no fear that Madame Dournof would ever ask the meaning of this addition, for the mother was never there when the child was dressed, or undressed.

Dournof's greatest happiness was in his little Serge. His daughter Sophie was too young to amuse him, so it was Serge who excited his deepest love, although he was proud to see his little girl tottering about his study floor.

The month of February was very cold this year — colds, croup and contagious fevers prevailed in the city; but Marianne seemed invulnerable; she passed her days in flitting from the florist's to the dressmaker's, from the dressmaker's to the shoemaker's, exactly as if she had nothing to put on. A poor shipwrecked sailor could not have been more anxious for something to wear, than Marianne, when she doffed her mourning.

The day of the famous ball arrived. For a week after the melancholy anniversary had passed, Marianne

skilfully lightened her mourning by degrees, so as not to shock her husband's eyes too suddenly. This was time lost, for he never noticed her. About four o'clock on the important day of the ball, while Marianne before her mirror, was trying on the billowy folds of the blue silk which represented a dress, Dournof entered the nursery. Sophie was seated on a large red rug playing with her dolls, while Serge — with a bright spot on one cheek and the other deadly pale — was seated in his large arm-chair in front of the Holy Images at which however, he was not looking, and seemed suffering and dull.

Niania greeted the father with the words:

"I have sent for the doctor — the young master seems very ill."

Dournof signified his approval and took the little fellow in his arms, who laid his weary, hot head down on his father's shoulder with a sigh of relief. Dournof listened anxiously to the quick breathing of the little invalid, whom he held, until the arrival of the physician.

"It is nothing," he said, "it is a mere childish ailment," and giving some trifling remedy he departed with the promise of coming in again at night.

About ten o'clock, before Marianne started to the ball, she stopped in the nursery to see her son. The large room was darkened by the heavy curtains, drawn before the doors and windows. One lamp was burning in the corner before the shrine, another, carefully

shaded, stood near the child's bed. When Madame Dournof entered this silent chamber, Niania, who was half asleep watching the sick boy, lifted her head to see who the intruder was.

The rustling of silk on the floor, shimmering in its thousand folds, the brilliancy of Marianne's diamonds on her throat and arms and in her hair, seemed so out of place near that darling boy breathing so painfully, that Niania could not conceal her surprise and indignation.

"Is he better?" asked Marianne, stooping over the crib.

"No, Madame, no, he is not better," responded Niania, sharply.

Marianne, somewhat affected, placed her hand on the child's burning brow; he stirred, and opened his eyes, looked at her a moment without recognizing her, turned his head away to sleep. He did not know this lady, as he had never seen his mamma in ball dress.

Marianne withdrew her hand which had become as hot as that little face, and laid it on the cool marble slab.

"How hot he is!" she said. "Has the doctor been here again?"

"No, Madame," answered Niania.

The young woman looked at her; a mother's instinct prompted her to do something for her sick child, but she knew nothing of a mother's duties.

"What can I do for him?" she asked, with a certain

wish to be called upon to perform a duty for which she was so unprepared by education and nature.

"Nothing, nothing, Madame," replied she old nurse, "we can manage by ourselves, perfectly well."

Marianne felt hurt at this reply, although it was not intended to wound her. She walked, majestically, up to the little girl's bed, the rustle of her long, heavy dress, dragging over the floor, made little Serge open his eyes; a racking cough seized him, he gasped and struggled, stretching out his hands in desperation. Niania took him up, put his head on her shoulder, quieted him, then laid him down in his crib once more.

As Marianne looked upon this scene, something sent a pang through her heart; Serge should have extended his arms to her! But she was not going to allow herself to be jealous of a nurse! Stifling this foolish thought, she drew away the curtains around Sophie's cradle. It was empty!

"Where is my daughter?" she asked, hastily.

All these new and disagreeable impressions angered her somewhat.

"Monsieur ordered her to be taken to another room, in case the boy should have some contagious disease."

What! and such changes were made without consulting her, without even asking her opinion! Dournof should have prepared her for this.

She remembered that twice since nightfall he had been to her room, but she was not alone; the hairdresser, the dressmaker, or the milliner was there, and

prevented any serious conversation. They had company to dinner; when could the husband have a confidential talk with his wife. Marianne was unreasonably angry.

"What folly!" she said, sharply. "Sophie will take cold in that room where the temperature is so different from what she is accustomed to. Go and tell the nurse to bring the baby here at once."

Niania did not move.

"Well?" said Marianne, in a higher key.

The old woman made no sign of moving.

"Go, at once!" repeated Madame Dournof, stamping her foot imperatively.

"Monsieur did not order me to do so," repeated Niania, without lifting her eyes.

Marianne tore off her gloves and threw them on the floor, perfectly furious.

"Am I no longer mistress in my own house?" she exclaimed. "Miserable creature, do you dare to disobey me?"

"I do not disobey you, Madame," replied Niania, coldly, "but I dare not set aside my master's orders."

The door opened, softly, and Dournof entered.

"What is the matter?" he asked, seeing Marianne's disturbed face, and the old servant's lips tightly compressed.

"That woman refuses to obey me," said Madame Dournof, between her teeth.

"What did you order her to do?" asked her husband, more agitated than he wished to betray.

For a long time a conflict seemed inevitable between these two women, the only wonder was that it had not come before. He anxiously awaited the response.

"Madame wishes Sophie brought back to this room."

"And why?" asked the father, addressing his wife.

"Because — because I do not wish any orders given here without my knowledge; because I do not wish to be treated like a stranger in my own house, and I choose to be consulted about everything that takes place here."

Dournof looked at his wife more in pity than anger.

"You were going to the ball?" he asked, without replying to her.

Marianne looked at him in surprise.

"You are going to the ball," he repeated; "your father is waiting for you in the carriage. We will talk of this later."

Marianne moved slowly toward the door, then hesitated. For a moment her conscience almost overpowered her, she wanted to say — "I remain here" — but a glance at her dress changed her mind. Her husband looked so serious that she was frightened; — and at what? A singular mixture of fear, anger, obstinacy, and worldly vanity agitated her frivolous heart. She was dissatisfied with everything, particularly herself.

"Good-night," she said, passing between the child's bed and her husband.

"Good-night," he replied, sadly.

As she pulled aside the curtains to pass out, a frightful hoarse cough, as if some one was suffocating, stopped her in the doorway. Serge was seized with another paroxysm.

She looked over her shoulder into the room; there she saw the fond father and Niania trying to calm the child, and give it a potion. Marianne felt they had no need for her near that bed, and left the room haughtily.

As her carriage left the court, another drove in; it was the doctor, coming to make the promised visit.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT THE BALL.

MARIANNE forgot those painful emotions at the ball, for she was one of those persons who thought only of the present hour, and this one was full of charms for her.

Her mourning had kept her out of the world for a time, but this repose was beneficial to her. Her marvellous freshness, the brilliancy which her recent anger imparted to her eyes, the perfect taste of her toilette — all enhanced her beauty, and caused her appearance in society to be regarded as a great social event. She was soon surrounded by a crowd of admirers, who were fascinated by her grace and wit.

Such homage and flattery, contrasted strangely with the cold manner of her husband and the insolence of Niania: every one, it seemed, except those two persons who constituted themselves her judges, found her charming — and was not the world right? This was a consoling thought, and she tried more than ever to fascinate all who came within her reach, especially a young Italian Marquis who was presented to her that night, and vowed he would ever be her most devoted admirer.

In the midst of all this vanity, Marianne's thoughts wandered back sometimes to the nursery; again, that

fearful cough rang in her ears. Suddenly, about one o'clock, she felt intensely uneasy — disgusted with everything and everybody — she ordered her carriage.

"Why do you leave so early?" asked her father, surprised at her moderation, for she was insatiable in her pursuit of pleasure.

"Serge is ill," she replied, briefly.

Her father looked astonished.

"You said nothing to me about it," he replied, reproachfully.

The carriage door shut upon them; Marianne threw herself into her father's arms, and burst into tears.

"I am a wretched woman," she said, feelingly; "and a bad mother — my child is very ill. I have scarcely left off mourning for my mother, and yet I could not resist the temptation of going into the world again. I do not deserve to live!"

Her father tried to calm her, and convince her that she was not so guilty as she thought. In his heart, he did not believe the child very sick, for Marianne could not have left him had he been in any danger.

When they arrived at Dournof's house, Monsieur Mérof wanted to hear at once from the child. As he reached the nursery door, he heard a terrible cough, like a bark; he was struck with horror, and painful souvenirs were revived, for he knew full well that fatal malady which had robbed him of two children.

"It is the croup!" he murmured in a low tone.

Marianne rushed into the nursery, leaving the door open; her dress caught on a chair and upset it, making

such a noise that Dournof trembled, but she passed on, threw herself upon the bed, crying out:

"My Serge! my son!"

Mérof followed her in, raised the chair and closed the door.

"Yes," said Dournof, in a whisper; "your son is dying with the croup, and you have just returned from a ball!"

Marianne was on her knees, her face in her hands, sobbing bitterly, her husband looking at her more in contempt than pity.

"Oh! my God!" exclaimed Marianne, wringing her hands; "how I am punished! What have I done, to be so chastised? My child! my boy!"

Her nervous, trembling hands disturbed the covering of the crib, and Dournof quietly lifted her from the floor.

"Go to your room," he said, firmly.

"I want to take care of my boy!" said Marianne, clinging to the crib.

Dournof put his strong hand on his wife's shoulder, and added in an imperious tone:

"Go and change your dress. Are you not ashamed to drag your finery about here?"

Marianne went out, crushed under the weight of this reproach, and was soon after joined by her father, who lingered to say a few words to his son-in-law.

Had Marianne been accessible to any authority, she would have understood and obeyed; but her superficial, frivolous nature was not one to receive any lasting impression.

One hour later, she returned to the nursery in her dressing-gown, determined to assist Dournof in his mournful vigils. He, pitying that weak, distracted soul, allowed her to take a seat near the child's bed; but Serge refused to lie in her arms, or take any medicine from anybody except his father or Niania.

Marianne, after shedding many tears, threw herself on a sofa in the corner of the room, and soon fell asleep.

The child's cough awakened her. She started up, nervous, bewildered and terrified. Then realizing her own helplessness, she would sink back, and after a while fall asleep again.

About five o'clock in the morning, her husband awoke her and said:

"The child is better; go to bed now, and try to sleep."

She arose mechanically, and obeyed; her husband watching her as she disappeared.

"Poor, poor creature!" said he in a low tone; "God did not make you for trouble."

"She is not our Antonine," murmured Niania.

Dournof pressed his finger to his lips.

"Antonine was too perfect!" said he sharply, stooping over his son.

Niania continued:

"Our Antonine would never have gone to a ball, leaving a sick child at home! Your wife, Master, is not a good wife."

"She is the mother of my son," replied Dournof, taking his place near the boy's cradle.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CONTEST.

FOR three days the child seemed to hover between life and death; during this time neither Niania, or Dournof, thought of themselves. Every two or three hours Marianne came to the nursery to ask how the child was, and invariably awakened him; she would then fall on the sofa weeping bitterly; weary of this, she would go out to walk, or to drive, to quiet her nerves.

While they waited anxiously for a change, Marianne in her solitude, concocted a little scheme.

Thanks to the stoical indifference of the old woman to everything that did not concern her master, and to the frivolity of Madame Dournof's character, no collision had hitherto taken place between the two women. Niania, respected by the servants because protected by the master, had so little to do with Marianne that some particular circumstance was necessary to prove the old servant's supremacy in the household. Marianne was ever on the alert now, and nothing escaped her.

She saw that Niania ordered everything, took charge of everything, in fact, supplanted her in the domestic arrangements, as she had in her son's heart, so she took the greatest antipathy to the old nurse.

Taking advantage of a moment when the child was sleeping, she went to her husband's study, where he was trying to take a little rest on the sofa.

Seeing her, he rose, for he thought this visit foreshadowed no good for him; but to his great surprise, Marianne spoke affectionately.

"My dear," she said, "it seems to me that Serge is better."

Dournof assented.

"We can hereafter take care of him ourselves, I think."

Her husband looked at her but said nothing.

"We have been wrong," continued Marianne, "not to watch over our own children more closely, and to allow a servant to have so much authority in our house."

"You are alluding to Niania!" said Dournof.

"Of course, she thinks she is mistress here, and it cannot go on — it is quite impossible!"

Dournof looked at her, but did not speak. He had feared this for some time, but finally thought Marianne did not perceive the position the old woman had assumed; and, indeed, if Serge had not been ill, jealousy would never have penetrated Madame Dournof's heart.

"We will give her a pension, and send her off, will we not, my dear?" insisted Marianne, with that sweetness which had won Dournof.

"Serge is not yet out of danger," he replied.

"I do not mean to send her away immediately, but in a few days."

"A good way to thank her for saving your child's life!" said Dournof, ironically. "You have a strange way of showing your gratitude."

Marianne bowed her head; she did not wish to appear ungrateful, or capricious, because her feminine dignity required the contrary.

As she looked up, hoping to provoke an argument, she discovered Antonine's portrait, which she had never seen before.

"What is that?" she asked trembling, and divining the answer before she heard it.

Dournof followed her glance and hesitated. It would be very painful now to divulge his secret to this frivolous woman who bore his name, however, he must reply, so he said, briefly:

"It is Mademoiselle Karzof's portrait."

"Ah!" said Marianne, turning away disdainfully, "she was not pretty."

Dournof suppressed his feeling and said nothing; he was hardened against all such attacks, and determined not to be affected by anything Marianne said.

"You have not replied," continued his wife — "shall we send Niania away?"

"By no means," replied the husband.

— "But if I desire it?"

"You cannot desire it, for that would be too unjust."

"Unjust! and to whom?"

"To that woman who does not deserve to be driven away, because we owe our boy's life to her, and because" — he hesitated trembling with emotion, "I wish her to remain, and that is sufficient."

"And I," replied Marianne, angrily, "I wish her to leave this house immediately."

Dournof coolly took his seat at his desk and began to arrange his papers, as if he wished to work.

Marianne looked at him, trying to speak, but bit her lips, and left the study.

Her husband looked after her, and remained very thoughtful.

"This was his home! a thoughtless, heedless woman, wicked sometimes, because of her frivolity, was the companion of his life!"

He recalled the dreams of the past, when he built castles in the air, and Antonine lived far away from him, but for him.

He had dreamed of an apartment, small and simply furnished, a lamp partially lighted the room, a child slept in the cradle, and another lay on Antonine's lap, for she was both mother and nurse, yielding to no other woman the caresses and smiles of her children. The work was long and hard — to-morrow's bread by no means certain — Dournof, stopped by an unforeseen difficulty, began to question that other dear soul, which responded to his, whispering to him of honor and truth.

What a vanished dream! and what a contrast to

reality! he uttered a deep sigh, pushed back his arm-chair, and went to gaze upon his son once more.

The door opened a second time, and Niania entered.

The rigid features of the old woman indicated deep grief; with clasped hands, as if asking mercy, she came towards Dournof, and threw herself at his feet.

"Pardon! pardon! master," said she, with a trembling voice, as he raised her up, "I cannot bear this!"

"What is the matter?" asked the President.

"Your wife has dismissed me, I cannot live far from the little one — or from you, Master — you know this."

She said no more, swaying her old frame back and forth; pressing that wrinkled face in her hands, she continued:

"Since our Antonine left this world I have never wanted to serve or love any one but you. You know it well, then why do you want me to leave? or where shall I go? and the dear little one, who is still in great danger, who will take care of him?"

Dournof took the hands of his humble servant.

"Console yourself, Niania," said he, "I have forgotten nothing; I will arrange that. Where is Madame?"

"In the nursery; she drove me away from his bedside, the poor little angel began to cry, and she scolded him."

Dournof heard no more, but ran like a madman to his child's room.

Serge was crying still, but his tears, stopped by the severe maternal reprimand, rolled no longer down his sunken cheeks; a convulsive sob, now and then, brought the feverish color to his pale face. Marianne, standing with her back to the door, was measuring out the sick child's medicine.

"Marianne," said Dournof, with such a menacing tone that Madame Dournof started, and the spoon fell. "Marianne, your place is not here; go and amuse yourself, Niania and I will watch over the child."

"Niania!" cried Serge, plaintively, "my Niania!"

Terrified by her husband's look, Marianne stepped towards the door, her husband stood aside for her to pass, and when she was gone he called the old servant from his study.

"Take your place there, you will be responsible for my son's life."

Without answering, Niania resumed her seat, and in a few moments, soothed by her familiar voice, Serge was sleeping a peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN ELOPEMENT.

THE child's convalescence was long and dangerous; several relapses put him back, and not until warm weather was he able to go out, and then only in the middle of the day. His little sister Sophie came in and out now as she pleased, fresh and beautiful as possible.

After her fruitless effort to drive away the old nurse, Marianne refused to enter her child's room; she had the little girl put next to her, and showed a decided partiality for her. To those who questioned her about it, she replied:

"The intrigues of an old woman have robbed me of my son's heart, I do not wish her to do the same with my daughter."

Marianne acted well this part of a martyr mother, and really believed herself the victim of an abominable conspiracy. She would walk for hours in the Jardin d'Eté, followed by the nurse with Sophie in her arms. The young marquis met her there regularly, and their conversations were long and animated. This was a subject for talk in society, but they said nothing more than that Madame Dournof was a giddy woman, and would soon tire of this Italian.

Lent is the season of concerts. Marianne went every

evening, either to one of these musical solemnities, or else to a dinner or small party. Dournof, always alone — for he invited no one to look upon his desertion — spent his time in working. Serge passed most of his day in his papa's study. To deprive him of this pleasure was the greatest grief to him. Dournof received these proofs of infantine tenderness with great joy, so the trio were firmly established in the President's private room. Niania, Dournof, and his son passed many happy days together, while Marianne walked off with her little girl and the Marquis.

One evening, M. Mérof came in while the three friends were amusing themselves building card houses; Dournof had just erected one on a high table, and Serge looked on, holding his breath for fear of blowing down the fragile edifice.

"Dournof," said the Minister; "I want to speak to you."

The President gave Niania the pack of cards, and led his father-in-law into a remote corner of the vast room.

"No," said Mérof, "we must be alone."

Dournof passed into the salon, and closed the door.

"My friend," said the Minister, "I am going to give you a terrible blow, but I was struck before you ——"

He leaned for a moment on the back of a chair, then sat down. Dournof noticed the fearful pallor of his face. He waited impatiently, scarcely daring to provoke the announcement of the misfortune which seemed to have utterly crushed him.

"It is not my fault," continued Mérof, trying to lighten the blow; "it is not my fault, and if my wife had lived, this would not have happened; but —— you were not the man for her."

"What has happened?" asked Dournof, affected by his father-in-law's emotion.

"Marianne ——"

The unhappy father could say no more. Dournof started up suddenly.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

"Worse!" murmured Mérof, hoarsely.

"What then?"

"She has gone!"

"Gone! With whom?"

"With your daughter, Sophie."

Dournof rushed around the deserted mansion like a madman. The servants were taking tea in the kitchen; everything seemed to be in order, but Madame had not come in for dinner, and the little girl's room was empty.

He returned, trembling, and supporting himself against the wall, the sight of his father-in-law gave him some confidence, and he summoned sufficient courage to say:

"Why did she go away?"

"She went, she asserts, because you made her life utterly unbearable!"

Dournof made a sign of denial, which the Minister interrupted by saying:

"I know all that you have to tell me, and I cannot

accuse you; the unfortunate woman deserves all the blame."

"Did she depart alone?" exclaimed the bewildered Dournof.

Mérof bowed his head in shame.

"Who was with her?" repeated the outraged husband, almost crushing the back of the gilded chair between his hands.

"That Italian — the Marquis! They have gone to parts unknown. You can have them arrested ——"

"Arrested!" said Dournof, bitterly. Allow the *gens d' arms* to bring back a wife, who publicly abandons her fireside? What should I gain? Let her go — the miserable creature — and work out her sad destiny. She was not made for ——"

"Dournof," said Mérof, gently; "she is my daughter, still!"

The young man sat down and covered his face with his hands.

"Here is what she writes," replied Mérof, handing the open letter to his son-in-law, which he read mechanically.

"DEAR FATHER: — Monsieur Dournof has ceased to love me, and has robbed me of my children's love, and for no fault of mine. Notwithstanding my earnest entreaties, he retains in his household a servant who has usurped my rights, and I cannot bear it ——"

"Who is that servant?" asked Mérof, hoping to find some excuse for Marianne's conduct.

"Niania," replied Dournof, shrugging his shoulders, and continuing to read:

"I cannot bear it; I leave, accompanied by a faithful friend, who cannot see me treated in such a manner in my own house. I take with me my little girl; of the two children God has given me, this is the only one that loves me; I leave with my husband the one he prefers."

"But what folly!" said Dournof, when he had finished. "It is folly of the most dangerous kind! Let her go where Fate leads her. She has ruined my life! but my daughter! she cannot keep her!"

"She will not keep her long," replied Mérof, sadly; "the child will soon be in her way."

Dournof buried his head in his hands again, and abandoned himself to mournful meditation. At the end of a short time, which seemed long to them, Mérof placed his hand affectionately on his son-in-law's shoulder; the two men understood each other, thoroughly. Just as they were about to shake hands, little Serge came in the salon.

"Where is my papa?" he asked, in his baby talk. "I want to kiss my papa, and grandpa, before I go to bed."

Niania, silent as usual, followed the child to the doorway. The two men took him in their arms, and kissed him. Bitter tears fell from the eyes of the outraged husband, upon the beautiful blonde curls of the boy, and the white hair of the dishonored father.

CHAPTER XXX.

REALITY.

WHEN Dournof was alone in the deserted apartment, he wandered about from room to room.

Everywhere were traces of great luxury, rather than good taste — marks of neglectful servants. Except the President's study, which Niania took special care of, the rich furniture, prepared to receive the young bride, was scratched, abused and discolored; proving the carelessness of the mistress of the house.

Dournof saw this with newly opened eyes, although it had not been altogether unnoticed by him previously.

Yes, Marianne had departed, and with a man devoid of all mental and moral attractions. She was now calmly weighed and condemned by her husband.

He had loved this frivolous young girl — this unworthy woman — this mother without maternal love — he had loved her, but had he loved her rightly?

The remembrance of his love for Antonine was to his wounded heart, as sharp and cutting as remorse; he had not loved Marianne with that deep love in which respect is mingled with tenderness — where one fears the displeasure of the beloved object more than the frowns of sovereigns — it was not thus he had loved Marianne!

Dournof tried to remember how he had behaved towards his young wife.

"Have I humored her too much? spoiled her?" he asked himself. "Have I been too indulgent, or too severe?"

He recalled the scenes of his early married life, when Marianne's ill humors and poutings, were looked upon as childish faults to be gently reproved and corrected.

"I have endeavored to do my duty towards her," thought the injured man, "it is she, who is guilty, and only she. Shall I follow her? Shall I force her to return to a fireside she has disgraced? How should I receive a wife who through force and not penitence has returned to her duties?"

Dournof shuddered with horror at the thought of this woman, who had dishonored his name, appearing again in his presence. Some day, when tired of the world, weary of the burden of life, Marianne might return to her blighted home, throw herself weeping at his feet, and ask pardon for her children's sake. What should he do, he, Dournof, before the tears of this foolish woman who did not know good from evil? Should he discard her then? She would accuse him of condemning her forever to a life of vice. Restore her? What opprobrium to breathe the same air with this lying, adulterous woman!

He returned to his study. Sophie's room was dark and empty, and gave a new channel to his thoughts.

What would become of his baby girl — the innocent little one — if reared by such an unworthy woman?

Poor little creature! her entire future would be blighted by the very one who ought to protect it! Must her pure heart be sullied in the bud by harsh contact with the world? Would she despise her mother, or succumb, as she had done?

Dournof, perfectly overwhelmed, saw no limits to his despair. Wherever he turned, there was not a ray of hope. Public opinion, which was of so little consequence to himself, would crush his children. He remained motionless, his hands so tightly pressed together, that the nails tore the flesh; his mental anguish was so much greater than the physical, that he did not even notice the pain.

He looked up to heaven, perhaps to utter some cry of desperation, when his eye rested upon Antonine's portrait.

"Ah!" he cried, "dearly beloved! my wrong is to you! I should never have admitted a stranger into the sanctuary of a heart consecrated to you! After having loved you, I should never have loved anything but my duty, I should have lived the life we talked of together, and given myself to my country! I should have remained poor and unknown — despised all honors and dignities, which have so turned my head — and as a child of the people I should have consecrated myself to them; and since God, in His goodness, did not permit your love and wisdom to brighten my life, I should

have believed myself condemned to solitude, and accepted the judgment, I should have lived and died alone!"

Niania entered noiselessly, and stood in front of her master.

"What do you want?" asked Dournof.

The old woman curtseyed respectfully.

"My mistress is away," said she, "I have come for your orders."

"In regard to what?"

"What shall be done with her things?"

"Nothing," replied Dournof, painfully, "nothing at all."

"They must be folded and put away in trunks."

"Yes —— do as you like."

Silence reigned, prolonged and unbroken as if the shadow of Death rested upon them.

"Master," continued the old servant, "you are sad!"

Dournof laughed bitterly.

"Do you wish me to rejoice?" he said ironically. "You are perhaps right, for certainly nothing is worse than before."

Niania shook her head, and said:

"That is not the way to talk, you don't know how to submit to the will of God!"

"It is true!" exclaimed Dournof, "I do not know how to submit, but why should one blow follow the other in such quick succession? Why, of these two women, should the angel be taken and the demon left, to be my evil spirit, and my children's curse?"

"You blaspheme, master," said Niania, severely, "God's ways are past finding out."

"So they may be," replied Dournof, "do you know, Niania, when I think of Antonine I do not know how I ever married Marianne."

Niania bowed her head solemnly as she said,—"Our Antonine was an angel, and yet she sinned against Heaven, in seeking death before her time. You young people are impatient under trials, and know not how to bear adversity; you want life to be always gay and bright, and when trouble comes, instead of receiving it as a chastisement to make you better, you run from it, like frightened children. You must be more of a man, and accept life as God gives it, and submit to it."

"When we can!" murmured Dournof. "Oh, Antonine! how happy I would have been with you!"

Dournof felt a keener, sharper grief than any he had experienced before. Antonine's loss appeared greater to him when he compared the Past and the Present. Gradually his life became utterly intolerable; he ceased to occupy himself with his own affairs, but devoted his whole energies to his profession; his son Serge no longer diverted him; the child, still delicate, was subject to frequent attacks of the same terrible malady. The unhappy man's existence was thus passed, living between the fear of losing his son, and seeing his wife return. This second fear was realized.

Three years after Marianne's flight, there came to

him a woman, simply dressed, leading a little girl, scarcely four years old. Admitted to the President's study this woman took a letter out of her pocket and handed it to Dournof, who immediately recognized Marianne's handwriting, and Sophie's nurse. Laying down the letter, he looked at the child; the resemblance was not very striking to her little brother, but Dournof saw in the child his own eyes; the beautiful curly hair was now cut short to the head.

"Sophie?" said he, gently.

The little girl stepped forward and looked at him, boldly.

"Sophie," said he, again, "do you know I am your papa?"

The child shook her head.

"My papa was down there," said she, "but it is a long time since he went away."

"Don't be silly, Mademoiselle," interrupted the nurse, "you were told that you were going to see your papa; the President is your father."

Dournof drew the little girl to him, and kissed her with tenderness and pity, his heart full of sorrow to see innocence thus early stained, and thought that when she was older that this stigma would still be upon her, in spite of every effort to obliterate it.

The nurse again offered the letter to the President, and as he refused to accept it, left it on the desk. Finally, after long hesitation, he opened it.

The child looked at him in perfect astonishment, and

the unfortunate father recognized in her expression and in her gestures the same fascinations that would make her a second Marianne. Her movements were already affected, her face lacked candor; in fact Dournof was looking upon a little woman, one of those precocious children seen in the gardens of the Tuileries, who imitate their mothers' friends, and alas, sometimes, their mothers themselves. Dournof drew a long sigh, kissed his child, and then read the letter:

"My eyes have been opened to my faults," said Marianne, "and I send you your child as a messenger of peace. You will not refuse to grant this innocent little one her guilty mother's pardon: I want to return to your home, and I will hereafter be a devoted wife and mother."

Dournof smiled at these words.

"I understand what a response will cost you," continued this singular epistle, "and therefore I shall regard your silence as a permission to return. Do not let us continue to show the world the spectacle of a divided hearthstone. I loved you fondly, and if you will pardon me, we can yet be very happy."

Receiving no word of approbation or disapprobation, the nurse said, quietly:

"Well, Monsieur, what do you wish me to do?"

Dournof started as if aroused from a dream.

"Go to your old room," he said, "you will remain here."

He kissed the little girl the second time, and when

she had gone, rose, and paced the floor up and down for a long time.

"Happy! happy together! What sad irony!" he thought, walking to and fro with a slow, measured step, regular as the pendulum of a clock. "Happy in a union sullied by infamy, with the remembrance of the past between her and me! An adulterous image always at the fireside! She may forget it and perhaps may again feel for me that light, superficial passion of which her frivolous heart is alone capable! She might be happy! but I?"

He stopped—looked vaguely out the window—then cast a glance around the apartment, until his eye rested upon Antonine's portrait.

"There is my happiness," said he, "could I never see that woman I despise, could I live peaceably with Niania and Serge, and forget there are any other beings in the world except these two souls, who love me devotedly, to live together under the eye of Antonine, who would look down upon us with pity, and sometimes smile upon us from on high, life might be endurable. Antonine, what shall I do? Must I drive from my home that woman—my worst enemy, or shall I stifle my feelings of aversion and disgust for my children's sake, and take her back?"

The idea appalled him of having Marianne again in his house, so long silent and gloomy—only enlivened by his boy's laugh. When Dournof thought of the change his heart failed him.

"I cannot! no, I cannot!" cried he, wringing his hands in anguish.

"It must be, however!" answered Conscience; "how can I refuse to this foolish woman the only means of restoring her to a life of respectability? How can I withhold the last straw from a drowning soul? Could you sleep peacefully, Dournof, if you thought you were casting into the great gulf of vice the wife who bears your name — the mother of your children — when you can save her by opening your door to her?"

"No! I cannot!" repeated Dournof. "It is beyond my power."

After meditating sometime he made a sudden resolve, and went to his son's room, where he found the two children playing together on the carpet, as if they had never been separated.

"Niania," said Dournof, "come here." Niania obeyed, and followed her master to his study.

"Do you know that my wife wants to return?" said the President, abruptly.

"The nurse has just told me so," replied the old woman, bowing down her head.

"Where is she?"

"At Varsorie."

"What is she doing there?"

"She is waiting for your permission."

"And if I refuse?"

Niania looked at her master perfectly amazed.

"How can you refuse?" she asked, "is she not your wife?"

It was now Dournof's turn to look astonished; attentively gazing at the old woman, who was very melancholy, but submissive, for she knew how to be patient and resigned — he answered slowly:

"But you know I have reason to complain of her."

"Nobody is without sin, Master," replied the old servant. "If she desires to do right you should allow her to try."

"Should she recommence her ——"

Niania crossed herself.

"May God preserve us from a like misfortune!" she said. "Why should you think of such an evil falling upon your household? She would not twice commit the same error."

"And if she should fall again?" insisted Dournof, very much excited.

"You want to know more than the Holy Spirit," said Niania, reproachfully; "that is not right."

"Then," said he, finally, "you wish her to return?"

"She ought to return," said the loyal conscience of Niania.

"Yet you, who want her back, have no love for her, and she has less for you!"

"That is true, master, but you promised me I should never leave little Serge, and besides, she ought to return here, for this is the home to which she was appointed by God."

Dournof dismissed Niania with a wave of his hand — she understood and retired.

That day the President forgot to dine. His boy's excitement — who, being accustomed to a lonely life, hardly knew what to make of his sister's arrival — had no power to elicit a smile from his father. His lamp burned way into the night, and at last, weary of mental conflict, he wrote the few words,

"Come if you will!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

SHAMELESSNESS.

IN a few days, Madame Dournof appeared. One would have supposed she would have been somewhat embarrassed and ashamed at appearing under these circumstances before her husband and household — but there was nothing of the kind. Undoubtedly, Marianne fully realized her position — but she held her head haughtily — and no one suspected it.

Her escapade had not caused much talk in the world, because of Dournof's reserve and apparent indifference; so that her return was not an event of very great importance. Monsieur Mérof always said his daughter remained away on account of her health, and her friends pretended to believe it, so that when she returned, there was not much notice taken of it.

The evening of the first day — so embarrassing to every one except Marianne — when the children were in bed, Madame Dournof came in her husband's study.

He looked up and frowned, for he had not thought of any such intrusions, but before he could say a word, his wife was established opposite him and talking affectionately.

The years of absence had improved Madame Dournof immensely; she had lost those childish graces she had

retained so long after her marriage, but she had grown much more womanly — more artificial, perhaps — but more fascinating. Marianne thoroughly understood the art of dress. She knew that a toilette may enhance the beauty of a woman, and also how the beauty of a woman may be used to obtain these toilettes!

"You are truly good, my dear," said Marianne, in her musical voice, which was one of her greatest charms. The clear ring had disappeared, but there was a certain tone of suppressed passion in every word. "You are, indeed, good to bid me return, and I cannot express to you all the gratitude I feel."

Marianne's eyes seemed to have a new meaning in them, too, as she fixed them on Dournof; but he remained firm, without looking up from the carpet.

"I know, full well, what I owe to you," continued Marianne, "and I will not be ungrateful. I have reflected much in the past few years, and concluded you were not alone responsible for my error."

"Indeed!" replied Dournof, in his cold way; "have you made that discovery? You are very good."

Without comprehending the sarcasm of his words, Marianne, with her eyes cast down, continued:

—"Yes — I was too young, perhaps — in fact, too childish; I did not know how to appreciate your kindness; your serious manner appeared to me like coldness; your dignity, — pride. You were too grave for me!"

"How she prevaricates!" thought Dournof, recalling

their early married life, when he was fascinated by the grace and beauty of this charming woman, who seemed to adore him, and whom he loved devotedly. In those happy days, he was neither serious nor dignified in her presence; but he preserved his silence.

Marianne resumed:

"I loved you passionately — yes — notwithstanding your sarcastic smile. I loved you, and you know it!"

"Why did you cease to love me?" asked Dournof, quietly.

"Because — because you were too hard towards me," replied Marianne, impetuously; "because you did not like what I liked; because you opposed me in everything; because my friends became your enemies — or, rather, because you regarded them as such ——"

"You chose your friends so well," interrupted Dournof, sternly, "that it was advisable for me to call them mine, was it not?"

Marianne blushed, and trembled from head to foot.

"He will kill me!" she thought.

"It was despair, that drove me to my fall," she said, with eyes full of tears, and inexpressible tenderness in her voice; "it was because you did not love me any more ——"

"It was not *I* who broke the first link in the chain of love which made our life so happy!"

"Yes, it was! it was you, and you, alone!" replied Marianne, rising.

She went to her husband, threw her beautiful arms

around his neck, laid her graceful head upon his shoulder, and murmured:

"I love you still! Forgive me, and let us be happy together."

Dournof was so surprised at this conduct, that he could scarcely believe his eyes; but when he felt Marianne's face resting on his breast, he recoiled as if contaminated.

"How do you dare!" he cried, unclasping his wife's arms from his neck. "How do you dare?"

"I was jealous of Serge!" whispered Marianne, trying to seize the hand he withdrew from her clasp.

"Jealous! When did I ever give you the shadow of a doubt?"

Marianne lifted proudly her repentant head, and pointed to Antonine's portrait:

"Here," said she.

Dournof looked so steadily at his wife, that she turned deathly pale; he then seized her by the wrist and threw her on her knees, saying:

"Wretched woman! wretched ——"

He tried to speak, but could find no words to express himself, his anger made him lose his better judgment.

Marianne, perfectly bewildered, remained prostrate; he let go his grasp, stepped back a little, and, still gazing upon her, said:

"You have dared to insult a saint! Yes, you are right, I am guilty, for I should have remained faithful to that departed angel. I felt this even on the day that

I yielded to your seductions. You are flesh, she was a spirit; you had nothing in common with her, you had never trodden the same paths."

He turned away from her with contempt, and Marianne, taking advantage of this step, rose to her feet. Her feigned humility had disappeared, and she answered, in a harsh tone:

"I offered you peace and you choose war. I accept it, but remember you are hereafter responsible for the future. I will remain where I am, I declare to you. In order to drive me away you will have to resort to violence, and you *dare* not try that!"

As she uttered these words she left the room. Her dress rustled over the floor for a few minutes in the adjoining apartment, then all was quiet again.

Dournof buried his head in his hands, everything reeled around him, he knew not whither to turn. After a moment of cruel torture, he rang the bell. Niania came.

"Niania," said he, "you love my children?"

"As you do, my master," replied the old woman.

"Will you swear that you will never leave them?"

"Why should I abandon them?" said Niania, shrugging her shoulders. "Never until I die, you may depend on that."

"That is right. Tell the coachman to bring the carriage to the door."

"At this hour?" she asked.

"Yes, I have business; and bid him be quick."

She obeyed in silence, as usual, and Dournof was left alone. He arranged various papers, and wrote several letters; addressing one to his father-in-law; looked in the drawer for Antonine's letters, glanced over them hurriedly, then threw them in the fire. Looking around him, he perceived the young girl's portrait, he tore it down, took it out of the frame, and consigned it to the flames with the letters, then watched the papers writhing in the fire until nothing was left of the picture but blackened cinders.

When the last spark died away he scattered the embers with the tongs, and soon all was dark.

"The carriage is ready," said Niania, coming in.

Dournof nodded, and Niania continued:

"Are you going far, alone, and at night? Suppose anything should happen to you?"

"No great misfortune can happen to me again," replied Dournof, going towards his son's room.

According to Marianne's order both children were put in the nursery; they each had their small bed, and the same happy, peaceful expression rested upon both faces. Dournof looked upon them with the same degree of tenderness, kissed them lovingly, then left the room.

Old Niania followed him about, uneasy, as a faithful dog who watches his master depart without him. Dournof turned back and kissed the old wrinkled forehead, respectfully, as he said:

"You will watch over them;" then disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CEMETERY.

THE night was very black when Dournof arrived at the inn at Pargoloro. He alighted at this place, and ordered the driver to return to the village, after his horses were rested.

He had never been there before, as Dournof always went in a hired carriage on this pilgrimage. The coachman turned back, unsuspectingly, and was soon out of sight. The President then took the road to the Cemetery.

It was a cold November night; the snow was not yet deep enough for sleighing, but it had fallen over the barren earth like a winding sheet. The declining moon cast a faint light, and it was difficult to distinguish the route. Every one seemed to be asleep in the village. In each house was the faint glimmer of the lamp that burned before the Images and shone through the windows, reminding Dournof of the candles burning for the dead on the day he first followed the road to the Cemetery.

The north wind whistled through the branches, blowing handfuls of fine snow in the President's face. The dreary Cemetery had neither wreaths or flowers on its solitary crosses. Antonine's tomb alone, recognizable at a long

distance by its elevation, was covered with wreaths of silvered metal, for Dournof did not wish it to look neglected when it was too late for natural flowers.

He climbed up the hill without perceiving the piercing cold which cut through his garments.

"I am coming! coming!" he murmured.

He thought no more of Marianne, she was forgotten; but silently took his way over the path, where, ten years before, he had followed — and with the same intensity of suffering and despair — Antonine's coffin to its last resting place. Arriving at the tomb he leaned upon the cross all out of breath, after having walked so fast. All was quiet, dark, and gloomy; the moon was just disappearing behind the trees on the other side of the lake when he pressed his lips upon the cold stone.

"I have come," he said, "because you alone are my hope, my salvation. Console me, departed soul! beloved saint! Take me in your arms like a sick child. I am ill — my heart aches — I am weary ——"

He sank upon the stone, clinging to the cross with his left arm, and leaned his head upon the chilly iron. Gradually his eyes closed; his frame, tired out from the inward struggle, seemed to be weighed down under the burden of a delicious languor. The cold, frosty air made him drowsy. "Console me! calm me!" he murmured, "I need repose and peace."

He did not want to sleep long, but was overcome. Gradually a vision seemed to rise above the frozen lake, it was this: Antonine, clothed in white, in her bridal

dress, floating heavenward; the long folds of her shroud enveloped the sleeping Dournof. He followed her without a pang, without a tear." No mortal man could tell when the dream finished.

In the morning he was found dead, clinging to the cross, with his arms around it, stiff and cold.

M. Mérof took the children to his home. The letter left by his son-in-law spoke of a long journey which would be far, and for an unlimited period; this journey might have brought Dournof to America, if death had not ended his troubles. The grandfather never gave up the children.

Niania herself prepared Dournof's body for the grave, as she had done Antonine's, and in her heart, blessed the Lord for reuniting them. She is very old, but active still, and in M. Mérof's quiet household watches over the children, hearing the prayers morning and evening, of the little girl and boy, who never forget, "Papa and Aunt Antonine in heaven"; for the old nurse is sure the forgiving Father Almighty has received them both in his arms.

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