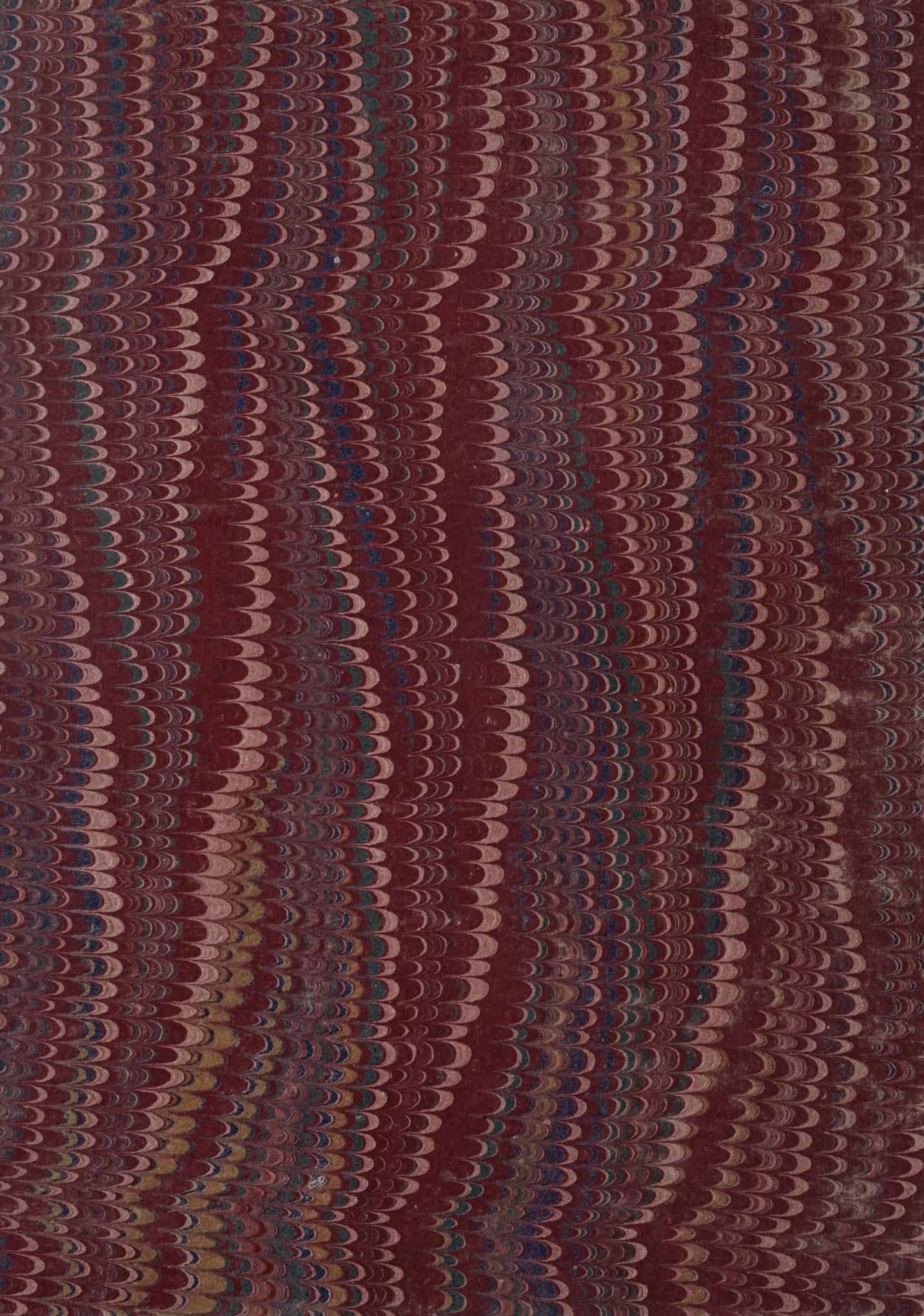


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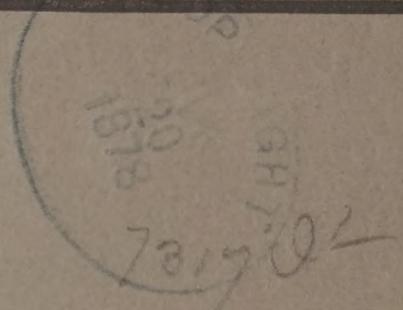


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OF

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G A B R I E L L E.

TRANSLATED FROM THE
FRENCH OF HENRY GRÉVILLE.

CHAPTER I.

A YOUTHFUL BRIDE.

“THE carriage is below, mademoiselle,” said a lay sister, stifling a sob, and wiping her tear-stained eyes upon a corner of her long black veil. “Our mother begs you to come down immediately.”

Gabrielle gathered up the gleaming folds of brocade that formed the rich train of her bridal dress. Her youthful companions crowded around her, and the fond kisses, the thousand promises which are made so readily at fifteen, were exchanged and sealed with tears. Then, preceded by the nun, Gabrielle descended the massive

stone stair-case which had reëchoed for centuries many a light and many a heavy footfall. She cast a parting glance at the school-room, deserted, to-day, in her honor; her eyes lingered for a moment upon the garden in which, scarcely a month ago, she had ceased twining garlands to dream of a lover,—of a husband;—she was just disappearing in the gloomy corridor leading to the convent parlor, when—

“*Au revoir*, Gabrielle, my dear Gabrielle, my beautiful darling! *au revoir!*” cried out fresh young voices above her.

She paused, and looked back. At the top of the stairs the schoolmates she had just left had gathered to bid her a last adieu. A tiny bouquet of snow-drops culled from the shadiest nook in the old garden, and thrown by some childish hand, fell upon her bosom, and lodged in the laces of her *corsage*, as she flung back kisses by the handful to the young recluses.

“Come, come, mademoiselle!” said the lay sister. “Your future husband is waiting for you at the church.”

Gabrielle blushed, cried “*au revoir*” once more to the pretty heads bending over the balustrade above her, and hastily followed her guide.

As they reached the closed door of the parlor, the sister paused and shook out the rich folds of silver brocade, and rearranged the chaplet of orange blossoms on the towering masses of fair hair, whose lovely golden lights could not be entirely hidden even though thickly powdered; but the poor little coronal of flowers was almost concealed beneath the plumes and diamond aigrette which formed the *gala coiffure* of that day.

"You are as beautiful as an angel!" said the good sister. "May you also be as happy!"

The door was opened before Gabrielle had time to reply. She entered the parlor timidly, almost shamefacedly. It was lighted for the occasion by a large candelabrum ablaze with candles, but they could not overcome even the dim daylight that forced its way through the gratings.

The mother superior advanced toward Gabrielle, took her hand and led her to her father.

"That which you intrusted to me, monsieur le comte," said she, "I return to you. God has blessed our efforts. She does honor to her name and to our teachings."

The old courtier of the deceased King Louis XIV. was guilty of no sentimental or unmanly

weakness. He just touched his daughter's forehead with his lips, then took her hand and led her to another old gentleman standing near.

"I hope, monsieur le duc," he said, "that she will prove worthy of the honor conferred upon her to-day by the house of Maurèze."

The old duke kissed the tips of Gabrielle's fingers, and paid her some formal, well-turned compliment, bowed to the count and to the lady superior, then there was silence.

Gabrielle looked in astonishment at the rich velvet coats and knee-breeches, glittering with gold lace, worn by the gentlemen, at the bottle of wine and delicate cakes that had been offered them as refreshments; then examined her own rich but rather too elaborate toilette, and was undecided whether one ought to grieve or to rejoice at such a momentous change in one's life.

Suddenly the outer door was opened and a ray of bright May sunshine lit up the gloomy apartment. Sounds from the outside world entered the room, borne upon the warm spring air. Gabrielle heard the impatient stamping and pawing of the blooded horses attached to the carriage; the whisperings of the eager crowd that had assembled on the pavement to await the coming of the bride. She was

only fifteen, and she felt her young heart beat joyously, while impatience brought a faint rose-tint to her usually pale cheek.

Still more compliments; then Gabrielle was led with stately courtesy over the threshold of the convent, from which a crimson velvet carpet had been stretched to the carriage. The crowd shouted heartily, “Vive la Mariée!” Some handfuls of money scattered among them caused enthusiastic blessings and thanks, and the heavy equipage rolled away.

A few moments after it reached the church of Saint-Germain l’Auxerrois. At the church door several handsome young men in gorgeous court dress were waiting to receive the bride. One of them approached the carriage, and, after the steps had been let down, respectfully offered his hand to assist Gabrielle to alight. More confused than ever, she accepted his aid. Then her father led her quickly into the church, where the peals of the organ resounded and where the wax tapers on the altar twinkled and sparkled in the dim, religious light that stole through richly-stained glass windows. She walked on like one in a dream, not daring to speak, longing yet fearing to wake.

All at once she felt her father placing her hand

in that of another—a man who led her gently forward to the altar. She started, raised her eyes, and recognized the same young man who had assisted her to descend from the carriage. She had only time for one hurried glance, for the next moment she found herself kneeling upon a velvet cushion on the steps of the altar, while a bishop, crossed and mitred, gorgeous in golden vestments, encrusted with rare and sparkling jewels, and followed by a train of priests arrayed in robes of brocade and gold, emerged from the sacristy to perform the marriage ceremony.

Twice before the solemn moment she lifted her eyes to look at the young man kneeling beside her—whom she was about to swear she would love so long as she should live—and both times she encountered a glance from two tender but mischievous black eyes that brought the tell-tale color to her very forehead.

Gabrielle had seen no men save the old gardener at the convent, her confessor, and occasionally her father, who was always haughty and severe. Hence it was not strange that this tender look, even while it seemed to mock her awkwardness, her timidity and ignorance, should sink deep into her inexperienced heart.

"What must I do to please you?" she was even now quite ready to ask.

The solemn words that fell from the bishop's lips were deeply graven upon her heart. "The wife shall be subject to the husband. In him she will see nothing to blame," said the prelate. "She should consider him admirable, valiant, and noble above all others."

"That will not be hard to do," thought Gabrielle.

"The yoke is a yoke of love," the bishop continued; "any sacrifice is easy when one loves. The wife will love her husband because he is her master, and she will be faithful to him until death."

Gabrielle sighed, but it was a sigh of relief, a sigh which said that her task would be easy and pleasant.

"And God shall bless your house," concluded the prelate: "you will bring up your children in the fear of God, and you shall see their children grow up around you like young olive plants."

Children! Gabrielle thought of the rosy, fair-haired cherubs she had seen in the pictures hanging in the convent chapel, and her heart swelled with joy at the thought of having such children of her own.

When they came to the marriage vow, Gabrielle

lifted a steadfast gaze to the bishop's face, and responded "yes" with a firmness unusual in such circumstances. The bystanders looked at each other in surprise. That clear, decided *yes* moved them in the very depths of their souls, and even the most frivolous among them felt some new emotion stir within them at the sound of the young girl's voice.

After the ceremony a magnificent collation awaited the guests at the house of the Duke de Maurèze.

"Marquis," he said, addressing his son, "offer your arm to your wife."

Gabrielle was married.

CHAPTER II.

GULF.

IT was evening. After a sumptuous repast, and while many of the guests were wandering through the lovely gardens which surrounded the hôtel de Maurèze, and which were now bright with the fresh verdure and gay flowers of early spring, the new marquise escaped from the throng and hastened stealthily to the suite of apartments that had been fitted up for her use.

She passed through several elegant rooms, and at last found herself before a door that stood partly open. She pushed it gently. Was not everything hers in this house now?—hers!

She saw a little *boudoir* furnished in pale-blue satin. It was lighted by some candles nearly burned away, which were flickering and flaring in a magnificent silver candelabrum. A maid, who had been asleep in an arm-chair, rose hastily at Gabrielle's entrance and offered her services to madame la marquise.

“I do not need anything,” said Gabrielle; “you may go.”

The girl disappeared through the open folding-doors, that led into another apartment beyond, and Gabrielle sank down into a low arm-chair to rest after all the confusion and excitement of the day.

The large, low window of the *boudoir* opened upon the gayly illuminated garden, but this wing of the house was screened by a high terrace covered with a heavy growth of shrubbery, and Gabrielle was secure from observation. The young girl, wearied and confused by all the novelty and excitement of the day, by the dazzling lights and the noisy crowd, found it an inexpressible relief to be alone in the quiet, fresh night air. The moon high up in the heavens made the brightly-colored lamps that were hung among the trees look faded and dim, and her clear blue light defined here and there upon the floor of the *boudoir* silhouettes of the overhanging boughs that shaded the window.

“Married!” said Gabrielle, with a long sigh. “I am married! How handsome my husband is!” she added, clasping her hands delightedly.

This innocent soul, this virgin heart, had surrendered itself at the first glance. She had not compared her husband with other men. She had

seen no other men. The bishop had commanded her to love her husband above all others, and she had obeyed instantly and implicitly.

"I love him!" she whispered softly; "I love him! He is my husband!"

Suddenly the remembrance of the look that had made her blush brought a still brighter color to her cheek. She trembled a little with fright, perhaps, and looked about her to see if she were quite alone: then sprang up, and walking on tip-toe, went toward the adjoining room, the door of which had been left open by the servant as she retired. But upon the threshold Gabrielle paused, scarcely daring to enter.

A magnificent bed, with heavy hangings of sky-blue satin, richly embroidered and fringed with silver, stood in the centre of the room. The satin counterpane, covered with lace, was turned back, disclosing the finest of linen, embroidered with the Maurèze crest, and garnished with costly lace. A shaded lamp, burning upon a table before a crucifix, cast a dim, uncertain light over the splendor she could imagine, rather than see. Here and there the foot of a gilded arm-chair, the corner of a table, or the frame of a picture, sent out a sparkle in the obscurity. Gabrielle shook off the fear

which had at first taken possession of her, and ventured into the room—the sound of her footsteps deadened by the rich, soft carpet.

“We are to live here—my husband and I! . . . My husband and I!” she repeated, slowly. “Oh, my God! how happy I am, and how I thank thee!”

She threw herself upon her knees before the crucifix, and, burying her face in her hands, gave way to her tears. Her heart was overcome with joy.

That very morning she was but a child—loving only the nuns and her schoolmates; now she was a wife, and loved her husband. A soul even less childlike than hers might well be overpowered by such a sudden change; but Gabrielle, by her act of adoration, relieved her overflowing heart as she wept and thanked God with all her strength at the same time.

A sound of approaching footsteps and voices aroused her from her rapturous dream. Some one called her name. She sprang to her feet and darted into the *boudoir*, not without closing the door of that room where she thought only her husband would be permitted to enter.

A moment later and the *boudoir* was invaded by

a throng of ladies, attended by servants, bearing great candelabra filled with candles, which made the little room a blaze of light, and destroyed the delicate lacework of shadows cast upon the floor by the leafy boughs as they trembled in the moon-beams.

“We have come to undress the bride,” said a gay feminine voice.

A crowd of ladies belonging to the highest nobility of France immediately surrounded Gabrielle. She received her father’s blessing and also that of her father-in-law. Then the ladies led her into the bridal chamber—so quiet and peaceful a moment ago—now filled with noise and confusion, and a glare of light.

Etiquette, already less rigorous than during the reign of Louis XIV., no longer required the bride to be put to bed in the presence of the ladies; but they removed her ornaments and her rich bridal dress, and arrayed her in an exquisite *robe-de-chambre* of delicate lawn and costly lace. The sister of the Duke de Maurèze, a stately and consequential *grande dame*, bade her a formal good-night, and the gay crowd withdrew.

A moment after and the door of the *boudoir*

was opened and the voice of the marquis was heard, saying :

“Thanks, gentlemen ; I will now dispense with your services.”

As he spoke he bowed to his laughing companions, and, entering the room, closed the door behind him. Gabrielle rose trembling from the *fauteuil* where she had been seated.

The marquis approached her with courtly grace.

“Madame la marquise,” said he, bowing low, “will you permit your devoted slave to speak to you of his love ?”

Gabrielle lifted her great thoughtful brown eyes to his. By the light of the candles burning brightly upon the table, he could see her face distinctly.

“For at last, madame la marquise,” he continued, “you are my wife, and I love you. Do you love me a little ?”

Gabrielle still looked seriously at him, but her heart throbbed violently. “Oh, yes,” she replied, shyly, almost in a whisper.

The marquis threw aside his sword and drew nearer. He had made love many a time to pretty *grisettes*, to opera dancers, and to haughty *grandes*

dames, but never before had he received such a reply.

He took his young wife's unresisting hand gently in his, and led her out of the glare of light to a tiny sofa on which there was scarcely room for him to seat himself beside her. Gabrielle was silent, and her little hands trembled violently.

"What may I call you?" said the marquis, kissing the tips of her cold fingers one after another.

"Gabrielle," she answered, timidly; then gaining courage a little, "and your name?"

"Is Guy," he replied, laughing.

"Guy," repeating it after him, softly. "Guy—that is a very pretty name. And you, monsieur le marquis, will you love me? I will do my best to please you."

Then she hid her face in her hands, fearful lest she had said too much.

"You are adorable, Gabrielle," exclaimed the young man, throwing himself upon his knees at her feet. "Certainly I shall love you! How can I help it?"

He clasped his arms closely around her, whispering tenderly, "I love you," and Gabrielle hid her blushing face upon her husband's shoulder.

CHAPTER III.

SILHOUETTES.

THE Marquis de Maurèze was by no means worse than others of his years and of the time. Until thirty he had lived the usual life of a man of the world and a courtier of the age of Louis XIV.; and he had profited by the relief that this monarch's death had given to the entire court. Everybody was so weary of the hypocrisy that had attended the last years of this king's reign, that more than one man who was really good and virtuous at heart, loudly boasted of having committed the most shameful excesses in order that he might not be outdone by others.

Guy de Maurèze was certainly not one of the most perfect in morals and in life, but we repeat that he was by no means one of the worst.

His father was a severe, stern man, who possessed a wonderful talent for making virtue odious by the effect it produced upon himself, which was to make him insufferably morose and disagreeable. Nevertheless he had instilled really good principles

into the mind of his son, and, in spite of Guy de Maurèze's life and the influences that surrounded him, some of these principles and teachings still lay dormant in his soul; and at fifty, when the froth of passion should have evaporated, there would be good, generous wine still remaining in the bottom of the cup. For some of his friends that day would never come. They would die as they had lived—frivolous and wicked, for in their cup there was nothing but foam. He had other friends, the rich wine of whose natures had been turned to vinegar by exposure to the harsh winds of adversity. Such men should be pitied rather than blamed, for their old age is lonely and miserable.

Guy de Maurèze belonged to neither of these classes of men; still the generous wine of his nature would bubble and froth for a long time yet. Besides he feared ridicule above everything.

For a month he adored his wife. At the end of a month his acquaintances began to tease him.

"This will never do," exclaimed one of his friends. "Why, it is vulgar to the last degree. You cannot cheat us in this way."

"I admit," said to him one of the most brilliant men of the court—for brilliant, read the most

wicked—"I admit that it is the duty of a man to perpetuate his house, but is he to renounce every other ambition?"

It is true that Guy's chief aim in marrying *had* been to perpetuate his house. Such a noble family must not be allowed to die out. But his father had chosen for him a wife accomplished and charming in every way, of noble birth, beautiful (perhaps too beautiful, since Guy forgot everything else by her side), rich; in a word, perfection. In such keeping the house of Maurèze could not be in danger.

Gabrielle was in Paradise. Everything combined to intoxicate her—her own youth and inexperience, her husband's devotion, and the deference and splendor that surrounded her who had never known any other life than that of the quiet convent—all this was surely enough to turn her head.

She mingled in the gay world, and it enchanted her. The gorgeous dresses, the sparkle of repartee, the bewitching music of the opera, all filled her with wonder and delight; and the marquis enjoyed her child-like raptures immensely.

But this enchanted life was of short duration. After his wife had attended two or three of the feminine reunions, from which gentlemen were

excluded, he saw Gabrielle return greatly scandalized by the advice that she had received, and by the low tone of morality that prevailed among her acquaintances. She was so ingenuous that she did not know how to conceal anything, nor had she any desire to do so. Gabrielle told him of the vulgarity of expression, the general looseness of principle, and even the jests which had astonished her.

"You are too unsophisticated, my dear," the Baroness de P—— had remarked to her. "Your opinions will change before six months have passed."

"I hope not, indeed!" exclaimed the marquis. "I hope never to see that day."

But as it was utterly impossible for the marquise to eschew society while living in Paris, the young husband soon discovered there was only one way to prevent his wife from becoming contaminated by the manners of the time. This was to withdraw her entirely from the court, and take her into the country.

This plan was the more advisable because the future of the house of Maurèze was already assured, and Gabrielle would soon become a mother.

When this project was first broached to Ga-

brielle, she greeted it with the most rapturous delight.

"How perfectly charming!" said she. "There, at least, you will belong to me; and here I see so little of you. There, too, I shall not be obliged to receive the visits of your gentlemen friends, who are so disagreeable when they laugh and seem to make sport of me, because I love you."

These words strengthened the marquis more and more in his determination, and, in spite of the approaching winter, he decided to install Gabrielle in the château de Maurèze immediately. This château, which his father had presented to him for a country residence, was near enough to Paris and Versailles to make the journey an easy one for Gabrielle, while it was far enough from the capital to prevent their being troubled by an influx of city guests.

It was a magnificent mansion, situated upon a high eminence. Skilfully constructed, winding carriage-roads led into the court-yard, which was enclosed by a massive wall, and the entrances guarded by heavy iron gates. It was a diminutive copy of Versailles, in which only the fountains were lacking.

The great park, laid out under the directions

of *Bearnais*, abounded in the choicest game; and the terraces and flower-beds, tended by a perfect army of gardeners, reproduced the designs of *Le Notre*. The château itself was built during the reign of Louis XIII., and its exterior walls were a mixture of brick and stone, that afforded a pleasant relief to the eye after the gray *façades* of Paris. But, in spite of all its magnificence, the effect produced by this princely abode was gloomy and depressing.

But a person of Gabrielle's age, whose heart is filled with joy and hope, is little inclined to sad forebodings, and she arrived at the château, pleased and happy.

The duke, her father-in-law, stood upon the threshold waiting to receive her with all the honors. With head uncovered, the old courtier advanced to the door of the carriage and assisted her to alight, then led her with formal courtesy into a chilly reception-room. In spite of the cool October air, no fires were burning, for in those good old times, now, thank Heaven, long since passed, fires were never lighted except in a sick-room earlier than All Saints' Day.

The chill air of the gloomy room made the young girl shiver, as she threw a half-frightened

glance about her. The uncomfortable chairs and the grim tapestries gave the room a cheerless look, and her father-in-law delivered his complimentary greeting in the solemn tone suited to a funeral oration. Suddenly wide folding-doors were flung open, disclosing a richly furnished dining-room, brilliantly lighted, where crystal and massive silver glittered upon snowy damask, and where her husband stood smiling upon his young wife. Gabrielle's heart gave a sudden bound; and reassured, she smilingly placed her slender fingers in her father-in-law's proffered hand. He conducted her with formal politeness to her place at the table, and thus Gabrielle entered upon the course of her every-day life.

CHAPTER IV.

TO PARIS.

TWO days had flown by in the most complete felicity, for Gabrielle enjoyed the inexpressible happiness of having her husband by her side from morning till night; when at supper, the duke, arousing from his accustomed silence, suddenly addressed his son :

“ Is it not to-morrow that you are to rejoin your regiment ? ” he inquired.

“ To-morrow ? ” said Gabrielle, grown pallid with sudden fear. “ I thought that the marquis would remain here.”

The marquis smiled tenderly upon his wife.

“ No, certainly not, my darling,” he replied. “ I could not possibly spend the winter here; and you yourself could not possibly expect me to do so. You know that I belong to my regiment before I belong to my family.”

“ But is not your regiment now in Paris ? ” asked poor Gabrielle, timidly.

“ Certainly, my dear; so I shall often have the

pleasure of visiting you," said the marquis, with the greatest possible courtesy.

Gabrielle ceased eating, and looked steadfastly down upon her napkin. All her appetite had forsaken her, and the two hours which must elapse before the hour for retiring seemed insupportable. Soon after dinner she pleaded indisposition as an excuse for withdrawing to her own room, a magnificent apartment wainscoted in oak, with lofty ceiling and sombre coloring, and where the light from the candles illuminated only a small portion of the immense space.

Stretched upon the state-bed, which was so high that she was obliged to use a footstool to reach it, Gabrielle, with her face hidden in her hands, was weeping silently, when her husband at last entered, humming an opera air.

Seeing his wife lying upon the bed he paused, fearing that he had disturbed her—for the marquis was a model husband.

"I am not asleep, Guy," said poor Gabrielle, trying to speak in her usual tone.

The marquis approached the bed, and taking his wife's hand kissed it tenderly. She raised herself upon her elbow and clasped his hand tightly in hers.

"You are going away!" she cried, in such a gentle and reproachful voice that the marquis, in spite of himself, was moved.

"I must, indeed, my darling," he replied, dropping upon his knees to bring himself nearer to the pretty face raised so beseechingly to his.

"And I—I am to remain here with only your father for company? Oh, it will be so lonely!"

"You care so much for society!" laughed the marquis, striving to give a jesting turn to the conversation; but Gabrielle's sad look made him turn his eyes away, and he dropped a kiss upon his wife's pale cheek.

"You have been crying," he exclaimed. "Your face is wet with tears! Who has dared grieve you, my own darling?"

The young wife could no longer restrain her emotion, and averting her face she burst into heart-breaking sobs.

The marquis took her in his arms, and tried in vain to induce her to look at him. She kept her eyes obstinately closed, while her great tears fell fast upon her husband's cheeks and hands.

"What is it, my dearest? What is the matter?" he asked again and again. "Tell me, my child, what has grieved you?"

"You ask me that!" cried Gabrielle, the truth at last wrested from her tortured heart. "You ask me that, when you are going away to leave me, to abandon me, and when I love you so!"

These words, so passionately uttered, moved the marquis deeply, for he was by no means cruel at heart. He caressed his young wife and tried his best to convince her that it was necessary for him to go; and that in reality she would see much more of him than if they lived in Paris, where society claimed so much of their time. He told her how much he loved her, how often he would come to see her. He was so eloquent that Gabrielle, convinced, but by no means consoled, at last said:

"Ah, well! if it is necessary, go; but do not forget me!"

Forget her! Certainly not! The marquis had no thought of forgetting her! Such a beautiful, amiable and devoted wife! He left the next day, however, and returned to Paris, where the officers of his regiment gave a magnificent supper in his honor.

"We have recaptured the Marquis de Maurèze," they shouted over their wine. "Maurèze is our own once more!"

At the same moment Gabrielle was saying sadly to herself:

"It is necessary for him to be there! I wonder if he is thinking of me now!"

Alas! no. The marquis just then was certainly not thinking of his wife.

CHAPTER V.

A JOYFUL WELCOME.

WINTER had come. The road leading to Paris was white with snow. The huge chimneys, in which the wind shrieked and moaned, sent up great curling masses of bluish smoke to the gloomy sky, and Gabrielle, seated by her window, was watching anxiously for her husband's coming.

She had learned many things during her three months lonely sojourn at Maurèze. She had learned that married life was not the perpetual fête day she had thought it; she had learned that a husband's love in the fashionable world of that epoch was only a brilliant but fleeting fire of straw; and that those who have never known happiness have less cause to repine than those who have known it only to lose it.

Gabrielle's sadness increased as the gray light of the bleak December day faded away, for the hope that she should see her husband faded with the waning twilight; and if he failed to come now,

when could she hope to see him? Twice already he had promised to come, and then Gabrielle had received a little note, very tender and gallant, it is true, but the visit had not been paid. Would it be the same to-day?

The house was very gloomy. Even the old duke could not endure it. Paris and Versailles attracted him irresistibly in spite of his misanthropy, and one fine morning he excused himself to his daughter-in-law, and, promising to return soon, he entered his carriage and was driven away. Since that day he had never come back to Maurèze.

Gabrielle, however, did not grieve much over his departure. Her father-in-law was a mysterious and rather frightful phenomenon in her eyes. That a person could exist so bound up in himself that he could live three or four days at a time without addressing any one except when politeness absolutely required it, and that he could not endure life unless he were in the king's presence, seemed so extraordinary to Gabrielle that she finally gave up even attempting to understand him. Still in her utter loneliness she sometimes regretted the loss even of this austere companion, for the sight of a human face, however stern and

forbidding, would have been some relief. The poor little marquise thought of her former convent life, which had then appeared so gloomy, but which she looked back upon now as radiant with happiness. Those days when she had been so innocent, so free from care and sorrow, seemed now far away! But the hour when she had so passionately thanked God for her joy in that bridal chamber, resplendent with blue and silver, seemed still farther back in the past; and the then devoted husband—more lover than husband she thought—had now forgotten his wife as he would have forgotten a mistress.

Suddenly a black speck became visible in the distance upon the white road. Gabrielle sprang up and looked with straining eyes. But it was not a carriage; it was only a man on horseback, who was ascending the wooded bridle-path leading to the château. In the dim twilight she could scarcely distinguish the horse.

“Another messenger!” sighed poor Gabrielle, sinking back into her chair; “he will not come!” and a big tear rolled down upon her clasped hands.

“If only my child were born!” she murmured. “I shall not be so lonely when I have my child for company!”

A horse's hoofs rung on the stones of the court-yard below. Gabrielle tried to distinguish the rider, but it was now so dark that she could see nothing.

"My child," she continued softly, while more tears followed the first, "my child will console me!"

The door just then was flung open, and Gabrielle saw emerging from the gloom a gentleman, followed by servants bearing lighted candles.

"Marquise!" said Guy's joyful voice, "I have come."

"Guy!" exclaimed Gabrielle, springing towards him; but the entrance of the servants made her pause. "You do me great pleasure and honor, monsieur le marquis," she said formally, with a profound curtsey.

When the servants had retired and the door was closed, the marquis caught his young wife passionately in his arms.

"I have come," said he, fondly; "because I knew you must be lonely without me; because I have a gay, pleasant life—while you" . . . He shivered as he cast a glance around the gloomy walls, then laughed at his emotion.

"In short, madame, I have come because I love

you, and longed to tell you so. Will you grant me your hospitality for a day?"

"Oh, Guy!" murmured Gabrielle, with her arms clasped tightly about her husband's neck. "My dearest, my husband, how good you are to think of me! Did you come all the way from Paris on horseback to see me?"

"An easy matter, *ma belle*, with two relays of horses. But what would not one gladly do to win such a welcome! And now, my darling, let us have supper, for I am dying of hunger."

Gabrielle passed twenty-four hours in a dream of delight.

CHAPTER VI.

FOREGONE CONCLUSIONS.

IF Gabrielle had known the real cause of her husband's coming in such haste to see her, her happiness would have been sensibly diminished.

The evening before, a gay company of the marquis' friends had assembled at the hôtel de Maurèze. After supper they began to chat as they sat over their wine; and, as is very frequently the case under such circumstances, they talked too much.

"Only see, gentlemen," cried one young simpleton of twenty; "only see how little taste ladies have! My mistress forsook me yesterday, and for whom, let me ask you? for him! him!" he added, pointing to a very corpulent man of about forty, and by no means attractive in person or manners.

A shout of laughter greeted this sally.

"Since she has preferred me," responded the individual designated, "it must be because she imagines, at least, that I possess some attraction;

but, however that may be, she will undoubtedly desert me to-morrow for some other man who has some other attractions, or the same, or even none at all."

"Women are the tools of Satan!" proclaimed a third from the farther end of the table (in a voice thick with wine).

"Every one of them, that is the truth!" exclaimed another.

"Pardon, pardon, my friends," said a fair-haired man, holding fast to the table with both hands to prevent himself from toppling over; "we must except our mothers."

"Granted," replied the stout man.

"And our wives!" added another.

"And our sisters!" exclaimed another.

"Except everybody then," said one of the guests, mockingly, "for you leave no one to condemn."

"No, we will not except all; but here is Mau-rèze, who possesses a perfect treasure in his wife —the prettiest little marquise that ever was seen —a lady who would be the brightest ornament of the court. She is virtuous, and she adores him, and the good-for-nothing fellow conceals her! It is not fair."

"No, it is not fair," they all shouted in chorus.

"He is a lucky fellow, and he doesn't deserve his good fortune!" said the man who had protested in favor of the mothers.

"I am fortunate, gentlemen," said Maurèze, rather conceitedly—"more fortunate than you imagine; for, as you have said, I have a charming wife" . . . He paused an instant, and threw a complacent glance around the table—"and I also have a mistress who is almost as beautiful, and quite as faithful."

"Ah, the spoiled fellow!" they all shouted. "Why, Maurèze, you are too fortunate! Who is she?"

"I shall not tell you, you would all try to take her from me; but I will show you her picture. None of you know her."

He drew from his pocket an elegant snuff-box, the lid of which was ornamented on the inside by the picture of a very handsome woman. It made a tour of the table, and the lovely face elicited enthusiastic praise; but when it reached the fair-haired man, before spoken of, he burst into a loud laugh.

Maurèze frowned, for he did not enjoy raillery when it fell upon himself, and he said in rather a haughty tone:

“ Well ? ”

“ So this is your faithful mistress ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ Was it she who gave you this keepsake ? ”

“ Yes, most assuredly.”

The guest drew from his pocket a similar box, which he placed beside the other, covered them both with his handkerchief, then gravely addressed Maurèze :

“ Choose at random, my dear marquis ; whichever one you take, you will find the portrait of your fair friend.”

All the guests shrieked with laughter ; and Maurèze himself, in spite of his discomfiture, could not help joining in the mirth.

The trial was made, and proved the truth of the assertion ; and the light-haired man, not sharing Guy’s reasons for keeping the affair secret, gave a full account of his own acquaintance with the little *bourgeoise* from whom he had received the gift.

“ Ah, well ! so be it,” said the marquis, with a careless air, striving to conceal his chagrin ; “ my wife remains.”

“ And you are a good-for-nothing rascal not to be at her feet,” returned this doughty champion of morality. “ When one has a wife like yours, my

friend, he should quit running after the discarded sweethearts of other men."

Maurèze examined his lace ruffles with a foppish air, and the conversation was turned upon some other topic. But the next day, having arranged his affairs for a short absence, he set out for the château de Maurèze—making the journey on horseback that he might arrive there the sooner.

Thus Gabrielle really owed her husband's welcome visit to the revelations of that evening; but fortunately she was ignorant, and would probably always remain ignorant, of the episode of the snuff-box and the portrait.

When, however, the marquis left after a day's visit, he had grown weary of playing the rôle of a lover. Gabrielle was no coquette. She said to her husband, simply and frankly, "I love you!" because he was her husband, and because she loved him; and this afforded the marquis neither amusement nor pleasure.

CHAPTER VII.

HUMAN KINDNESS.

GABRIELLE did not possess in any great degree that trait of character known as regard for conventionalities. She no more saw the necessity of saying what she did not think than of not saying what she did think. In the convent she had been brought up under the strictest discipline, but of the principles and requirements of worldly wisdom she knew absolutely nothing.

To the great horror and surprise of her father-in-law, she delighted in taking long rambles about the country, and she could not endure the constant attendance of the two tall footmen who he always insisted should accompany her, even when she went only to the neighboring village on her missions of charity. So her father-in-law's departure was a relief rather than a privation to her.

One afternoon in February, when the sun shone almost as warmly and brightly as on a spring day, the mild, pleasant air tempted the young marquise out for a long walk through the fields. The spirit

of seventeen, which had been so long dormant, suddenly awoke, and throwing on a large silk mantle, she called the youngest of her attendants—a girl named Toinon, who was a favorite with her mistress on account of her very youth—to accompany her.

The park had no attractions for Gabrielle; she would have plenty of time to explore that when summer came; besides it was enclosed by massive gray walls, and seemed only a part of the château itself; and without really acknowledging it even to herself, she, in her secret heart, thought this magnificent abode very like a prison.

But, if a prison, the key was in the door, for these two young women, walking rapidly, soon found themselves in the open fields.

The air had that balmy softness which heralds the approach of spring, and makes one think of lilac and whitethorn blooms, while the branches are still brown, and bear no blossoms save the dewdrops. The marquise felt hopeful and happy. She prattled on as gayly as she had been wont to do in those pleasant days at the convent, and her companion listened with respect as befitted the servant of so noble a lady.

“ You will see,” said Gabrielle, “ my child will

be a boy. Monsieur le marquis wishes his first-born to be a boy, and I must not disappoint him. They will have a magnificent baptism for him, and the king himself will undoubtedly be his god-father. His baptismal robe will be all lace—the richest of lace! There will be nothing good enough for my boy."

The young servant smiled at the almost child-like joy which she understood, for it is not necessary to be of high rank to comprehend the raptures of a young mother.

"And you," said Gabrielle, suddenly, "have you any children?"

"No, madame la marquise," replied the girl, "I am not married, but my eldest sister has a splendid boy—not very old. He was six months old on New Year's day."

"Ah! where is he?" asked Gabrielle, hastily.

The servant pointed to some wreaths of smoke curling up from among some trees not far away.

"She lives in a cottage over there," said she.

A sudden whim seized Gabrielle's fancy.

"Come, let us go and see him," she said, gayly, and passing her arm through that of the servant, she turned her steps in the direction indicated.

A peasant's hut is not very attractive to-day; and a century ago it was still more comfortless. There were great piles of refuse before the door, and some carts stood there half buried in the mire, but this was nothing unusual. Always and everywhere it was the same. The girl led the marquise to a low and narrow door—closed to keep out the cold—lifted the latch, and the visitors entered.

Gabrielle did not perceive the nauseating odor of the miserably ventilated apartment. She did not observe the poverty of the furniture, nor the bareness of the walls. She saw only a little group radiant with life and health.

Upon a low chair before the fire sat a young woman nursing her child, lavishing upon it all a mother's endearments, uttered in that chirping, gurgling language which only a baby can understand. Mother and child were so absorbed in each other that they did not notice the entrance of visitors until Toinon stepped forward and called her sister by name. Frightened, the young woman rose hurriedly and made a deep curtsey; while the child, after looking with astonishment at Gabrielle, began to nurse again.

"Sit down," said the marquise, kindly. "I came to see your baby. I shall soon have a boy of my own."

Mothers always understand each other, whatever may be the difference in their rank and fortune; and in five minutes the humble peasant woman was quite at her ease, and, her eyes sparkling with pride, was telling the grand lady of the incomparable perfection of the child.

“He will soon stand alone,” she said, proudly, rapidly removing its clothing; and the plump, rosy infant, quite naked, stood upon its mother’s knee, supporting itself by her neck and nestling against her cheek with all a baby’s winsomeness.

“What a beautiful boy he is!” murmured Gabrielle, clasping her hands in ecstasy, “and how much he loves you.”

“He is not ill-looking,” said the humble mother, complacently, “and our children love us because we always nurse them ourselves. He knows whom to call upon when he is hungry, and when he is satisfied he still remembers that it was his mother who fed him.”

Gabrielle rose and passed her fingers gently over the child’s rounded cheek, then she emptied her purse upon the table and departed, followed by benedictions. All the way home she did not speak, and the servant, astonished at her prolonged silence, ventured to ask if she was tired.

"No," replied Gabrielle, "I am very happy. I am so glad I saw that child. Did you know your mother? Do you remember her?" she suddenly asked the young girl.

"Oh, yes, madame! and she was a good woman. She had a hard time to raise us all."

"Did you love her?"

"Oh, yes, madame, I loved her dearly!"

"Did she nurse you herself?"

"Yes, all of us, madame la marquise, and there were nine of us. When she died we all mourned bitterly."

Gabrielle returned to the château and dined alone as usual. After she had retired to her room she tried in vain to sleep. New and strange fancies flitted confusedly through her mind. She had never seen her own mother: if she had known her, would she have loved her? Would she have spoken of her as that peasant woman had spoken of her mother? The elegant ladies she had known in Paris had children. Did they derive such joy from their offspring as the poor mother of that little boy?

Such were some of the many thoughts aroused within her by the little episode, and they finally took the form of a resolution that she too would be a real mother to her child.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOTHER AND SON.

THE dreaded, though longed-for, day came at last. Gabrielle heard the first cry of her first-born pierce the still air of her chamber, and her heart overflowed with joy and pride. The apartment had scarcely assumed that festive air which a tiny creature, enshrined in laces and ribbons, imparts to a room, when Guy arrived.

"It is a son, monsieur le marquis," said the physician, bowing deferentially.

"A son!" repeated the marquis, taking the little thing in his arms; "an heir to the house of Maurèze!"

He held the child near the window for a moment, and looked at him closely.

"He resembles you as much as two drops of water resemble each other," said an old servant, who had nursed Guy in his childhood.

"So much the better," said the marquis. Then he thought of his poor little wife, who had suffered so much, and who was watching him from her couch with eyes full of love.

"My dear wife," he said, bending over her fondly, "I thank you."

"You are pleased?" she asked, in a voice so faint that it was scarcely audible.

"Delighted!" he replied, kissing her hand tenderly.

An expression of peace and joy, mingled with resignation, passed over her lovely face, and she immediately closed her eyes and sank into a sweet slumber. She awoke several times during the night, and each time inquired for her son. The young count was sleeping quietly, they told her. Then she would fall asleep again, with that same expression on her face—an expression that made her look more like an angel than a mortal.

The next morning her husband paid her another visit.

"Please sit down, Guy," she said, pleadingly; "I am very strong, and I wish so much to talk with you."

The marquis obeyed. She glanced at him two or three times, then cast down her eyes and seemed to hesitate.

"You wish me to make you some present," said Guy, smiling. "Well, what shall it be, my

dearest? To her who has given me a son I can refuse nothing."

She looked at him gratefully.

"No," she answered, "it is not a present; it is a favor, and I beg you, in advance, not to refuse it."

"It is granted in advance," said the marquis, courteously.

"I desire—strange as it must seem to you—I desire to obtain your permission to nurse my son myself."

In spite of his good breeding, the marquis could not repress a start.

"Nurse your child yourself? What an idea! We have already employed a woman for that purpose."

"I know it, my dear Guy; but pray give the woman a present and send her away. Grant me this happiness, I beseech you!"

Rousseau's "Emile" did not appear until several years after this date, and that which was to become a custom and a real delight seemed then a strange caprice—the wandering of a morbid mind.

"That would not be common sense, my darling. How could you endure the fatigue such a duty would impose upon you? Leave this to the

strong, healthy peasant women. They have rich, generous milk to give our children—their only endowment, in fact; while you . . . What a strange fancy!"

"Guy," resumed the young mother, tenaciously, "I entreat you to grant me this favor. My life here is very gloomy, but I do not complain of it. Indeed, I do not care any more for the gay life of Paris. But since God has granted me the happiness of bringing a son into the world, do not insist that any one shall come between him and me. Let him know and love only me."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the marquis, laughing, "I believe you are jealous—jealous of a peasant woman! Why, marquise, I thought you had better sense. Your son, if he resembles you or his father, will be too dutiful to allow the remembrance of his nurse to come between him and his mother."

"But—" Gabrielle insisted.

"It is useless, my dear," said the marquis, rising to put an end to the discussion. "Such a thing was never heard of, and I detest such singular actions, which will set the whole world to gossiping. From father to son, all the Maurèzes have been brought up in this

way, and our race does not appear to have suffered from it."

He drew himself up proudly, and his fine figure and handsome face did, indeed, do great honor to his race.

"Let us talk no more about it," said he, pleasantly, fearing that he had wounded his wife's feelings. "It is only an invalid's whim, and, even if I consented to it, such a care would soon become irksome to you. Now, to change the subject," he resumed, in a lively tone, "I have reserved a family jewel to present to you on the day you should give an heir to the house of Maurèze."

As he spoke, he took from his pocket a small casket, opened it, and laid it upon the rich lace counterpane. A necklace, composed of five rows of magnificent pearls, gleamed upon the blue velvet lining of the jewel-case; but Gabrielle scarcely saw it.

"I thank you, my dear," she answered, very gently.

The marquis kissed the forehead of his submissive but unresigned wife, and left the room. Gabrielle, pretending to be asleep, lay with her face hidden in the pillows, so that she might weep

unrestrainedly. The casket was still open upon the bed, and the costly necklace fell out and was hidden in the folds of the counterpane; but what did the poor young mother care for jewels, when her boy was to be nourished from a strange breast?

CHAPTER IX.

STOLEN KISSES.

THE king really stood as godfather to the young heir; and, in order that nothing might be wanting to the honor conferred upon the house of Maurèze, the king's mistress acted as godmother. Gabrielle then knew very little about the state of affairs at court, and the name of a countess, with which all Paris was ringing, meant nothing to her. From prudence, rather than jealousy, the marquis made his wife's delicate health and the distance of the château from Paris an excuse for not presenting her to his majesty.

The old duke was by no means satisfied.

"In my day," said he, "under the late king, such a thing would not have been permitted. Even etiquette is no longer observed."

Alas! something more than an observance of etiquette was lacking in that court! But the excuse was graciously accepted: that was the important point. Scheming men thought

Maurèze had neglected a fine opportunity to advance his fortune; but all wise and well-meaning men approved his course, and decided that he had acted with wisdom and discretion.

Little René, covered with laces and ribbons, was brought back to the château in a carriage drawn by four milk-white horses, caparisoned in blue and silver. He was reclining upon the knees of his nurse—a stout, good-looking woman, with a rosy face, and as tall as a poplar, and as stiff as a post.

When she entered Gabrielle's room the latter rushed forward to clasp her boy in her arms, and smother him with kisses; but the nurse stopped her midway, with such a stern and majestic gesture that the poor young mother hesitated, thinking she must be doing wrong. The nurse cautiously held up the young count's forehead to his mother's lips; she timidly pressed a kiss upon it; and then the nurse, taking the child with her, retired to her own room, whither Gabrielle dared not follow her.

This nurse was perfectly *au fait* as to all the proprieties; for, as she herself complacently remarked, she had served in this capacity three times in the first families of France, and it was the duke who, upon the express recommendation

of one of his old friends, had secured this treasure for his daughter-in-law. The young heir of the house of Maurèze could not but flourish in such experienced hands.

Gabrielle had conceived a strong dislike for the nurse before the day of his baptism. Any woman who robbed her of the right to caress her son would have to possess great goodness and amiability to be forgiven this usurpation ; but the poor little marquise had been from the very first quite overawed by this grenadier in petticoats, who, with that insolent assurance common to servants of a noble family, informed her twenty times a day that, though she might be the Marquise de Maurèze, she was in reality only a young, giddy thing—a mere girl without experience, and utterly unfit to take any charge of the training of such a precious child as this. If she pardoned Gabrielle for being the mother of the boy, it was only because the youthful marquise was of noble birth, and had a fine constitution, which little René had apparently inherited.

The next morning, when Gabrielle sent for the child, the nurse brought it ; but would not allow it to be taken from her protecting arms by the poor little mother.

"Madame la marquise was not accustomed to children—she might injure him—one must have had a great deal of experience to know how to hold an infant properly."

"After all, he is my child," said Gabrielle, angrily, one morning; "and I wish you to give him to me when I desire it."

The nurse laid the sleeping infant upon his mother's knee, made a low bow, and left the room without a word.

For an hour Gabrielle, successful beyond her hopes, watched over her sleeping child. He was a splendid boy—the picture of health. His plump cheeks were shaded by long brown lashes, and delicate blue veins were traceable under the soft, clear skin. The young mother was so happy that for a while she scarcely dared breathe lest she should disturb his slumber; but after a little she gathered courage to pass her finger softly over the satin-like skin, and to gently touch the rosy, dimpled fists. Soon even this did not content her, and she kissed again and again his little hands, his blooming cheeks, and the closed eyes which she had never seen, for they brought the child to her only when he was asleep. Her caresses at last aroused the little fellow, and he cried

lustily at seeing a strange face bending over him.

Much frightened, Gabrielle endeavored to quiet him, but without success. The servants came at her call, and the nurse was sent for, but was nowhere to be found. After searching for her more than half an hour, during which time the child was screaming with all his might, the nurse entered the room as composed and solemn as ever. When Gabrielle reproached the nurse for having left her alone with the infant so long, she replied, with a great show of offended dignity, that she had only obeyed the express command of madame la marquise; and madame la marquise could find nothing to say in reply.

When they brought the young count to receive his mother's good-night kiss, that same evening, he was restless and feverish. Gabrielle remarked it; and the nurse replied in an aggrieved manner that it was not to be wondered at, after what he had passed through that morning.

For some days René was slightly indisposed; and the marquis, hearing of it, came to the château. The nurse gave him an alarming account of the child's illness, and did not fail to allude frequently to the cause of it.

"It was not the poor, dear lady's fault! Madame la marquise was so young—so inexperienced! She did not know the harm it did the child when she interfered in this way."

The marquis loved his wife, but he was extremely solicitous in regard to the health of his young heir; and he reproached Gabrielle so sternly that she burst into tears. She tried to vindicate herself—to tell him the facts as they had really occurred, but her husband would not listen, and for the first time he was really unkind.

Gabrielle was silent; but when he had gone away she wept bitterly, and began to entertain a mortal dread of this nurse who was not only robbing her of her child's love, but was also trying to prejudice her husband against her. She grieved so much that she became really ill; while, on the contrary, the child improved marvellously after his father's visit. Toinon, the marquise's little maid, was so troubled at seeing her mistress in this condition, that she said, one evening,

"I see very plainly that madame la marquise is just fretting herself ill on account of Master René. If I only dared, I would tell madame how she could see the young count, and the nurse know nothing about it."

"I could see him! How? how?" exclaimed Gabrielle, eagerly.

"She likes to eat, and she likes to gossip still better; and instead of eating her supper in her own room, as madame thinks, she goes down to the servants' hall every evening."

"And my child is left alone?" said Gabrielle, indignantly.

"Oh! madame; he does not mind it, for he seldom has any one to play with. If madame wishes, she can go and see him, and I will stand guard."

"At once!" cried the marquise, springing up from her couch. "You have saved my life, Toinon; I shall never forget it."

She hastily threw on a wrapper as she spoke, and then, with a soft, stealthy tread, followed her guide through the long corridors. The nurse had taken a room far away from Gabrielle's, on the plea that the child would disturb his mother's rest at night. Toinon paused at last before a half-opened door, motioned the marquise to enter, and then followed her.

René was not asleep. He was now seven months old; and, as Toinon said, had never been spoiled by company. He was amusing himself contentedly with some toys, which had been left designedly in

his cradle. On seeing his mother, he made a movement of fear, which Toinon calmed by a caress.

"He knows me very well," said she. "We are great friends, are we not, monsieur?"

Monsieur clutched her hair in his tiny fists, and pulled with all his might.

"Do not be afraid, madame," said the kind-hearted girl, heroically. "While he has hold of me, he will not cry, and you can come near him."

Gabrielle approached the cradle, and bent over it, deeply moved. The child looked gravely at her for a moment, then released his hold on Toinon, and seized his mother's bright ribbons in both hands.

"See," said Toinon, joyfully, "he knows you already. Oh, you little darling! He knows how to kiss, madame. I taught him, and his nurse knows nothing about it. Kiss me, monseigneur, kiss your Toinon."

Obediently and seriously the little fellow laid his cheek against that of the faithful servant.

"And your pretty mamma—kiss her, too! Come, that's a darling!"

Without reluctance, René pressed his soft cheek against his mother's, while great tears fell from her eyes and dropped upon his toys.

"He loves you, madame, he loves you already!" exclaimed Toinon. "It is blood that speaks, and he knows already that he is your son."

Some sound outside startled them, and they hurried away. As soon as she had regained her own room, Gabrielle unlocked a cabinet, and took from it a handful of gold, which she threw into Toinon's apron without speaking.

"Oh, madame!" said the kind-hearted girl, "I did not do it for a reward."

"You are right," replied Gabrielle, drawing Toinon to her, "but keep the gold; it may be of use to you; yet do not think that I consider it as any payment of what I owe you."

And the grand lady kissed the poor servant tenderly upon both cheeks.

"I shall owe to you," she added, "the happiness of being loved by my son, and there is nothing that can compensate for that."

CHAPTER X.

HER DEAREST WISH.

AFTER this, Gabrielle went secretly every evening to see her child; and Toinon guarded against any intrusion while the young mother caressed her boy. Sometimes the child laughed so loudly that Toinon feared they would be overheard, and begged the marquise to be more careful. To all appearance nothing was changed.

Every morning René, while asleep, was brought to his mother's room in the arms of his nurse, who was as dictatorial as ever. The marquis came frequently to the château, and always paid his son a visit. The child's beauty and strength increased marvellously, but the father had only seen him when the infant was asleep.

On one occasion, when his stay at the château had been unusually prolonged, a whim seized the marquis to see his son in the day-time, when he was awake.

“What is the color of his eyes?” he asked his wife, after sending a servant in quest of the nurse.

"I do not know," faltered Gabrielle.

It was true, for she had seen the child awake only in the dim light of a lamp that stood at a distance from his cradle.

"What shall I do," she thought, "if he shows that he knows me?"

The child was brought in wide-awake, his big black eyes wide open and staring with wonder. At the sight of his father he was undecided whether it were best to laugh or to cry; then his baby face lighted up, and, pleased with his father's rich costume, which was sparkling with gold lace, he smiled with a most gracious air.

Gabrielle, trembling with fear, gazed intently at the child's eyes, and observed for the first time the striking resemblance between father and son. Her poor little heart, almost bursting with emotion, throbbed violently beneath her hand as she strove to control her agitation. Her son was so beautiful, and his father seemed so proud of him! If she could only clasp them both in her arms—both these adored creatures!

"Your boy is superb, madame," the marquis said to his wife. "I congratulate you upon him."

"Oh, my dear! he is your very image," said Gabrielle, naïvely.

The marquis, flattered by this remark, smiled graciously, and René, who had until then seen only his father, turned quickly at the sound of his mother's voice, recognized her, laughed and held out his little hands. The mother looked at her child with eyes brimming over with tenderness and with tears, but she ventured only to touch the baby cheek softly with the tips of her fingers.

"He is a very sweet-tempered child," said the nurse, obsequious in the presence of the marquis.

"Poor little thing," thought Gabrielle, "you must wait until to-morrow; I cannot come to play with you this evening."

While the marquis was at the château, she dared not visit the child, for she prized the privilege too highly to run any risk of losing it. Still she was extremely anxious to tell her husband how the nurse neglected her charge, and how she abandoned him for hours at a time. Toinon, however, advised her to wait, at least, until the child had been weaned, and Gabrielle yielded to this wise counsel.

The long winter wore slowly away. In the spring the marquise expected to give birth to her second child, but the hope she had entertained the year previous had wholly vanished.

"They will take this child from me as they have taken the other, and I shall be its mother only in name," she thought.

René was now fourteen months old, large and strong. He walked alone; and the nurse, although she concealed the fact, had weaned him several weeks before, when he was sick for the first time in his life. Gabrielle had noticed his altered looks, and several times she had found him crying. But what could she do? Her husband always ridiculed her desire to take charge of the child herself. She was not yet of an age to make her wishes and her rights respected, and she possessed neither the determination of character nor the authority necessary to carry her point. She had been for several days secretly worrying over René's indisposition, when it chanced that the marquis was at the château one evening, entertaining a party of gentlemen, most of them members of the nobility residing in the vicinity. Gabrielle, pleading fatigue, had excused herself and retired to her own room. She was standing by the window, looking sadly out into the gray twilight as it gathered over earth and sky, when Toinon hurriedly entered the room.

"Madame," said the faithful servant, breath-

lessly, “Master René is very ill. He is all alone, he is moaning in his sleep, and has a burning fever.”

The marquise did not hesitate, but without even waiting for lights, ran, rather than walked, through the long corridors leading to the distant nursery. Shouts of laughter, proceeding from the servants’ hall, floated up from below, as the attendants of the guests made merry with the servants of the château. Their noisy gayety grated harshly upon the ear of the marquise, and she passed quickly on and entered her son’s room.

The child was alone and wide awake, his cheeks crimson and his eyes glittering with fever, as he tossed restlessly in his cradle.

“When did the nurse go down?” demanded the marquise, pale with terror and indignation.

“More than an hour ago, but I dared not come and tell you sooner, because I thought you were in the drawing-room with the gentlemen.”

Gabrielle did not lift her eyes from the child’s face. The gilded cradle, surmounted by a ducal coronet and emblazoned with the Maurèze coat-of-arms, seemed to her fevered imagination a coffin. Suddenly she snatched up her child, and holding him tightly to her heart, hastened to her own room.

In mute astonishment Toinon followed her.

"Madame, what have you done?" she asked, when Gabrielle, still holding René in her arms, sank breathless into a seat.

"I have done my duty," exclaimed Gabrielle.
"I am going to try and save my child."

"What will monsieur le marquis say?" said Toinon, in dismay.

"You will see what he will say when he finds that the heir of the house of Maurèze has been stolen from the cradle where he was left alone!"

"Oh! madame," said Toinon, clasping her hands in admiration, "God must have put that thought into your mind!"

Meanwhile, the child, cradled upon his mother's breast, had become more quiet and his breathing more regular. Gabrielle laid him down gently upon her own bed, where he was hidden in the shadow of the curtains.

"It shall be here that they find him when they seek him," she said, quietly, as, exhausted by fatigue and excitement, she seated herself beside him, while Toinon crouched upon the carpet at her feet, and both listened anxiously for the alarm that must soon be sounded.

A half hour passed, then another. The ser-

vants were still carousing, and there were sounds of noisy revelry from the great banqueting hall, where the marquis and his friends still lingered over their wine. Night had come on, and through the open windows the nightingale's song was wafted into the room on the soft May air. Sometimes a moan from René brought the two anxious watchers to his side, then all was still again in the silent chamber.

Suddenly a step was heard approaching. A servant, sent by the marquis, came to inquire for the health of madame la marquise.

This mark of attention touched Gabrielle's heart and seemed to her a favorable omen.

Toinon, through the partially opened door, replied that madame was feeling much better, but desired not to be disturbed, and the servant returned to report to his master.

The sound of his footstep died away in the distance, and again all was still. Then, suddenly, a great tumult was heard. Gabrielle clasped Toinon's hand tightly in hers, and drew nearer the bed as if to protect her child.

A confused sound of running to and fro, of excited talking and weeping was heard from below. Then the sounds grew louder, came nearer.

"What is the matter?" the marquis called, angrily, from the foot of the grand staircase.

"Oh, monseigneur," cried the terrified nurse, "they have stolen the child!"

"What child?" asked the wondering marquis.

"Your child, monsieur."

"My child!" shouted the marquis, in a voice of thunder.

Then, casting aside all the dignity of a *grand seigneur*, he rushed frantically through the rooms searching wildly for his son. He burst into his wife's chamber, and, seeing her standing there pale and agitated, he exclaimed:

"Gabrielle, they have told you! You have heard that the child is stolen?"

"Ask this woman," said Gabrielle, strangely calm, and pointing to the nurse, "how it was possible for the child to be stolen."

The woman, forgetting her cunning in her mortal terror, said that she had gone down to supper.

"Leaving the child alone?" demanded Gabrielle, composedly.

"Yes, that is—no."

"How long did you remain below?"

"Only ten minutes, madame, not even ten

minutes; and no one could have entered the room, for I had the key in my pocket."

The marquis, wondering at his wife's calmness, feared that the shock had destroyed her reason.

"Marquis," said Gabrielle, firmly, "dismiss this woman. She has deceived you for a long, long time. Your son has been left alone every day for hours. I knew it. He was ill and neglected; and when I saw that, I, his mother, entered his room, and *it is I who have stolen the child.*"

She flung back the curtains with a superb gesture of scorn and indignation, and pointed to the sleeping boy.

His father sprang towards him with a cry which woke him suddenly from his quiet slumber, and he cried out in terror; but when his mother bent over him his sobs ceased, and, clasping his little arms tightly about her neck, he called "mamma, mamma."

"I discharge you. Leave the house at once," said the marquis, sternly, to the frightened nurse. "And you may retire," he added, motioning to the wondering crowd that had invaded the apartment.

When they were alone the marquis approached Gabrielle, who stood there still holding his son

clasped closely to her breast, and dropped upon one knee before her.

"Forgive me, madame," said he, gently, "for having made you suffer so much."

Gabrielle's dearest dream was realized. She clasped her husband and her child together in one embrace.

Two days after, René was well again, and, under Toinon's charge, occupied a room adjoining that of his mother.

CHAPTER XI.

ALONE.

THE marquise soon after gave birth to a little daughter, who was named Lucile, and whose christening was no less magnificent than René's had been; but this time Gabrielle's wishes did not meet with the same opposition as after the birth of her son. Upon one point, however, the marquis was resolute: he would not permit his wife to nurse her child. This, in his opinion, was not befitting a noble lady; but she might be allowed to amuse herself in her leisure hours by exercising some surveillance over the hired nurse. Toinon's sister had just lost her second child, and she was engaged to act in the capacity of nurse by the marquis, who was not disposed to rely so implicitly upon the advice of his acquaintances now, as he had been in the previous instance; and the little family throve as well as one could desire.

Gabrielle devoted herself constantly to her children, and had no time for *ennui*. The days were all too short. She had but one sorrow—the

separation from her husband : she could not reconcile herself to the life and manners of the age.

“ Since we have jointly promised before God to love each other until death,” she said one day to Madame de Rogis, a relative, who had come from a distant province expressly to visit her, “ ought not my husband to cherish me as fondly as I love him ? ”

Madame de Rogis was not far from sharing this opinion, although her own marriage had not been the happiest in the world. As soon as her husband had been selected for her, she had placed him upon a pedestal, as the god of her adoration, and proceeded to burn unceasingly before him the incense of passionate worship. But Monsieur de Rogis was much too deeply imbued with the spirit of the age to respond to these *bourgeoises* effusions of conjugal tenderness, and he soon winged his flight to the gay capital, where he tarried, while his better half remained in the country, sighing for her vanished happiness. Not long after, he was considerate enough to die, and some scandal-mongers declared that the mourning widow had not been without consolers.

Madame de Rogis’ visit was, at the same time, a great advantage and a great disadvantage to

Gabrielle. The latter needed society. To be left at eighteen, with only children and servants for companions, is to be exposed to many temptations; but such companionship as that of Madame de Rogis was not suited to Gabrielle's needs. The pretty widow—for she was still attractive, in spite of her forty-two years—had acquired at *Saint-Cyr*, where she had been educated, an apparent austerity which in reality veiled the freest manners and a morbid sentimentality.

Such was this pleasing and dangerous companion whom the Marquis de Maurèze begged to remain at the château with his wife, when he was ordered to depart with his regiment for the seat of war. The war of the Austrian succession had just been declared, and the flower of our battalions must needs be sent as prey for the enemy's bullets.

Gabrielle was inconsolable. This dearly beloved husband, after three years of wedded life, in spite of his neglect, in spite of his more than suspected infidelities, was still, in the eyes of his young wife, a superior being, worthy of all adoration.

If he had permitted it, she would gladly have left her children and followed him to camp; but the bare mention of such a thing made the marquis laugh until he cried at the very moment of their parting.

"How would it do, my dear," he asked, jestingly, "to bring the children and nurses?"

He departed, but not without tenderly assuring Gabrielle that he should be absent only a few months. When he said it, he really believed it; but eighteen long years were to elapse before he again crossed the threshold of his home.

When the carriage bearing away her husband had quite disappeared in the distance, Gabrielle, who had watched it as long as she could distinguish it, refused the well-meant attentions of her servants and of Madame de Rogis. Even the sight of her children seemed to afford her no consolation; and, declining all companionship, she went out into the park, until now seldom visited, for she had been too unhappy at the château to be fond of it or its surroundings.

It was late in July. The withered blossoms of the lindens strewed the ground and rustled beneath her feet, and their warm, sweet fragrance filled the air. Behind her stretched dazzling *parterres*, whose brilliant hues of scarlet and gold contrasted vividly with their borders of emerald turf. In the paths thousands of tiny insects issued from the parched and dusty earth, drawn forth by the hot rays of the noonday sun. She went on until she

reached a cluster of elms, beneath whose shade several rows of stone benches were ranged about a platform, intended doubtless as a stand for musicians. Here she paused and looked around her, then bowed her head and walked slowly on.

The pleasures of society and the beauties of the natural world had little or no charm for her. Her heart was engrossed with the thought of her husband. What did she care for the diversions in which others found such delight? Gallant compliments, admiring glances, flattering badinage and sprightly jests—all these things had no charm for her.

She went on and on, seeking for some lonely place where she might rest and weep undisturbed, but finding only straight, smooth paths in this orderly domain. At last she chanced to enter an apparently unfrequented walk that brought her to a wild, desolate spot, which had probably been neglected on account of its great distance from the château.

A marble bench, broken by frost and half covered with ivy, formed a semi-circle about a marble table, overgrown with moss; while here and there, in the dense thicket of brambles and honeysuckle, were moss-covered statues—one, a

reclining nymph, was pouring from an urn a tiny stream of limpid water down upon her marble feet, now broken and crumbled by time and neglect. It was a lonely spot, in which Gabrielle's wounded heart could find relief in tears and solitude, undisturbed. She threw herself down upon the marble seat, and burying her tear-stained face in her hands, resolutely confronted her destiny.

CHAPTER XII.

A VIPER.

“**I**T is all ended,” Gabrielle murmured, when her frantic outburst of grief had left her in that state of melancholy quiet which generally follows such a crisis. “The marquis may survive the accidents of war—he may return; but, as for me, I have lost my husband!”

As the remembrance of those happy days immediately following her marriage rose in her mind, her sad eyes again filled with tears. Now her happiness, even her hope of happiness, had long been dead. She had tried in vain to content herself with the marks of affection that her husband occasionally bestowed upon her; she had tried in vain to believe she saw proofs of his love in his rare visits, but his good-natured indifference had been plainly visible to the penetrating eyes of the fond wife at the very moment of the parting which had been so agonizing for her.

“He married me,” said she, bitterly, “because there must be heirs to the house of Maurèze. Now he has children, and what am I to him?

Only the mother of his children—in the eyes of the world his wife—in reality, nothing! If I should die to-morrow, he would not mourn for me a single hour, and I—I have given him my whole life."

She thought of her earnest prayers to heaven for the preservation of her beauty. Since it was that which had won his admiration and his love, should she not desire above all else to remain beautiful? And now—to what good?

"He would have loved me just as much if I had been ugly," said Gabrielle to herself, scornfully.

Here she was greatly mistaken. The marquis, possibly, might have married an unattractive woman, but he would never have spoken to her of love. He was, it is true, frivolous and egotistical; but he was no liar.

She was mistaken, too, in another respect. Her husband really loved her far more than she supposed, more indeed than he himself imagined. Her sweet temper and patience had touched him deeply; and more than once, on his return to the hôtel de Maurèze, after spending the night at some magnificent *fête*, he had said to himself that the château was a doleful place to live in; and he could not help thinking that among all the ladies

he met in society, there was not one who would submit to the dreary, monotonous life he imposed upon his wife. But, unfortunately, these kindly thoughts, which visited him in the morning before he slept, took flight after his slumber; and, in the gayety that filled the remainder of the day, but a faint recollection of these fleeting impressions remained in his mind.

"What am I to do?" asked Gabrielle, thoughtfully, when the wild tumult raging in her soul had subsided a little. "I am eighteen, and virtually a widow. I have no friends. The only relative who cares for me at all is Madame de Rogis. What am I to do?"

She pondered some moments; then she said, more cheerfully:

"My children are left me. I will devote my life to my children."

A deep joy filled the heart of the young mother. Yes, she had her children. Why had she not thought of them before? How could she have forgotten those two guardian angels for a moment?

Hopeful and grateful to heaven, Gabrielle rose and turned her steps towards the château. Her tread was no longer slow and uncertain. She no

longer felt fatigued and discouraged ; for had she not enough left to amply fill her life ?

As she was ascending the steps of the grand entrance, she perceived a man, attired in very plain travelling costume, who, with head uncovered and holding a note in his hand, stood awaiting her approach.

“ What do you wish ? ” she inquired, not without surprise ; for new faces were rare at Maurèze.

The man bowed profoundly, and silently presented the note to the marquise. It was a fragment torn from her husband’s memorandum-book, and containing only these words, written in pencil :

“ Madame, I send you a faithful servant, of whose services my father has deprived himself in your favor. He is an old *major-domo*, who has given us numberless proofs of his devotion. Make such use of him as pleases you, and do not fear to rely upon his fidelity.”

“ What is your name ? ” asked Gabrielle, looking at the servant thus recommended.

“ Robert.”

“ Ah, well, Robert, I take you into my service. Install yourself, and see in what you can be of use.”

Robert bowed in silence, and Gabrielle passed on into the mansion. When she had disappeared the old servant stood there, quiet and thoughtful.

“She is very charming,” said he, at last; “but too young, too young—not suited to the house of Maurèze.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VIPER PROPOSES.

ROBERT, born in the house of the Duke de Maurèze, and brought up in the admiration and worship of the family, was an excellent type of the model servant. This old-time servitor often figures in romance and upon the stage; and he is usually represented as humble and devoted in character, yet this extreme devotion not unfrequently verges upon ferocity; and Robert was one of those persons who would hesitate at nothing if he could further the interests and happiness of those he loved. But he loved and venerated only one thing in this world, and that was the house of Maurèze.

He could scarcely forgive the noble scions of the house for committing the *mesalliance* of marrying a wife not closely related to the family. The necessity of perpetuating the race was the only thing that reconciled him at all to such marriages, and he was always regretting that there were no female cousins of the same name. The marriage

of the marquis had caused him many a sigh, but as there was no help for it, and as he could not but acknowledge Gabrielle's charms and virtues, he was forced to partially approve at last.

In spite of this, he feared that the young marquise would not be equal to the task of properly governing the mansion in her husband's absence; and, for this reason, he asked the duke, with all due respect, if he could not be of service in watching a little over the interests of monsieur le marquis.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the old duke. "That is really a good idea. You had better go down to Maurèze immediately."

Robert made no slight sacrifice in assuming these new duties. He had always lived in Paris, and the change of habits and of abode was by no means a pleasant one, but he immediately repaired to Maurèze, which was henceforth his only home. Robert was not old, although he no longer appeared young; but he was one of those persons upon whom the passing years seem to have little effect. He was scarcely forty, and would probably look no older when sixty. He was a prudent, but not a crafty man; zealous, without being obsequious; and devoted, without being officious or intrusive.

He walked slowly, but never loitered by the way; always spoke to the point, but never unnecessarily. He was a man of high principle, but of narrow judgment; good, but not generous; severe, but never unjust. Such was the man deputized by the duke to watch over the château and its inmates. Certainly, no treasure was ever better guarded.

The marquise at first failed to notice the enormous influence which Robert speedily acquired over the entire household. This quiet man, who seldom spoke, and was seldom seen, appeared to her a very unimportant personage; but, at the end of a few months, she could but acknowledge that everything around her went on with a regularity and perfection to which she was unaccustomed. The table, the attendance, the stables, the wine-cellar, and the grounds were all perfect. There was no bustle, but everything was done systematically, and much more work accomplished. The marquise was so much pleased with the change that she expressed her approbation to Monsieur Robert—for so the new superintendent was called by all the servants, partly in ridicule, and partly in fear. He only bowed silently, but took no share of the compliment to himself. To do that would have been to insinuate that formerly

the household had been badly organized, or at least not so well ordered; but he could not help feeling secretly flattered by the praise.

Two years passed in monotonous regularity. René grew finely. Already he made a great noise with his drum and gun; broke his little sister's toys pitilessly; and, although naturally sweet-tempered, was fast becoming a spoiled child, when a strange event happened to Toinon, his nurse.

One day, while she was seated upon the terrace, knitting and watching the two children who were playing upon the green turf, Monsieur Robert came towards her, and, removing his hat, bowed deferentially—which greatly surprised Toinon, for, ordinarily, he uncovered his head only before his superiors in rank.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “I have observed you closely for two years, and I have noticed something that has touched me deeply.”

Toinon looked at him in astonishment, and he continued:

“You show a very great affection for the children of the Marquis de Maurèze—”

“Well,” responded Toinon, good-humoredly, “what is more natural than that I should love them, the little darlings? Are they not the image of their dear parents, whom God preserve?”

"They both bear a striking resemblance to their father," replied Robert.

"And to their dear mother," exclaimed Toinon. "See, is not Monseigneur René the living image of his mother, with his long flowing curls?"

Robert was not at all of this opinion, but just then he did not deem it advisable to argue the question.

"And you are strongly attached to our master and mistress—"

"If madame should order me to jump into the fire," cried Toinon, "I would do so instantly, without even asking why!"

Her honest face glowed with enthusiasm. Robert smiled.

"Ah, well! mademoiselle, if you will bestow upon me your hand in marriage, I believe that the house of Maurèze will have in us the founders of a line of faithful servitors."

Toinon looked at him in blank astonishment. Then, to hide her confusion, she ran suddenly after little Lucile, who, tottering along on her tiny feet, had reached the edge of one of the great stone basins in which a fountain was playing. When she returned, red and breathless, with the child in her arms, she asked in a tone she strove hard to make calm and unconcerned:

"What did you say, Monsieur Robert?"

Robert repeated his request in still plainer terms; and Toinon, crimson with shame and embarrassment, looked down at the child, kissed her rosy cheek, and then set her down upon the grass.

"I do not know, Monsieur Robert," Toinon said, finally, in great confusion. "I must speak to madame."

"Then I may conclude that your answer is favorable," replied Robert, gravely; and, making a formal bow, he returned to the château without speaking another word.

Toinon was greatly perplexed. This proposal was the more extraordinary as Robert had not addressed ten words to her during the two years he had lived at the château. She could not doubt that he wished to marry her solely on account of devotion to the Maurèze family—a devotion which, in his eyes, was the most exalted of human virtues.

Thoughtful and preoccupied, she led the unwilling children back to the house; and that evening, when she went as usual, before retiring, to the bed-chamber of the marquise to give an account of the children, she told Gabrielle of the strange proposal she had received.

The marquise was not a little surprised, for the affair seemed serious, although Robert, as she laughingly remarked, did not have the appearance of a sighing lover.

"Why not?" said Gabrielle, after reflecting a while. "He is, it is true, much older than you, Toinon; but he has some property; besides, he is a settled man; he has been faithful to our family, and he may, perhaps, be constant." Here, at the thought of her own sad fate, she sighed. "You will remain near me. If you like him, why not marry him?"

Toinon, with all her virtues, was not wholly free from vanity; to be called Madame Robert by the other servants was certainly something; besides, Robert's position, without being very clearly defined, was far above that of an ordinary servant. Then, too, he did not drink or swear, which was another attraction in the opinion of this honest girl, refined by daily contact with her adored mistress, who treated her almost like a friend and equal. So she decided to accept Monsieur Robert's offer, and the wedding took place soon after.

She still retained, however, her charge over the children, and her marriage made little change in her life, except that she was called Madame Robert by the members of the household.

CHAPTER XIV.

DREARY DAYS.

MONTHS and years passed by, but nothing occurred to vary the monotonous life of the inmates of the château. The children grew up in simple freedom, unhampered by "*paniers*" and powder. Madame de Rogis had aged a trifle, but her heart was still youthful, and she loved more than ever to recall the tender episodes and adventures of her life.

Gabrielle always listened with some astonishment, but no longer with that sort of fear and dismay which she had formerly felt, when her friend talked on these subjects.

Seated in winter before the immense fire—in summer upon the broad stone steps leading down into the park—the two ladies would converse in low tones, while the children played near by, but beyond the sound of their voices, or amused themselves quietly in an adjoining room. With no one else near to listen, Madame de Rogis, sheltered behind her fan, would tell for the thousandth time

how the first fires of passion had been kindled in her heart.

“Heavens! my child,” she would exclaim, “how handsome my poor husband was the first time I saw him!”

Gabrielle thought of the radiant apparition that had dazzled her eyes upon the portico of the church of Saint-Germain l’Auxerrois.

“How charming the days were which followed our marriage!” continued Madame de Rogis, gushingly. “How happy we were! He told me every day that I was divine and adorable, and I believed him,” and she laughed affectedly.

While Madame de Rogis was gorging her vanity with the remembrance of this flattery, poor Gabrielle thought of the blue *boudoir*, of her husband’s loving words, of all the incidents of *her* little romance, that had vanished so quickly.

“And what anguish I suffered when the perfidious man deserted me!” continued madame. “In my despair I longed to put an end to my life. My grief nearly broke my heart. It was my mother who consoled me.”

“I,” thought Gabrielle, “have no mother.”

“She told me that all men were fickle, and that if we women tore our hair over each faithless

lover, the most beautiful of our sex would soon be baldheaded!" And madame laughed heartily, but Gabrielle could not even smile. She asked herself thoughtfully, why men should possess this recognized right, sanctioned by custom, to be inconstant, as her friend had said.

"I was twenty-two, *ma belle*," the untiring talker continued; "only twenty-two, when my husband deserted me."

"And I," thought Gabrielle, "was only eighteen."

"Fortunately, I had no children, and the amusements of society in some measure relieved the despair which at first made my friends fear for my life."

While Madame de Rogis thus unbound the chaplet of her love adventures, Gabrielle, who had heard them all recounted again and again, thought bitterly of her own sad experience.

Yes, certainly, her children were a great consolation; but was not their father still more culpable to have deserted these dear little ones, who knew him only by name? One campaign ended, the marquis had taken part in a second. He loved the vocation of arms, and he believed that it bespitted a Maurèze to battle for the honor of his country, and even for the interests of other

countries. The fortunes of war had protected him, and Gabrielle gratefully thanked heaven for his preservation. But, now that the war was over, when would he return to his fireside? Had garrison life so many charms for him that he could not tear himself from it to spend a few weeks with his wife and children, when years had passed since they had looked upon his face?

"For me it does not matter," thought the marquise, sadly. "I had evidently no other mission in this world than that of giving birth to heirs for the house of Maurèze; but they, poor innocents, why should he not know and love them, the dear little things, when they love him so? and how easy it is to love him!"

These sad thoughts passed through Gabrielle's mind while Madame de Rogis continued her everlasting confidences.

"The *Chevalier R.*," she resumed, "was by no means equal to my husband, but . . . Ah! well, my dear, you know when one cannot get thrushes, one is glad to eat blackbirds," she whispered behind her fan, with a meaning laugh that made Gabrielle blush.

Thank heaven, however much she had reason to complain of her husband, she was not yet

reduced to seeking for blackbirds, or even for thrushes.

"If he would only write to me," she thought, for her heart turned constantly to the absent one; "but the letters he sends me once in three months —are they the letters of a husband? Those he writes to Robert are a hundred times as long."

This was after Robert had become *major-domo*, steward, and *factotum* of the mansion. Under his honest and skilful management, everything had prospered. The most perfect order reigned in the château, in the grounds, on the farms, in all the disbursements and revenues. The incapable servants had been discharged, all useless expenditures been done away with, without diminishing the magnificence of the establishment in the least. This steward, who stole nothing, and who wasted nothing, doubled his master's income.

Several times Gabrielle, in recognition of his valuable services, had asked Robert what reward would be acceptable to him.

"Nothing, madame la marquise," he had replied, "nothing, save the happiness of contributing my small share to the grandeur and prosperity of Maurèze."

This quiet and undemonstrative man seemed to

regard only two persons with anything like affection. Occasionally he showed some signs of love for his wife, Toinon, and always for the young Count René. For the latter he would even neglect his duties, and when René—who, like most children of noble families, was a little tyrant—would say to him, “Robert, come and be my horse,” Robert would allow himself to be harnessed without a word, and would gallop over the lawn until it pleased René to choose some other form of amusement, though the following night he might be obliged to remain over his accounts until morning, to make up the time, not lost, in his opinion, but consecrated to the pleasure of his young master.

“I am sometimes almost afraid of that man,” said Gabrielle one day to Madame de Rogis, who, as usual, was complacently relating the incidents of one of her numberless conquests.

“Of whom? of the baron? Oh, he was not at all dangerous!”

“I was not speaking of the baron, nor of the *chevalier*,” said Gabrielle, impatiently, “I was alluding to Robert.”

“Robert? Your steward? He seems to me irreproachable. What has he done?”

“I have no fault to find with him, but I was

thinking of his influence here. Sometimes it seems to me that I am a mere nobody; that I am in this house only on sufferance."

"If he is wanting in respect to you, why, dismiss him," replied Madame de Rogis.

"No," murmured Gabrielle, thoughtfully. "He is never wanting in respect, far from it. I can only praise him."

"Well, then, what more can you ask? You are too fanciful, *ma belle*," said Madame de Rogis, playing languidly with her fan.

Gabrielle could say nothing in reply, so she was silent, and the subject dropped.

CHAPTER XV.

A BLOW STRUCK HOME.

THE marquis had been absent five years, when the usually peaceful life at Maurèze was entirely transformed by an event that every one had foreseen except Gabrielle.

One lovely day in May the duke arrived in a carriage, attended by his usual retinue. Gabrielle, warned of his approach by a courier, hastened to receive him, with all due ceremony, at the foot of the grand staircase. She was much surprised at his visit, for the duke, being now very old and very infirm, was more than ever averse to any change of habits and of residence.

Gabrielle thought that he must have come to announce some misfortune, and her first thought was of her husband; but her father-in-law's austere face wore a look expressive of as much satisfaction as his grim nature would permit, and there was no sign of mourning in his gorgeous attire.

After the usual compliments, and after he had

partaken of some refreshments, the duke addressed Gabrielle with great affability.

"My dear daughter-in-law," he said, "I bring news which you will receive, I am sure, as you have heretofore received all decisions emanating from your husband."

On hearing these words, Gabrielle's heart sank within her. What was he about to demand? She waited breathless for what was to follow.

"But first, my dear daughter-in-law," continued the duke, "will you allow me to see my grandchildren? I have heard wonderful stories about them."

Gabrielle gave the necessary orders, and the children, attended by Toinon, soon after entered the room. A single glance at their nurse was enough to show the marquise that some terrible misfortune was impending, for the face of the faithful servant was as white as marble.

The two children advanced to the arm-chair in which their grandfather was seated, kissed his hand with perfect grace and an irreproachable bow, then stood with their eyes fastened upon their mother's face, waiting for her commands.

"They have, evidently, been well trained, very well trained," said the duke, approvingly. "You

must have taken great pains with their education, and I see that my son has been wise in allowing them to remain in your charge up to the present time. But now the time has come for them to receive an education suited to their rank. You know," he added, smiling as graciously as possible, "you know that the dauphin of France, at the age of seven, is always placed under the charge of men. You will find it advisable to pursue this course with your son."

"You desire, then, to provide him with a tutor?" faltered Gabrielle, trying hard not to understand his meaning.

"I have already engaged a tutor who will educate René at the hôtel de Maurèze, under my supervision, where," (with great politeness,) "it is needless for me to say, your visits will always be most welcome."

Gabrielle, with an almost savage movement, caught her boy in her arms as if to defend him; and the frightened child looked at his grandfather with furious eyes.

"You would take my son from me!" exclaimed Gabrielle. "I will not consent."

The duke smiled indulgently; then added, gravely:

"Such an exhibition of childishness is most unbecoming one of your rank, madame la marquise; besides, such is your husband's formal order."

And he handed an open letter to Gabrielle, who glanced over it eagerly.

"What!" she exclaimed, "my daughter also. Oh! it is too horrible! What barbarity!"

"Your daughter is to be placed in the convent at *Visitandines*, where you, yourself, were educated," replied the duke, dryly. "There was nothing very horrible or barbarous about that."

"But," faltered Gabrielle, "she is still so very young, scarcely five years old."

"We might have waited, certainly," said the duke; "but we reflected, and decided that such a course would cause you the pain of separation twice instead of once, and that it was better to have it over now."

Poor Gabrielle was wild with grief, but did not know how to resist. Once she had had the courage to take her child from his nurse, but then she had been in the right, and could prove that the nurse had been unfaithful to her charge. Then, too, she had to deal with an inferior—a servant; but now, to resist her father-in-law and her husband! Resist! How could she resist?

While she was sleeping they would take her children from her! She clasped them both closely in her arms, while great, scalding tears rained down upon their little faces, and the children began to cry with her.

“Have pity, monsieur,” she begged. “See how small they are! Is it not impossible to deprive them of my care and love while they are still so young? They love me so; they are so accustomed to my caresses. What would they do among strangers? It is not for my sake I ask it, monsieur, only for their own. Oh, do not be so cruel!”

The duke blew his nose, took a pinch of snuff, shook his lace *jabot* to dislodge a few grains that had fallen upon it, then said:

“Madame, it is my son’s command.”

“It is well, monsieur,” replied Gabrielle, her face suddenly grown cold and proud. “It is a command. I submit to it. Pray heaven that your pride may not one day suffer as it has made me suffer to-day.”

She left the room, holding her children by the hand, and led them to her own chamber. There her courage deserted her, and she wept bitterly with them. After they had fallen asleep in her arms, worn out with weeping, she left them in

charge of Toinon, and went down again to her father-in-law, whom she found conversing amicably with Madame de Rogis.

"When do you desire to take them away?" she asked, calmly.

"To-morrow, if possible."

"To-morrow! So be it!" she replied.

She would not humiliate herself now by asking even for a day.

The duke took René away in the carriage on the following day—the boy fighting his grandfather like a little fiend; and Gabrielle, accompanied by Toinon, went herself to the convent at Visitandines with her daughter.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONVENT AGAIN.

WHEN the grated door of the convent had closed behind Lucile, thus separating the young mother from all that was left her on earth, the marquise silently took leave of the superior and re-entered her carriage, still accompanied by the faithful Toinon, whose eyes were red and swollen with weeping. But Gabrielle did not weep. She had forced back her tears even on parting with her son, for she scorned to show any sign of weakness before those who had shown no mercy for her.

“Where will madame la marquise go now?” inquired the footman, before remounting to his place.

“To the church of Saint-Germain l’Auxerrois,” replied Gabrielle.

She seemed determined to drain all the bitterest cups life could hold for her at one draught.

The vestibule of the church was deserted; the paintings and frescoes upon its walls were dimmed by age and defaced by dampness. The day was

dark and stormy. How far away seemed that lovely and blissful day when she had given her heart and destiny into her husband's hands!

Some aged women were kneeling in the cold church, mumbling their prayers with a dejected air. The marquise came quickly forward to the very steps of the altar, paused, and looked sadly about her, then fell upon her knees on the marble steps. Yes, it was on this very spot that she had received her wedding-ring and the nuptial benediction. Hers had indeed been a hard fate. "Happy are those," she thought, mournfully, "who have never known a husband's love! They do not know the tortures of being forsaken. Happy those who have never been mothers! They do not know the ~~agony~~ of having their children torn from them! Happy those who have died in their youth! They, perhaps, are mourned, and they have not the misery of seeing a future of loneliness and despair stretching before them!" And Gabrielle besought God, who had denied her happiness, to take her from the world that seemed to hold no place for her.

The quiet of the church, and the certainty of not being observed, reopened the fount of tears, and Gabrielle wept silently. Toinon, kneeling

beside her, also sobbed bitterly; not only on account of her own deep grief at the loss of the children she had cared for so long, but also for her mistress, who, possessing youth, health, beauty and high rank, could not escape sorrow, even misery.

The storm without increased in fury; and the church, always dimly lighted, became still more gloomy; yet Gabrielle did not think of leaving it.

“What must I do,” she asked herself, “to appease the anger of God, whom I must have unwittingly offended, for it could not be that He would thus afflict me if I were not guilty! Guilty!—of what? Has not my heart been engrossed only by two thoughts—my husband and my children? The poor bless me. I have solaced the sick and afflicted. I have been neither proud nor uncharitable. Oh! why should I be so sorely punished that even prisoners are happy in comparison with me?”

An aged priest, who was passing slowly through the church, paused a few steps from Gabrielle, arrested by the sound of her sobs.

The elegant and distinguished appearance of the lady, and the honest and discreet air of the servant accompanying her, interested him; and he was about to approach her, when at the same moment

the marquise raised her head and observed him. Moved by an irresistible impulse, she rose from her knees and went towards him. The saintly air of the venerable man, his white hair, and the sympathizing look he gave her, encouraged her to speak.

“My father,” she said, “give me your counsel. My soul is pure; my hands are charitable. I have but one love—my husband; but one source of happiness—my children. My husband abandoned me two years after our marriage, and now my children have been taken from me. What must I do? What must I believe?”

The venerable priest, utterly astonished, regarded the beautiful young woman, who stood eagerly awaiting his response with tightly-clasped hands and eyes brilliant with fever, as slightly deranged. He was a little frightened, and recoiled a step.

“My daughter,” he said, “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. Beseech Him to grant you His peace.”

A bitter smile curled Gabrielle’s lips. She turned away with a slight inclination of the head, and walked towards the door. Upon the threshold she paused and looked back. The lights upon the altar flickered feebly; the church was deserted and shrouded in gloom.

When she entered it before, it was crowded by a gay throng, sparkling with gold and jewels, and the glad May sunshine had illumined every nook and corner. In Gabrielle's life there had been the same transformation. She closed the door, and, without speaking a word, entered her carriage and was driven away.

Later in the evening, after they had returned to the château, and the marquise, worn out with fatigue and grief, had retired to her couch, Madame Robert was talking with her husband.

"One thing is certain," she said, while undressing for the night, "it is a great sin that *monsieur le duc* has taken upon his conscience to-day, and I hope a just heaven will punish him as he deserves."

"What do you mean?" said Robert, in a tone of displeasure, for he could not endure to hear any one bearing the name of Maurèze censured.

"I mean that it was a sin and a shame to take the children away from madame. God knows her life was sad enough here, in a place where it is dull and gloomy enough to kill any one; and all she asked to make her happy was her children. If I were in her place I know what I would do now. I would go to Paris and enjoy myself."

"That would be fine, truly," growled Robert. "I beg you will not put any such notions into madame's head. It would be very displeasing to *monsieur le marquis*."

"The marquis! What business is it of his," said Toinon, tartly, "when he has a wife like madame, and treats her as he does?"

"Well?" said Robert, in a forbidding tone.

"Well? I say if she should disgrace him, it would be only what he deserves," said Toinon, too angry to realize the true import of her words.

She had not finished the sentence before her husband grasped her rudely by the shoulder.

"If you ever speak in this way to madame, I will strangle you—do you hear me?"

Frightened, Toinon looked at her husband. He was white with rage, and could scarcely utter the words through his set teeth. He shook her violently, as he continued:

"The honor of Maurèze is the first thing to be considered; you understand that. Madame is only too fortunate in being permitted to enter this family on any terms. And she will behave herself, for it is I who will watch over the honor of the house."

He muttered something more between his

clenched teeth, then held his peace. After this, Toinon ceased to love her husband—not that she had ever felt any great affection for him, yet she had been proud of him. But from this moment she feared him, and regarded him as an enemy to herself, and above all, to her mistress, upon whom she henceforth lavished all her tenderness and devotion.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GAME FOR TWO.

LEFT to herself, Gabrielle would doubtless have lived in a deep seclusion which might have shortened her life; but Madame de Rogis would not consent to her leading such an existence.

"One lives but once, my dear," she said again and again. "You are only twenty-three; you are attractive—yes, adorable! and you wish to bury yourself! In the name of all the graces, I protest against it."

And Gabrielle allowed herself to be persuaded.

Madame de Rogis commenced by "beating the country," to use her own expression. There were some agreeable people in the neighborhood, and soon madame had learned how and where to collect guests enough for a small card party—the first of all necessities. Under her clever generalship the society at the château, which at first had consisted only of the curé and his sister, was augmented by the addition of some elderly gentlemen of position, and a few ladies of noble birth, who

were too poor to reside in Paris and too proud to mingle with the *bourgeoisie*. These recruits did not bring a very varied element to the social life of Maurèze; but, as Madame de Rogis said, little brooks form mighty rivers, and she declared that she should yet see a crowd of promenaders beneath the shade of the park.

The marquise went every week to visit her children. These little jaunts brought some variety and relief to the monotony of the life at the château; and Madame de Rogis frequently accompanied Gabrielle. The duke, more opinionated and morose each year, but more than ever resolved to live, always received his daughter-in-law with pleasure. He had been gratified to a certain degree by her quiet resignation to the separation from her children which he had so arbitrarily exacted; and he found the marquise so charming in every way that he praised her not a little, even in his letters to his son.

Soon after Gabrielle received a letter from her husband, in which he complimented her on her discreet manner of life, and promised her a speedy visit.

Alas! each year, for ten years, Gabrielle was to receive a similar letter, and though the first

made her heart throb joyously by evoking the ghost of her former happiness, those which followed brought only a half-bitter, half-mocking smile to her lips.

Ten years passed—one in nowise different from another. Gabrielle lost her father, but his death grieved her little, as she had seen him only four times since her marriage.

Robert's hair was snow-white, and Toinon had grown very stout; but though her step was less agile, her generous heart was as devoted as ever to her mistress. The old duke was still alive. René had just received his sword and commission as an officer. He had paid his mother a visit, and Gabrielle could scarcely restrain her tears when she saw how much he resembled his father. Lucile was an idle little thing; she had not learned much at the convent, and two or three years more of study were deemed necessary for her. The marquise was very anxious to have her daughter with her; but, as usual, she was obliged to submit to the will of others. With the marquis only time had passed on wings. He was as well suited to military life as military life was suited to him. The commander of a regiment, his official duties occupied his mind and his time sufficiently; and,

besides, he was almost a king in his little sphere. Nothing in the world could have suited him better. When the war was finished he had no desire to leave the service. Why should he leave it? Where could he find an equivalent for that which he would lose in abandoning this easy and congenial life?

The ladies in the provinces are very susceptible to the charms of a gorgeous uniform, gallantly worn; the officers of the regiment, all of noble family and many of them rich, idolized their colonel. The life of the marquis was enlivened by gay suppers and easy conquests; visions of glory haunted him sometimes, and flattery was lavished upon him always. Was this not enough to content any man of those times? Hence, the years had passed swiftly and lightly for the marquis. He was now nearly fifty, but could not realize it himself, and certainly no one thought of telling him that such was the fact.

When Gabrielle was thirty-three a great misfortune befell her. She had reconciled herself to the prospect of living on quietly but cheerfully, until old age, in the companionship of Madame de Rogis, when this relative died. A thorough epicurean, she died, as she had lived, with

consoling maxims sustaining an easy code of morals.

"You will be very lonely, my poor child," she said to Gabrielle, two or three days before her death. "I would gladly have aided you in passing a few years pleasantly; but I can do nothing. Others will console you," she added, with a smile that made her face young again.

She asked to be buried in a rose-colored dress, which had always been a favorite.

"I wore that," she said, in a languishing tone, "when the *chevalier* made me that passionate declaration of love. And, above all," she added, "see that I have a little *rouge* on my cheeks. One need not frighten people because one is dead."

The nobility in the neighborhood thronged around the marquise to console her for the loss of her friend, and to fill the frightful void that death had made at the château. These worthy people, whose hearts had not been made *blasé* by the superficial life of the city, vied with each other in numerous and substantial marks of devotion to Gabrielle.

Among her assiduous visitors was an elderly lady—once a court-beauty, who showed a special fondness for the marquise. She, too, had known

sorrow, and often had wept with Gabrielle over her separation from her children. Madame de Présanges had but one child, a son, now about twenty-five years old. He had been adopted by a rich bachelor-uncle, who, like the duke, wished to retain in his home the life and joy which the presence of a young and attractive person always lends to a house. For twelve years the mother had been separated from her son, and the two ladies had mingled their tears more than once. One evening, as Gabrielle was sitting alone in the twilight thinking of her former companion, now dead, of her absent children, of her husband almost the same as dead to her, she heard a carriage roll into the court-yard. The rustle of silken garments aroused her from her reverie, and she had scarcely time to rise from her chair before she was clasped in the arms of Madame de Présanges, who, breathless with haste, was laughing and crying at the same time.

“What a misfortune!” she exclaimed; “and how delighted I am. Oh, my dear marquise, the ways of God are mysterious! He is dead, and we shall see him here in eight days!”

Gabrielle, astonished, looked at her visitor, and wondered if she had lost her reason.

"Who is dead?" she asked. "Is it your son?"

"No, no; my brother-in-law is dead, and now my son is coming home. He is rich; he is the only legatee. And, think! it is twelve years since I have embraced my son."

Gabrielle sympathized with her friend in her joy as she had formerly sympathized with her in her sorrow, and some hours later the two mothers separated, promising to see each other soon.

A week later Gabrielle was in the park alone just as the sun was setting. She had resumed her solitary visits to the quiet and abandoned nook which she had discovered the day her husband bade her good-bye, so many long years before. In this neglected and lonely spot she lived the past over again—a past, sorrowful enough, but in which her heart had at least been alive.

Yes, it was true that she had suffered much; but her sufferings, her jealousy, her despair, and the struggles of her young and ardent soul against fate—all these were better than the torpor, the death in life in which she had at last found repose. Now the measured beating of her heart was never quickened; no name, no memory had power to bring the slightest tinge of color to her always pale cheek.

"Have I ever lived? Have I ever loved? Have I sorrowed? Is it all a dream, or am I changed to stone, like this marble nymph from whose urn the water is always trickling? Ah!" she exclaimed, bitterly, "it is not Madame de Rogis who is dead, it is I!"

She could not even weep over her own misfortunes. Her heart was rigid and her eyes were dry.

"It is all over," she said to herself. "There is nothing left for me but to end it now by dying."

As she rose from her seat to return to the château, she saw some one coming towards her in the dim twilight. Thinking it some servant coming in search of her, she stood quietly waiting for him to approach; but, as he came nearer, she saw a very handsome young man attired, like herself, in mourning garb. Meeting her, he paused and bowed profoundly.

"Pardon my intrusion, madame," he said, in a grave, but exceedingly sweet voice; "my mother, Madame de Présanges, is very ill and wishes to see you."

"You are Monsieur de Présanges?" asked Gabrielle, slowly.

The young man bowed silently.

"Your mother must be greatly pleased," commenced the marquise. Then she paused, slightly embarrassed, for the eyes of the stranger met hers, and in them she read an admiration whose very memory she had forgotten.

"My mother is quite ill," the velvety voice continued; "I do not know, it may be from her great joy at seeing me again, but she seems to me very feeble. She begs you to come to her, and if you can do so, madame, you will give her great pleasure, and perhaps your presence will be beneficial."

"I will come, monsieur," replied Gabrielle, who had quickly regained her usual composure of manner. "Will you kindly announce my coming to madame, your mother?"

The young man took his leave, and when the marquise reached the château the ring of horse's hoofs upon the stone pavement of the courtyard told her that Monsieur de Présanges was already bearing away her message.

She sent for Toinon immediately, and requested Robert to accompany them; and they departed soon after for the house of Madame de Présanges.

"Madame la marquise is so good," said the

servants, as they saw her enter her carriage. "She can never see any one in trouble without going to their assistance."

Meanwhile Gabrielle's heart was beating with a new and sad emotion.

"I did not know that I loved the poor lady so much," she thought. "How anxious I am!"

"How troubled I am," she said to herself again, as they came in sight of the lighted windows of the château de Présanges.

The young man stood upon the threshold waiting to receive her.

"My mother is better," he said, as he welcomed the marquise.

It was strange, but Gabrielle's agitation was not diminished by the good tidings.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MORE TROUBLE.

THE joy and excitement of her son's return proved too great a shock to the delicate nervous system of Madame de Présanges. The feminine organizations of that age were not as well fitted for the struggles of life as those of the present day. The ladies of the nobility led an aimless, pampered existence, and but little sufficed to extinguish the spark of life. Madame de Présanges found her son so devoted, so handsome, so perfect, that she was literally overcome with happiness. She lingered, however, for several weeks; then one morning, just as the birds were waking, she fell asleep forever in the arms of Gabrielle, who had been spending several days with her sick friend.

Julien de Présanges was kneeling beside the funeral couch with his gaze riveted upon the features of the dead, where an expression of serene repose softened the rigidity of death. Gabrielle had gently closed the eyes of the departed,

and was just leaving the room, when Julien, looking up, saw her. He rose from his knees, and approaching her, said, with bowed head and a trembling voice:

“In the presence of her who is no more, permit me to thank you. You have been a daughter to her.”

Gabrielle felt her heart throb with the same strange emotion that had surprised her the first evening she met Julien.

“You are the only friend left me,” said the young man, turning away his face to conceal the tears.

The sun rose up suddenly from behind the neighboring forest, and its crimson rays poured through the large windows into the gloomy room, giving a life-like tint to the face of the dead. In spite of her sorrow, in spite of the memory of her departed friend, evoked by this sad scene, a feeling of faint joy stirred in Gabrielle’s heart.

“Be kind to me,” said Julien, still with bowed head. “Do not entirely banish me from your presence.”

“Come, and see me. We will speak of her,” said Gabrielle, gently and consolingly. Then she left the house, where her presence was no longer necessary.

When his rigorous term of mourning had expired, Julien came to call upon the marquise. Both in deep mourning, both with their homes lonely and desolate—this gave them a sad unity of thought and feeling. His visit was brief—but Julien went away with a strange joy in his heart. He no longer seemed to suffer alone.

He came again; rarely at first, then more frequently. The recent death of his mother of course prevented him from attending any large social gatherings; and, besides, he cared little for gayety. Educated in the country, and in the household of an old man, he had not formed a taste for gay amusements. His favorite diversion was a gallop upon a spirited horse.

He came often; and Gabrielle received him with that entire freedom from affectation which was one of her greatest charms, and which distinguished her from most ladies of her rank. She enjoyed his society, and the thought of concealing the fact from him never occurred to her. This quiet and gentle man who talked so understandingly on subjects that she knew of only by hearsay, this graceful, courteous gentleman, who never descended to fulsome flattery, but in whose presence one was always at ease—was it not natural that his society

would be agreeable to any one? And Gabrielle saw nothing blamable in allowing herself to be entertained.

Life had again an interest for her. Formerly, her weekly visit to her children had been the only thing she had to look forward to; and, while waiting eagerly for the day to come, the other days had passed slowly and tediously. Now there were other days that were endurable, even pleasant; and the tread of a certain horse's feet upon the stones of the court-yard would bring the bright color to her cheek, and cause her heart to quicken its throbings.

One evening, while undressing her mistress, Toinon ventured a word of counsel.

"Madame," she said, hesitatingly, "I fear you will have some trouble."

Gabrielle raised her head quickly. The apathy of former days had vanished.

"More trouble?" said she. "Have I not had enough already? What new sorrow threatens me?"

With the greatest caution, for the subject was an exceedingly delicate one, Toinon reluctantly told her mistress that Robert had been in very bad humor for several days.

"And why? What has displeased him?" inquired Gabrielle.

"It is—it is because—Well, Robert says he has charge of the house of Maurèze—"

"Well, does he fear that I shall steal it?"

"And," continued Toinon, summoning all her courage, "he says that Monsieur de Présanges comes here too often."

Gabrielle drew herself up proudly to her full height.

"Go and tell your husband that I discharge him," she said, haughtily, to the terror-stricken servant.

Toinon, sobbing, fell upon her knees at the marquise's feet.

"Ah! my dear mistress," she faltered, "do you not know that he has the duke's confidence—that he is the master here?"

Gabrielle threw herself upon her bed, and wept the bitterest of all tears—the tears of wounded pride.

"It is true," she said, at last. "I am nobody here. It is, indeed, Robert who is master. He is a worthy representative of my father-in-law. Ah! well, so be it! Monsieur de Présanges will come here no more; for to-morrow I shall tell him that

I am no longer at liberty to receive such visitors as please me, and that those I support have turned against me. Go, and you may tell your husband that the person whom he so dislikes will offend his eyes no more."

"My dear mistress," said Toinon, beseechingly, "do not agitate yourself thus. Robert will see that I have been speaking to you, and, if he does, he will lose all confidence in me. It would be the greatest misfortune that could happen to us, for we should be completely at his mercy; while now, with what I can tell you—"

"You are right, Toinon. You are a faithful servant," replied the marquise, pressing the hand of her humble friend. "And I will give Monsieur de Présanges to understand that he must not come here so often."

On the morrow Julien called, but there were other visitors at the château, and the day passed without giving the marquise any opportunity of speaking to him in private.

Towards evening, some one proposed a stroll through the park, and by chance, during the promenade, Gabrielle found herself beside Julien. Availing herself of this opportunity, she paused under the path bordered by lindens, now in full flower.

"Monsieur de Présanges," she said, gravely, "I have a favor to ask of you."

"Command me, madame," he replied, with a bow.

"I am still young, monsieur," said Gabrielle—"at least they pretend so; though, so far as I myself am concerned, I do not think of that, I assure you; and certain evil-minded persons have intimated that your frequent visits to Maurèze might possibly occasion unfavorable comments."

"You banish me, then," cried Julien, sadly.

"No, it is not I," murmured Gabrielle. "You are not banished, by any means," she hastened to add, hoping he would forget, or fail to notice, her imprudent admission; "but you are to come only on the days that I receive my friends."

"Then there are to be no more of our pleasant talks; no more of those interviews, in which you have permitted me to talk so unreservedly."

Gabrielle shook her head sadly.

"It is over, then, this pleasant dream, in which you had promised to sympathize with me, to talk with me of my mother."

"You pain me deeply," Gabrielle replied, gently, walking slowly on.

"Then," asked Julien, "if it depended only upon yourself, nothing would be changed?"

"No," responded Gabrielle, reluctantly.

"I thank you," said Julien, softly, almost in a whisper.

No one was observing them, and Julien raised Gabrielle's hand gently to his lips. They returned to the château, and did not speak with each other again during the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONLY THIRTY-THREE.

TWO days after, Gabrielle, seated in her favorite retreat, far from the château, and near the confines of the park, was thinking over the events of the last few months. There had been a marked change in her life; and upon reflection she was forced to admit that this change dated from the arrival of Julien de Présanges. Until he came, she had lived in a sort of twilight; her sorrows, drowned in the depths of the past, had left a secret bitterness in her soul, and a habit of self-renunciation which, while it prevented her from being happy, occasioned her no very poignant suffering. Until the day she met Julien, the very day on which she had declared that her heart was dead, she had for several years experienced little more than a dreary feeling of torpor and vacuity. Sometimes, it is true, her eyes had filled with tears at the remembrance of her vanished youth and her blighted hopes; but such tears were soon dried by the thought of a future when her daughter

would return home to be her companion and friend.

But with Julien de Présanges, a new element had entered her life, and the past seemed to have faded away. A new existence, after her first meeting with this young man, had commenced for Gabrielle.

What could have been more natural? Just as this son had returned to his home after long years of absence, a cruel fate had deprived him of the mother who was so worthy of his love, almost before he had learned to know her well. Hence was it not Gabrielle's sacred duty to tell him of this departed mother whom he had known too little to really appreciate, but sufficiently to be insatiable when they talked to him of her?

And then, how strangely similar their fates had been! Educated in the country and far from anything that could be called society, Julien was ignorant, so to speak, of the world and its customs; and although Gabrielle had mingled more in society, she was almost as unsophisticated. And the sorrow which had afflicted both at almost the same time—was it not a mysterious dispensation of Providence which brought them together to console and love each other?

Love each other! Certainly, and why not? As an elder sister might love her brother; surely no one could say aught against it. And who had any right to forbid Gabrielle's bestowing this purest, most unselfish affection upon this young orphan, who, in turn, seemed to regard her with brotherly tenderness? Had the marquis this right? It could not diminish her wifely affection for him, upon which, however, he certainly appeared to set little value. Her children? They had been taken from her. What more could she do for them than go and visit them each week? And the remainder of her time, could she not employ it better in assuaging, so far as lay in her power, Julien's grief, than in talking of trifles with the ladies of the neighborhood?

Gabrielle replied to all these mental questions in the affirmative. Then what was there to separate two friends, whose pure and unselfish regard for each other might be openly avowed before the most censorious?

“For the honor of Maurèze!” Robert had said. Gabrielle bowed her head, acknowledging that she had received the honor of this house into her keeping, and that it was her sacred duty to preserve it inviolate. This duty she had fulfilled,

for she had sent Julien away; but sitting there alone upon the moss-covered marble, she thought bitterly that her last comfort—the only alleviation of her gloomy life—had been taken from her, as all the others had been, by the same relentless hand.

Involuntarily she thought of Griselda. The old romance recurred sorrowfully to her mind. Poor queen! they took everything from her—her children, her crown, her rich attire. She was sent back to her humble cottage, and even threatened with the loss of her husband's love; but all at once *her* sorrow had been changed to joy, and with a triumphal *cortége* they brought back to her, her crown, her children, and her husband. Hers had been only a test—but what a test! and how cruel the heart that had imposed it!

“Alas!” thought Gabrielle, “my sufferings are not a test. I shall go down to my grave on the same dreary road I have travelled so long!”

She rose with a sigh, and approached the little basin filled by the water that trickled down from the pitcher held by the reclining nymph. This statue had become her *confidante*, almost her friend. More than once she had thrown her arms around the neck of the marble dreamer, and her

tears had coursed down upon the naïad's cold cheek. This time, moved by an impulse almost new, it had lain so long dormant, Gabrielle leaned over the water to view her face in its mirror-like surface.

She saw, looking up at her from the water, a face with regular, clear-cut features, large, soft, thoughtful brown eyes, a proud face, but one that was irradiated as much by an expression of kindness as by its beauty—a face any queen might envy.

"Is it really I?" asked Gabrielle. "Is it I, and am I still so young?"

She bent lower, and the sweet face, as it came still nearer, answered back her melancholy smile.

"Yet I am thirty-three—thirty-three. I thought I was an old woman," she said to herself, half amused, half sad.

She passed mentally in review the ladies residing in the neighborhood, and not one among them could compare with her in youthful grace and beauty; but instead of being proud, Gabrielle was troubled.

"It is true," she thought, "I am still young. The honor of the house of Maurèze must be preserved from any possible reproach. Poor Monsieur de Présanges!"

She thought of Julien's deep grief after the loss of his mother, and then how he had regained a little cheerfulness in their quiet, pleasant talks together.

"Poor Julien!" she sighed, this time almost aloud; "and poor me! condemned to live always alone!"

A slight sound in the dense shrubbery aroused her from her reverie. She cast a preoccupied glance around her, then looked back into the fountain. Her reflection still confronted her in the limpid water. She gazed at it a moment, then turned away her head, for the eyes she met there troubled her; the face wore an expression that half frightened her, and that it might haunt her no longer, she plunged her hand into the tranquil water, which formed at once a thousand circles and destroyed the picture; then she rose with a sigh and left the fountain.

The same sound that had startled her a moment before, but this time nearer, made her raise her head. She recoiled a step, with her hand pressed against her heart, frightened, yet happy. Julien stood before her.

Humble, submissive, respectful, bowing until the plume of the hat he held in his hand swept

the ground, he waited for her to address him—her command for him to depart, or her permission to remain; while Gabrielle, too agitated to speak, looked at him in utter astonishment.

“Pardon me, madame,” he said at last, seeing that she could not or would not speak. “I have not disobeyed you—at least not openly. My presence here is unknown to every one.”

“How did you come?” faltered Gabrielle.

He pointed to the wall not far from this lonely retreat.

“My horse is in the neighboring wood, the wall is low, and no one saw me. Pardon me, madame, but indeed I cannot live without seeing you.”

His altered features, his broken voice and trembling hands, expressed more than his words.

“If any one should see you!” exclaimed Gabrielle, frightened and confused, “we should be lost!”

As this “*we*,” by which she took half the blame upon herself, escaped her lips, a tide of crimson suffused even her delicate white throat. She was so youthful in appearance at that moment, that no one would have supposed her over twenty years of age. The fleeting blush did not escape Julien’s ardent gaze, and he dropped on his knees before her.

“Madame,” he cried, “do with me as it pleases you. I am your slave—your dog—anything! I have eyes only through you and for you. If you send me away I shall die, for I love you! I love you, and upon my honor, I have never loved any woman but you!”

With a gesture full of terror and also of feminine dignity, Gabrielle motioned him to rise.

“Hush!” said she. “You must not speak such words to me, and I must not listen to them.”

Unconsciously she had seated herself upon the marble bench. Her head drooped upon her breast, and she secretly rejoiced over the infinite sweetness of this avowal. Loved! she! after being so many years deserted and alone; after having imposed an eternal silence upon her heart! She did not ask herself why Julien’s love overcame her with joy; but she felt the happiness penetrate to the inmost depths of her soul.

Emboldened by her silence, Julien seated himself beside her. He so respected this woman, who was so worthy of his esteem, and whom he knew to be so unhappy, that he dared neither to take her hand nor to speak. Her continued silence would have dismayed him, had he not read upon her tell-tale face kindness, even tenderness.

At a slight movement of Julien's, Gabrielle started and raised her head. Her eyes encountered his, and she did not turn away.

"You love me?" she asked, in a constrained voice, in which, in spite of herself, there was a tender intonation.

Julien looked his response.

"Entirely? It is not a mere caprice? You are sure that you love me?" she asked.

"Ah!" he cried, eagerly, "have I not told you that I never have loved any woman but you? Where I have lived in the country there were only servants and dowagers, and here—who is there that can compare with you? Laugh at me if you will, but I swear that never have my lips touched the lips of any woman; that my heart has never been given to another, and that, before God, I say for the first time in my life, I love, and *I love you!*"

Gabrielle listened, gazing at him intently. This passionate cry opened a new world before her.

"Then it is with all your soul?" she asked, with the same sweetness.

"With my whole soul and forever!"

"I am married," continued Gabrielle; "for the honor of the name I shall transmit to my children, I must be without reproach."

"I revere you," said Julien, kissing the border of her mantle. "I revere you. I ask for nothing in return; but I must tell you that I love you. And you will permit me to see you here sometimes?" added Julien, eagerly.

Gabrielle did not reply by word or gesture, but her smile and blush said "Yes!"

"You must go," said she; "it is time now for me to return to the château."

"Already?" asked Julien, despairingly.

"Immediately."

"You will return?"

Gabrielle gave an almost imperceptible gesture of assent.

"To-morrow?"

"No, oh, no! not to-morrow!"

"I beseech you to come!"

His persuasive tone and manners were truly irresistible. No one who loved him could refuse him. Gabrielle half promised to be there the next day at the same hour, and Julien departed happy and triumphant, darted over the wall like a bird, and disappeared in the shadows of the wood.

Left alone, Gabrielle pressed her hand upon her heart. It throbbed, oh! how it throbbed—that heart she had believed long dead! With what feverish joy she looked forward to the morrow!

"There has been no wrong in what I have done? It is not wrong?" the marquise asked herself, with all the honesty of a soul that has never resorted to stratagem with itself.

She had preserved the honor of Maurèze. That which she had given to Julien was only her heart—her love that no one valued or cared for; and she persuaded herself that she had committed no wrong.

Thus it is that one begins; for who, even the most depraved, dares gaze down into the abyss, and then precipitate himself into it knowingly?

CHAPTER XX.

YOU ARE A SAINT.

AS the marquise was returning to the château, she was surprised to see her son descending the broad white marble steps leading down into the garden; but the unexpected arrival of her first-born did not cause her the same delight as usual, and she drew back for a moment. Some secret instinct told her that René's presence would be a safeguard against unworthy thoughts. But no guilty thoughts had entered her mind; no, certainly not. Nothing could be more chaste and pure than her affection and regard for Julien de Présanges.

Reproaching herself for her hesitation, she quickened her pace, and soon her son, who had hastened to meet her, received a kiss as fond and ardent as in the days of his infancy.

“What good fortune has brought you here, my dear René?” inquired the happy mother, gazing admiringly at her son, who was already as tall as his father.

"I have two days' leave, mother; and I have come to spend it with you. Do you not know that I would a thousand times rather see you than visit my grandfather or my aunts, who are all equally tiresome?"

Gabrielle smiled. Her son's eyes were far more eloquent than his words. Etiquette in those days did not permit children to express their sentiments very freely, and the mode of expression current at the time gave a superficial appearance even to the deepest and most natural emotions.

René offered his arm to his mother, and she walked on by his side, proud of her handsome boy, and happy at having him near her. At that moment, Julien de Présanges was far from her thoughts.

"How beautiful you are, mother," said René, suddenly pausing to look at her; "how handsome and young! I can scarcely believe that you are really my mother. Say, are you not a fairy?"

"No one but a mother could love you so fondly," replied Gabrielle, pressing her son's hand to her lips.

"No, that is true," answered René; "but you seem so young—too young to be my mother."

"I was very young when I was married," the marquise murmured, sadly.

René still looked at his mother, and a thought, which had been vague until then, took distinct form in his mind. He was more thoughtful than most boys of his age. The severe education which he had received under the supervision of his grandfather, and a natural inclination to meditate and to observe closely everything around him, gave his mind a reflective power greatly in advance of his years. From his earliest infancy, he had entertained a passionate love and admiration for his mother. In his earliest recollections, he remembered her as young and beautiful—almost a child herself, always smiling, always fondly indulgent—his consoler in every childish trouble. He remembered vividly and bitterly the scene that had preceded his first departure from Maurèze, and the tears his mother wept over him then made her dear to him forever.

"Do not cry, René," Gabrielle had said to him, just before his grandfather took him away. "Do not afford them the satisfaction of seeing how much sorrow they have caused us." (They referred to Robert and the duke.) "Do as I do, my René. You see that I suffer greatly; and yet before them I shall not shed one tear."

This first lesson of moral courage had borne double fruit; first René had learned to suffer in silence; for, in spite of his youth and his grief, he stoically restrained his tears in obedience to his mother's request, and his pillow was the sole confidant of his sorrow. Then he conceived an intense admiration for his mother, whom in his thoughts he frequently compared to a Roman matron, while at the same time his admiration for her was joined with an equal aversion for his grandfather, whom he secretly likened to an ogre, a wolf, and a crocodile, all in one. When the period of infancy gave place to that of adolescence, René learned to better appreciate his grandfather, who really possessed many admirable traits of character; but the young man's love and admiration were given entirely to his mother, and remained hers through all the vicissitudes of his life.

As he conducted this beloved mother back to the château, René wondered why he never saw his father. The marquis wrote occasionally to his son, and when René gained his first epaulettes his father sent him a magnificent sword studded with diamonds, and a well-filled purse accompanied by a complimentary note. But on the very day he

received them, Gabrielle, in embracing her son, dropped upon the fresh, bright epaulettes one of those tears of joy which only mothers know ; and the son, in memory of those she had shed for him in the silence of the night, and in the sadness of her lonely days, reverently kissed away the tear. Poor René ! this tear and his mother's tender kiss effaced all remembrance of his father's splendid gift.

"Mother," he asked, after a protracted silence, "why is my father not with you ?"

Gabrielle cast an almost frightened glance at her son. This question touched the greatest sorrow of her life. With what an unerring hand children aim at the sorest part ! How innocently they plunge a dagger into the wound !

The marquise did not reply, and René repeated the question with a persistence which would have been impertinent in a less devoted son ; but René, for several years, had asked himself this question again and again, and had never succeeded in finding a satisfactory reason.

"I do not know, my dear son," Gabrielle replied, sadly. "His duty calls him elsewhere, no doubt."

René was silent. They had just entered the gardens; the sweet fragrance of roses perfumed the

air, the sky was cloudless and serene. Among these roses, and beneath such a sky, care and sorrow seemed impossible.

The eyes of Robert, peering through the window of a little room in one of the turrets of the château, followed the mother and son, and he sought to read in their faces the subject of their conversation, for Robert regarded everybody and everything with suspicion.

“Mother,” said the young man, at last, “I do not know what the duties are that keep my father from you; but, I have often thought that he could not love us very much to desert us in this way.”

“Oh! do not say that! do not think that!” cried Gabrielle, eagerly. “Do not say that your father does not love you! He does love you devotedly. He is proud of you. Are you not his only son, and the heir of his name? Did he not long for you, wait anxiously for your birth, and welcome you with delight?”

“My father, then, loves me?” said the young man, deeply moved. “I am very glad. I wish to love him. Why does he never come to us?”

“He will come, undoubtedly, my son,” replied the marquise, “and you will see how handsome and kind he is, and how worthy of your love.”

"Mother," said René, impulsively, "let us sit down here, and you can tell me of my father."

They seated themselves upon a marble bench among the roses, and in the soft light of the expiring day Gabrielle told René all she knew about his father. It was little enough, alas!

The young man listened, smiling—pleased to hear of this father whom he scarcely knew. When Gabrielle paused, the shades of night had gathered around them.

"And then?" demanded René, "since my father left Maurèze?"

"He has made several campaigns," said the marquise, hesitatingly.

"And then?"

"I know nothing further," replied the deserted wife.

"And you have lived here in solitude—your only relief and pleasure the society of Madame de Rogis and your visits to us in Paris?"

"Certainly," replied Gabrielle, reluctantly, with something very like remorse gnawing at her heart.

"My mother," cried René, falling on his knees before her. "You are a saint!"

Gabrielle burst into tears. Forgetful of all

restraint, she clasped her son in her arms and allowed him to caress and console her.

The next day Julien de Présanges waited beside the fountain in vain; the woodland birds were his only companions. When, restless and desperate, he remounted his horse, after three hours of fruitless waiting, Gabrielle, upon her knees in the solitude of her own room, was thanking God for having blessed her with such a son, and vowing that she would remain worthy of him.

CHAPTER XXI.

DUTY AND HONOR.

WHEN René returned to Paris, the duke, more jealous and crotchety than ever, thanks to an increase of gout, begrudged the time the boy had devoted to his mother, and reproached him bitterly for his absence.

“It was I who educated and cared for you, after all!” exclaimed the duke.

“It was my mother who brought me into the world!” René retorted, hotly.

This response brought down a formidable storm upon his devoted head. Gabrielle, when he wrote her of the scene that ensued, counselled him to submit at least apparently to the caprices of the aged man.

“Preserve the harmony of your father’s family at any sacrifice,” she wrote; “as for me, I shall love you just the same; while they . . .”

Her consideration was poorly rewarded; for the duke, to punish this act of insubordination on the part of his grandson, requested the colonel of the

regiment to which René belonged to grant the young man no more furloughs; and the poor boy obtained only three days' leave in the six months that followed. He was, however, allowed to absent himself frequently for twelve hours at a time. Twelve hours would not suffice for him to go to Maurèze and return; but it allowed the crabbed old duke a pleasant day in the society of his grandson.

Gabrielle wrote frequently to her son. Her letters were full of good counsel, which displayed the greatest nobility of soul and generosity of heart.

René welcomed these letters with delight, and read and re-read them admiringly. From them he composed a sort of breviary, which he took a malicious pleasure in repeating before his grandsire.

“Who taught you such goodly lessons of wisdom?” the duke asked one day, not without a certain pride in seeing him so wise.

“It was my mother,” replied René.

His grandfather treated him coldly for a month afterward.

If René could have visited her every week; if she could have been surrounded by the devoted tenderness and passionate admiration of her son,

Gabrielle would have lived only for him; but it seemed as if the entire Maurèze family had united to deprive the marquise of all that could protect her against herself. In the complete isolation to which she had been abandoned through the anger and caprice of the duke, Julien de Présanges had gained his cause.

Some days after René's visit, the marquise, torn by a thousand conflicting emotions, invited Julien to a formal dinner-party, to which numerous guests were bidden. He came, so pale in his deep mourning attire, so sad and dejected on account of Gabrielle's apparent indifference, that she had not courage to greet him with common-places. In the confusion, no one noticed that she did not address him, while he could not and dared not trust himself to speak to her; and if he could have spoken, it would only have been to overwhelm her with reproaches. At the moment of leave-taking, he ceremoniously kissed her hand in accordance with the custom of the time. The marquise felt the kiss burning there all through the night; and the next afternoon she wandered to her old retreat beside the fountain.

She had scarcely reached the spot when Julien appeared. He had not failed to be there every day since their first meeting at that place.

At the sight of him, Gabrielle, greatly agitated, was silent. The change in his appearance seemed a cruel reproach to her. He came forward without speaking a word, fell at her feet, and hiding his haggard face in the folds of her black dress, wept unrestrainedly. The marquise was prepared to listen to reproaches. She, in turn, had prepared a moral discourse—but what could she do? What could she say before this mute expression of uncontrollable grief? Herself overcome, she laid her hand gently on Julien's bowed head.

He looked up eagerly. He certainly had no vanity, for as he raised his head he disclosed a worn face, and eyes swollen and disfigured with weeping; but if he had been artful he could not have played his part more skilfully. His love was his only advocate; and he could have had none better. "See what your unkindness has made me," his distorted features seemed to say.

They were both speechless with emotion, and Gabrielle felt that, however faithful she might be to her duty in word and in deed, her heart, in spite of herself, was given beyond recall to this man who loved her. In vain she had endeavored to stifle this growing passion; in vain she had sought a refuge in maternal love. Gabrielle was young; she

was beloved ; she might die of sorrow—worn out by the struggle ; but she could not help loving this man who adored her.

“Why have you caused me such sorrow ?” murmured Julien, after he had read in her glance that he had lost none of her affection.

“Duty and honor,” replied Gabrielle, without answering his question directly.

“But,” cried Julien, springing up impetuously, “have I asked of you anything contrary to duty and honor ? Do you think that I do not revere you enough to always respect you, or do you doubt my word as a gentleman ?”

He spoke so loyally and with so proud an accent that Gabrielle was conquered and offered him her hand. He seated himself by her side, and they began to talk of the future.

They would often meet each other here—and if it rained, that is, if the storm was not too violent, a gardener’s hut near by, now unoccupied, could serve as a shelter for the friends—for they said nothing of love.

Julien was so confident, and Gabrielle was so sure of herself, that the struggles and anguish of the preceding days seemed unnecessary and even absurd. The friends could even smile at the recollection of them.

What cause had Julien to be troubled? Had he not been sure that she cared for him? And Gabrielle—what reason had she to distrust her friend? Was it not an outrage to his loyalty to think him capable of influencing her to do anything that was not right?

When they had asked each other's pardon for their mutual doubts, they separated, and Gabrielle returned to the château.

That evening, while undressing her mistress, Toinon noticed a brightness and a resolute expression upon the features of the marquise that she had not seen for many a day. But she ventured no comment. It was Gabrielle who first spoke.

“Listen,” she said to Toinon: “I shall need your faithful services. I must trust entirely to you. I love Julien de Présanges!”

Toinon, frightened, looked at her mistress to see if she were really in earnest. A single glance was sufficient to convince her. She hurried to the door, opened it and looked outside to see if any one was listening, then returned to the marquise.

“My kind mistress,” she said, “I will do whatever you may desire.”

Gabrielle was deeply touched by this humble and unquestioning devotion.

"But if Robert should discover it, he is quite capable of killing you."

Toinon made a disdainful gesture.

"So much the worse for him," she replied. "I am yours entirely, and it is their own fault—why have they made you so wretched!"

After this, Toinon, whose actions were not under *surveillance*, was intrusted with depositing and receiving their letters, which were concealed in the hollow trunk of a large tree, near one of the entrances to the park. For two or three months this secret correspondence fed the passion of the two lovers, and satisfied their wants. They enjoyed writing to each other even better than seeing each other; for, during their interviews, something almost always occurred to make them restless and discontented. But a day came when letters were powerless to calm their agitation and quiet their longings.

Gabrielle had a slight attack of fever, and was not able to leave the house for several days. Julien, during her illness, wandered around the château in the most improbable disguises, and frightened poor Toinon almost to death by continually appearing where she least expected to see him, such was his eagerness to obtain news of Gabrielle.

At last the marquise, still weak, but convalescent, was able to resume her walks in the park; and one day she reached, not without difficulty, the gardener's hut, in which Toinon had taken the precaution to kindle a good fire.

Autumn had come; the dead leaves strewed the ground, and the bare branches of the trees seemed to shiver in the chill wind. Gabrielle walked hurriedly to the little cottage. When she entered, trembling with fatigue and with emotion, Julien sprang forward to meet her, hastily closed the door, and taking her gently in his arms, carried her to the blazing fire.

"Ah, how I have suffered!" he whispered, in a voice trembling with emotion; "how I have suffered, and how I have waited!"

Gabrielle, weak and overcome, nestled close to Julien's breast, where she seemed to find rest and protection at last. The lids drooped over her tearful eyes; and, for the first time, he dared press a kiss upon her icy lips.

When she left the cottage, after Julien had departed, Gabrielle found Toinon awaiting her in a fever of impatience.

"Madame! madame!" she cried, "make haste, and return to the château. Mademoiselle Lucile has come."

"Lucile has come? My daughter?" exclaimed the marquise, incredulously.

"Yes, madame."

"Ah!" cried Gabrielle, with a heart-broken moan, and lifting her hands wildly to heaven, "may God forgive me! It is too late!"

Almost as she spoke, she fell fainting to the ground. Toinon rushed for assistance, and the marquise was carried to her own room. The physician, summoned in haste, declared that madame had gone out too soon after her illness. Gabrielle did not contradict him; but she knew only too well that it was neither exposure nor over-exertion, but remorse for her sin, that had overpowered her.

When Lucile came to the bedside to embrace her mother, Gabrielle drew back in horror.

"I," she thought, "I embrace this child with arms soiled by guilty embraces—kiss this pure forehead with my adulterous lips!"

"My mother no longer loves me!" said Lucile, weeping bitterly.

"I have no right to make this poor innocent suffer when I alone am guilty," thought Gabrielle, and she held out her arms to her daughter. God only knows with what deep humility the mother received the kiss of her child.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RETURN.

A N epidemic that had broken out at Visitan-dines had compelled the nuns to send home those scholars who did not reside at too great a distance from Paris; and Lucile had returned to Maurèze under the charge of a lay sister.

The young girl, on leaving the convent, did not know whether to rejoice at going to her mother, or to grieve at parting with her schoolmates; but she was not long in doubt.

Her mother, who was ill only for a day or two, became to her an object of idolatry. Alas! Gabrielle knew how to make every one, outside of the Maurèze family, love her. They, however, loved no one but themselves.

With what intense admiration Lucile watched her mother—her mother, so beautiful and graceful, so noble and dignified—her mother, who treated her with such unfailing kindness and love!

In these days we can scarcely realize how meagre was the convent education of that time.

Young girls knew nothing of the outside world ; they had few books, and there was but little amusement for the younger pupils, and only interminable pieces of needlework for those who were older. They had no intellectual resources, and their only society was that of the nuns, who were, it is true, better informed than their pupils, but who would be considered deplorably ignorant at the present day.

In this colorless and unnatural life, Lucile had not, however, lost the tastes and instincts she had inherited from her mother. Her naturally frank and resolute disposition had preserved her from becoming hypocritical ; and even more strongly than her mother, rather indeed like her father, she was capable of loving and hating with equal intensity, and from the first she adored her mother.

When Gabrielle first looked in her child's face after her unexpected return, the wretched mother felt a mad longing to take her own life. In the time of Lucile's coming, she saw a mocking fate. Had her child come a few hours earlier, her presence would assuredly have saved the mother from her sin ; and the marquise felt as if destiny had brought Lucile back to her just at the time she had committed this irreparable fault, only that

she should be thenceforth and forever tortured by unavailing remorse. It was horrible, and the unhappy woman loathed her life.

Then she reflected.

"Alas," she said to herself, "if I have been so unfortunate, it was only because I had no mother. A mother would have warned me that a husband's love is only a dream, that one must never expect to find it real. A mother would have taught me how to defend myself; would have put me on my guard against the first insinuations of guilty passion. Lucile must not, through any act of mine, be exposed to the same dangers that have proved my ruin. This will be my punishment—to live on, dishonored and tortured by remorse as an expiation of my crime; and the caresses of my daughter, and the respect and love of my noble son, will be the severest chastisement for my sin."

With her mind filled with such thoughts, Gabrielle again met Julien, who every day awaited her coming in the little cottage. She spoke of her children, of her duty, of her remorse, and told him that they must part.

"Never!" exclaimed Julien. "Why should you be troubled with remorse, or with mistaken notions of duty? I know that you love me, as I

adore you. Your husband deserted you long years ago, and in the sight of God you are free, and we wrong no one. You are mine, and I will never give you up, never! I will kill myself before your very eyes, in your own home, before I will consent to give you up!"

What could she do? Divided between love and duty, tortured by remorse, but overcome by fear, Gabrielle, at last, reluctantly consented to meet Julien as before, and left the cottage, more closely bound than ever to this man whom she loved with all the fervor of her despairing soul.

To quiet her troubled conscience, the marquise decided to pursue a middle course.

"I will endeavor, with all my strength, to prevent my children from falling into the gulf into which I have fallen," she thought, "and if my own conduct is culpable, my counsel, at least, shall be irreproachable."

Then there commenced a double life, which may seem impossible, but which, nevertheless, exists in more than one apparently happy and honest household.

Gabrielle loved with the love of a mother and of a lover at the same time. She met Julien several times each week. He was so loving, so

devoted, so noble; how could she help loving him —she who had been so long forsaken and alone? But when she returned to the château, the lover gave place to the mother. She banished the thought of Julien from her fireside; and when he came openly to the house, strange as it may appear, she was calm and unmoved in his presence. She seemed to forget the guilty bond that united them, and to see in him only a young and agreeable acquaintance, for whom she felt an honest and cordial sympathy.

It was under the pure and lofty influence exerted upon her by her daughter's presence, that she wrote those admirable letters to her son, from which he derived the wisdom that so astonished his grandfather, for in these letters this erring woman depicted the charms of virtue and the horrors of vice, in words of incomparable eloquence.

Hypocrisy! some will say. No, not so. Gabrielle lived two distinct lives. She did not blind herself with sophistries; she looked her sin full in the face, and she loathed it; but, seeing no way of escape, bore, as a heavy cross, the undeserved respect and admiration of her children; and her own love of virtue, and for her own lost honor, tortured her like the robe of Nessus.

This life continued for three years. On the third, René returned to the château, and formed a strong attachment for Julien. This friendship, which at first Gabrielle saw with horror, afterwards appeared to her more natural. For did not both young men possess the noblest qualities of soul? Julien displayed towards René the affectionate care of an elder over a younger brother. He advised and conferred with him, and in many difficult matters Julien gave him the best and most useful counsel.

Robert had quite forgotten his old suspicions. Completely blinded by Toinon's cunning, he felt secure when he saw the marquise receive Julien with such apparent indifference. Certainly there was nothing to indicate a guilty passion in the quiet and courteous manner in which she welcomed this visitor; and Robert was obliged to secretly admit that he must have been mistaken, and he ceased to talk of watching his mistress.

Besides, for several months, poachers had been giving him a great deal of trouble, and some recent depredations in the Maurèze forests caused him to be frequently absent from the château, but he had not yet succeeded in discovering the trespassers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DANGEROUS CONNESSIONS.

“YOUR children shall grow up around you like young olive plants,” the bishop had said in consecrating Gabrielle’s marriage; and the words recurred to the marquise one winter evening as she looked at Lucile’s sweet face, clearly revealed in the glare of the large chandelier beneath which she was seated.

Lucile was now more than seventeen. Like her mother, she was tall and slender, but her features were those of a Maurèze. Her black hair, innocent of powder, and her lustrous black eyes contrasted charmingly with the dazzling whiteness of her skin, and declared her origin more unmistakably than the best authenticated records would have done.

This mortal vesture, which betrayed a certain firmness of character, enfolded the heart of a child, full of frank surprise, of careless mirth and of tenderness, sometimes demonstrative, but oftener mute—and, above all, a boundless enthusiasm and devotion.

On leaving the convent, Lucile, notwithstanding her years, was but a child. The puerility of her studies and of her amusements there had retarded her intellectual development, but suddenly, in the space of only a few months, the child had become a woman. Was it the admiration and tenderness she had conceived for her mother that had wrought this remarkable transformation? Or was it her free life in the sun and the open air—her acquaintance with the varying moods and aspects of nature? Whatever may have been the cause, the miracle was accomplished—as branches apparently lifeless suddenly deck themselves with leaves and blossoms.

Had it not been for the remorse that tortured her continually, the marquise would now have enjoyed perfect happiness. In Julien she had found more than the most *exigeante* woman could have required. In him she found a trusty confidant and a noble and discreet counsellor. These two souls, between whom duty interposed an impassable barrier, were admirably adapted to each other. In an age of almost universal immorality, their fault, bitterly lamented by Gabrielle, and consequently deeply deplored by Julien, caused them both the keenest remorse, and often Julien,

prostrate at Gabrielle's feet, humbly entreated her forgiveness for the wrong he had done her.

"Ah!" she would exclaim, "let us cease to be lovers; let us be only friends."

"Impossible!" he would respond, pressing her wildly to his heart, "impossible! I should die separated from you."

And so Gabrielle yielded, weeping, and her words filled Julien's heart with despair.

These struggles and sufferings gave a new expression to their faces. If the deadly fangs of passion dragged them to the earth, their souls mounted the higher in their hours of repentance and aspirations for a nobler life. Gabrielle felt something almost like maternal pity for this man who had caused her so much sorrow, and for whose sake she passed long nights kneeling before her crucifix; and he, seeing the constant melancholy that brooded over the sweet face of her who loved him, humbly worshipped this woman to whom his love had brought little save agony and remorse.

Beside those two beings, tortured by mental anguish, Lucile, who suspected nothing, grew into a thoughtful and pensive womanhood.

"Is it true, mother," she said one day: "is it true that a man's friendship is dangerous to a woman?"

The marquise, busy at her embroidery-frame, lifted a face suddenly grown pallid.

"Who told you that?" asked Gabrielle, much agitated.

"You, yourself, mother, some time ago."

It was true, but at that time the marquise had not thought of Julien, and his image now rose suddenly before her.

"I spoke the truth," replied the unhappy mother, bending closely over her work. "It is dangerous."

"And why?" asked the young girl, earnestly.

"Because it leads to love, and love is a cruel torture to women—at least if they are not fortunate enough to be loved by their husbands."

Lucile was silent and thoughtful for a while. She was turning a momentous question over and over in her mind. Finally she ventured to speak.

"But, mother," said she, "of course my father loves you?"

This old question again! Since she had sinned against him, the marquise defended her husband from every accusation even more energetically than ever. It was a sort of *amende honorable* which she thus paid him.

"Your father fulfils all his duties," replied Gabrielle.

"Then why is he not here?"

"Other duties detain him elsewhere."

"But he has always loved you, has he not?"

"Yes," replied Gabrielle, in a low voice.

"Then you are happy?"

Gabrielle looked keenly at her daughter; but Lucile's face expressed only the most perfect innocence. The child evidently asked only for information.

"Yes," replied her mother, "I am happy in having good children who love me."

"But if my father were only here, you would be still more happy?"

The marquise grew cold with emotion. It had been so long since she had thought of her husband's return! And if he should return, what would become of her? She could not reply; but Lucile, pitiless, like all children, repeated the question.

"Without doubt," Gabrielle answered, with an effort.

"How I would like to see my father!" Lucile said, thoughtfully. "How glad I should be if he would return! He is very handsome, is he not?"

Gabrielle made a sign in the affirmative.

"Tall?"

"Yes."

"Of noble bearing?"

"He is a handsome cavalier," replied the marquise.

"You must have been a handsome couple when you were married," said Lucile, clapping her hands joyously. "It was a grand wedding, was it not?"

Gabrielle replied by a few words; then, making some excuse, left the room. To continue such a conversation was impossible. She hurried to her own apartment, and, falling upon her knees, burst into passionate sobs.

"My God!" she exclaimed, "cease to torture me. This life is worse than hell!"

The next day she had an interview with Julien, and, at the first glance, he perceived that the marquise was a prey to intense emotion.

"Listen," she said, "you will make me a solemn vow; if you do not, I will never look upon your face again. The marquis may return; some day he will long to see his children. Swear to me by the soul of your sainted mother, that, from the day of his arrival here, you will claim nothing more from me. From that day we must be strangers to each other. I cannot live a lie in my husband's presence; no, I cannot."

Julien protested earnestly, but the marquise was immovable. She declared, if he refused, that she, in company with her daughter, would immediately take refuge in a convent. What could he do? The return of the marquis was possible, of course, but not probable, and, in any case, far off; so he took the required oath, and Gabrielle thanked him with a passionate tenderness that touched him deeply.

Not long after this occurrence, Lucile, whose mind had been greatly exercised on the subject, resumed the conversation. Her mother expected a renewal of the same sorrow, but a fresh anxiety took its place.

"Mother," she asked, "the friendship of all men is not dangerous, is it?"

"No, certainly not," replied Gabrielle, hesitatingly. "There are some venerable and honorable men, from whose friendship there is nothing to be feared, and whose advice is well worth listening to."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lucile, "there are some young men who are as wise as aged ones; and I am quite sure Monsieur de Présanges' friendship could not harm any one."

Gabrielle looked at her daughter in utter

consternation; and Lucile, to hide her confusion, turned away her blushing face.

The wretched mother, impelled by a fear far worse than that of death, took a sudden resolution.

"My child," said she, "Monsieur de Présanges is more wise than most young men, because he has met with a great sorrow."

"A sorrow!" exclaimed Lucile.

Pity and angelic tenderness gave to her voice a tone of surpassing sweetness.

"A great sorrow," Gabrielle continued, "for which there is no possible remedy at present."

Lucile looked at her mother with wondering eyes, and the marquise saw that she must go on.

"Monsieur de Présanges loves a woman whom he cannot marry. He loves her devotedly. He will never love another. You are too young, my dear, to understand the anguish it must cost him to be separated from her."

"But this lady—does she love him?" asked Lucile.

The marquise did not know how to reply, and her daughter continued :

"It must be that she loves him; unless she did, he could not love her so much."

"Yes, she loves him," answered Gabrielle, her heart sick with fear.

"Then what prevents their marriage?" asked the young girl, innocently.

"She is already married," Gabrielle responded, in desperation.

Lucile clasped her hands, then let them fall again.

"How unhappy they must be! Poor Monsieur de Présanges! It seems to me that he, above all others, ought to be happy. Who could be so heartless as to cause him sorrow?"

Lucile was silent, and her mother had no desire to continue the conversation.

From that time the young girl displayed a more tender, and, at the same time, a more unconstrained friendship for Julien. In her intercourse with him she seemed to lose all thought of self; and yet a tinge of melancholy brooded over her pure and, until now, unclouded forehead; and her dark eyes wore a more thoughtful and serious expression; for the child suffered, although scarcely aware of it herself, and this suffering ended in freeing her from the bonds of childhood. She had loved Julien, and if she no longer loved him, it was only because a certain womanly pride forbade her to covet that which belonged to another.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAN AND WIFE.

TIME passed swiftly, now, in the château de Maurèze. Divided between Julien and her children, Gabrielle found the days all too short for the education of her daughter, and the nights were passed in bitter tears caused by the stings of remorse. Toinon, the marquise's sole confidante, saw, with the deepest sympathy, this constant struggle between passion and virtue, and dared not own, even to herself, how much she longed for the death of the marquis.

One day, while Monsieur Robert, her lord and master, was rehearsing, probably for the thousandth time, the many virtues that had adorned the marquis in his infancy, Toinon brusquely interrupted him—a thing of very unusual occurrence.

“All that is very well,” she exclaimed, angrily, “but when one is so perfect in youth, one had better preserve some of those perfections until he is of an age to need them most—until he has a wife and family.”

Robert, much offended, replied by asking loftily, if she presumed to judge or to question the actions of the marquis.

"Judge him? censure him? Good heavens! no; but, tell me, Robert, do you think families would be very united if married men of our own rank in life lived in this way?"

"Common people have no right to live like *grandes seigneurs*," said Robert, in a dictatorial tone. "Ordinary people must live as they ought; and the nobility may live as they please."

The conversation ceased at this point, for Toinon did not deem it prudent to retort, so she contented herself by thinking that although her husband was usually a shrewd and intelligent man, that he had at times but little common sense, after all.

Toinon no longer sought for excuses that would serve to justify her mistress, for she loved her even more devotedly than ever, and that sufficed, with one of her simple and generous nature. From the day when Gabrielle, in a moment of frenzy, revealed her unhappy secret to the faithful Toinon, the latter had thought only of her mistress' sorrow, and of the happiness she had failed to find. It was Toinon who prepared the *rendezvous* for the

lovers; who carried their letters back and forth, and who guarded against any intrusion during their interviews with untiring vigilance.

By a little well-played indifference, and by occasional outbursts of pretended anger against her mistress, Toinon, in her talks with Robert, had succeeded in allaying his suspicions entirely. The poor woman had learned that there was but one thing in the world for which her husband really cared, and that was the glory and honor of the house of Maurèze. So, far from avowing her personal attachment and love for Gabrielle, she complained bitterly, on more than one occasion, of madame's whims and even of her injustice; and by means of these innocent calumnies convinced Robert that she was far from regarding her mistress with favorable eyes. But once, to her great surprise, she found that she had gone too far, for Robert reprimanded her angrily.

"Madame is our mistress," said he, severely, "and you ought to see nothing wrong in her."

"But," replied Toinon, stupefied with astonishment, "have you not told me twenty times to give you a faithful account of all madame's sayings and doings? and have you not told me again and again that you did not care to hear the good things she did?"

"These are not the things I desire to know," growled Robert. "Whether she blames or praises you, makes no difference to me or to the honor of Maurèze. If she has whims and caprices, I do not care to have them rehearsed, even if they do put you to a little inconvenience."

"Yes," thought Toinon, "this is not the sort of game you are hunting after, you heartless old wretch! But it is not I who will put you on the track!"

Still, acting as much from life-long habit as from principle, Robert continued, from time to time, to watch jealously the words and acts of the marquise; but seeing the courteous and yet apparently indifferent greeting which Julien always received on his visits to the château, Robert's former suspicions entirely vanished. Two or three times he even believed that he had detected a secret preference on the part of the marquise for some of the other gentlemen residing in the vicinity of the château; for Gabrielle, feeling herself under *espionage*, occasionally pretended to bestow special attention, now upon one and then upon another of her visitors, in order to avert suspicion. But at last Robert had apparently come to the conclusion that the honor of Maurèze was safe after all; and he relaxed his *surveillance*.

René, since his sister's return, had spent much time at the château. He had scarcely known Lucile, for they had been entirely separated since they were infants; and he found this pretty sister, whom he could caress or tease as suited his pleasure, irresistibly charming and attractive. It brought a new element into his life. The ladies, whom he had met in Paris, were either more or less than a young man of twenty would fancy. Here he found the chaste tenderness of a sister—no coquetry—but perfect frankness. Here he met the affectionate reproaches and caressing chidings that influence a young man much more powerfully than stern moral lessons; and these charms and attractions made him a very frequent visitor at Maurèze.

Lucile was always rejoiced to see him. In her heart she made little difference between Julien de Présanges and René; but she felt that the latter would always be hers, while the other—Well, she must hope that some day Julien would be united to the woman he loved.

“A married woman!” Lucile said sadly to herself; “and that Julien may be happy—her husband must die!” And the thought took such a hold upon her mind that she grew melancholy.

The next morning, while attending mass with her mother, she gained courage to whisper softly :

“ Mother, would it be wrong to ask God to make Monsieur de Présanges happy ? ”

Gabrielle, terrified at hearing this name again upon her daughter’s lips, looked at her scrutinizingly for a moment, and then replied with ill-affected indifference :

“ Monsieur de Présanges—or any one else—certainly not ! One may always, *should* always, pray for the happiness of those whom they esteem.”

Lucile, in her turn, looked intently at her mother, but still seemed to be in doubt.

“ But, mother,” she said, hesitatingly, “ to wish for his happiness one must wish for the death of another man.”

With a shudder, Gabrielle seized her daughter’s hand and pressed it convulsively.

“ Hush, hush, unhappy girl ! Pray, pray for the life of that other man ! Pray for him without whom—”

She paused, choked with shame and fear. Lucile looked at her mother, greatly alarmed ; then, unable to understand her emotion, submissively turned away and began to pray for all who were suffering. But an indefinable sense of fear

haunted her after this scene. She vaguely felt that there was some unfathomable mystery—perhaps some crime; but she tried to dismiss such thoughts from her mind, knowing that they would be displeasing to her mother; and, seeing Julien so calm, so pleasant in all the thousand incidents of daily life, she decided that *he* must be guiltless of any wrong, since nothing seemed to indicate disquietude or remorse on his part. Who, then, was the guilty one? and who could this woman be? She looked around her, but could find no clue; and finally forced herself to dismiss these fancies, which, she was certain, her mother would disapprove.

This mother was almost a divinity in the eyes of her son and daughter. When they were alone together, they never wearied of chanting her praises. She was so beautiful, so loving, so noble, so altogether perfect! They found the time only too short for all they had to say on this subject.

One summer's day, more than three years after Julien and Gabrielle first met each other, the two children, as their mother jestingly called them, were sauntering through the shady walks of the park, chatting confidentially, and followed by the marquise, who was accompanied by Julien and three or four other guests.

"What a handsome pair!" exclaimed one of Gabrielle's companions, an old nobleman, who resided near Maurèze. "They resemble each other enough to show plainly that they are brother and sister; but yet they are sufficiently dissimilar to find pleasure in each other's company."

"Day and night! the sister is a perfect brunette, while the brother's hair is light," remarked another. "One seldom sees such a contrast in brother and sister. But you are such a perfect blonde, marquise?"

"The Marquis de Maurèze is dark," said Gabrielle.

It always made her miserable when any one spoke of her husband in Julien's presence.

"When will he return—our charming marquis?" said a coquettish lady.

"I do not know," Gabrielle replied, while a slight flush suffused her usually pallid cheek.

"Ah, madame!" cried the old gentleman who had spoken first, "you have been too long an adorable Ariadne. If I were not more than twenty I should propose myself as Bacchus."

"You see the marquise does not like mythology," the coquettish lady exclaimed, affectedly, as Gabrielle, scarcely smiling, proposed to her guests that they should go and see the swans.

The swans came swiftly to them at the sound of Lucile's voice. She had taught them to eat from her hand, and the party were amused at their voracity.

Clad, according to the fashion of the time, in a thin white robe that trailed upon the turf, Lucile made a charming picture, thrown into bold relief against the dark background formed by the shrubbery; while the great white swans rippled the smooth surface of the lake, as they hastened towards her from the opposite shore. Lucile had sent to the château for some bread; and soon Robert appeared, himself bringing it in a basket of silver filigree.

Robert, without making it his special office, liked to render such services, since it gave him an opportunity to enter the presence of guests and to observe them without any violation of etiquette.

"How pretty your daughter is!" exclaimed the old courtier again, admiring the lovely picture made by Lucile and the graceful swans. "When shall you marry this beautiful flower, and who will be the fortunate man?"

"Oh," replied Gabrielle, "I do not know. There is time enough yet. Her father will attend to that."

"Then he will return?" asked the lady guest, maliciously.

"I hope so," Gabrielle answered, a trifle haughtily.

As she spoke, she met an approving glance from Robert. She crimsoned with shame, and, perhaps, with anger, but said nothing, for just then her daughter turned and addressed her:

"My father loves us, and will come to us soon, will he not, my mother? He wrote you so very recently, did he not?"

"Yes," replied Gabrielle; but she did not add that he had written the same thing for many, many months.

René took his mother's hand and kissed it tenderly.

"When my father returns," he said, gently, "he will scarcely believe his eyes when he sees my sister so tall and my mother still so beautiful; but that which will most surprise him will be to see how well we know and love him—him whom we have scarcely seen; and it is all due to our mother, to our good mother."

Gabrielle, too much overcome by emotion to reply, pressed her son's hand, and the party soon after slowly wended their way back to the house.

"Children are indeed a mother's crown," said Julien to the marquise, as they chanced to be walking alone a little behind the rest of the party, but followed closely by Robert, who was hidden by the dense shrubbery.

"Yes, to a virtuous mother; but to a guilty mother they are a crown of thorns!" cried Gabrielle. In her passionate anguish, forgetful of prudence, she spoke too loud. She paused quickly and looked around her. No one was to be seen, and, reassured, she walked on; but Robert, concealed behind a cluster of lilac bushes, had heard the words, and stood there motionless, frozen with horror.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

ROBERT returned to the château and awaited his wife in a fever of impatience. He thought her simple and ingenuous, and flattered himself that from her, either by persuasion or intimidation, he could easily learn all that he wished to know; but from the first, he met and was baffled by her utter stupidity. Toinon would understand nothing, was entirely ignorant of everything; and to the most artful questions—questions to which, apparently, only clear and decisive answers were possible, Robert could extort only non-committal replies.

Made still more furious by the certainty he felt that he was being outwitted and deceived, he threw aside his mask and displayed his real nature.

“I will have the truth! Do you hear me?” he stormed, seizing her savagely by the arm. “I care nothing for madame or for you; but if the

honor of Maurèze has suffered . . . The truth! I say, I will have it!"

"When such is the truth, you will undoubtedly know it," retorted Toinon. "Let go my arm, you hurt me."

"I will make you speak," thundered Robert, his face distorted with passion, and his eyes blazing with fury. "People are still put to the torture—do you know that? *Mon Dieu!* if only torture will make you speak, you shall have it."

"You may kill me," said Toinon, firmly; "but you shall not make me say that which is not true."

"But I heard it! I heard it myself," cried Robert, forgetting prudence in his rage, and thereby losing his advantage.

"You heard—what? the wind in the trees, or a bird singing?"

"I heard madame speak of guilty mothers. She said it to Monsieur de Présanges."

"And that is all you heard? O! the lovely bird! How well he must have talked!" exclaimed Toinon, with a quick, nervous laugh, as she wrested her arm from her husband's grasp.

Robert lost all control over himself. He seized his cane and struck the poor woman over the

shoulders again and again. Toinon did not utter a sound, but looked at him with eyes so full of hatred and scorn that his fury became still more uncontrollable. When he paused, weary, perhaps, or frightened at his own violence, his wife still stood motionless, looking him full in the face so disdainfully that he turned away his head in shame and confusion.

"Look you, Robert," she said, at last, in a voice trembling with restrained passion, "you have struck me, beaten me for the first time, after seventeen years of married life together. You have beaten me because I have preferred the torture with which you threatened me, to the shame of aiding you to disgrace and slander my mistress, and yours—for she is your mistress. Well, you may do it again, if you choose; but I shall report this to monsieur le marquis. He shall do me justice. He will not permit you basely to slander the honor and good name of his wife."

She confronted Robert with flashing eyes, and he recoiled a step, not a little frightened. He had thought of writing to the marquis himself, but he knew that Toinon was right—that his master would not listen to such an accusation against his wife from an inferior, and he turned away in confusion.

"Go, then, viper!" he said, angrily, "betray the master whose bread you eat; disobey your husband; add to your already heavy burden of sins; but a day of vengeance will surely come!"

An hour later, Toinon entered the marquise's room to assist her, as usual, in disrobing, and found her mistress worried and anxious.

"Has your husband said anything to you?" she asked, quickly, almost before her trusted servant had time to close the door.

Toinon hesitated for a moment to trouble the marquise, then she concluded that it was best to tell the truth, that her mistress might see the need of greater prudence.

"He thinks he heard something," she said, reluctantly.

"He has been talking to you? He has questioned you? What did you tell him?" asked the marquise, wildly, as she tremblingly awaited the dread disclosure she had feared so long.

Toinon, too agitated to speak, tore off the little fichu that covered her shoulders, and Gabrielle saw the red and swollen marks upon her arms and bosom. She clasped her hands and recoiled in horror.

"Fear nothing, dear madame, fear nothing,"

sobbed Toinon, as she fell upon her knees at Gabrielle's feet; "I told him nothing! I will tell him nothing! He shall learn nothing through me; but, oh! be prudent."

Gabrielle threw her arms about the neck of her faithful friend, and wept for her and with her.

"I have only you!" she sobbed, while the tears fell fast. "Julien would kill himself without a word, and my children would look upon me with abhorrence, if they knew the truth. You alone have been faithful, although you knew my sin, and you will be faithful in my shame!"

"Ah! if that comes," murmured Toinon, "I will die rather than leave you! But it will all be right. Do not fear; only do not give them proofs against yourself."

"What shall I do—see Julien no more? Will he consent to it?"

"He must, madame, at any sacrifice. Unless you do this, both you and Monsieur de Présanges are lost."

"Advise me, then," said Gabrielle, with perfect faith in Toinon's wisdom and discretion.

"Then, madame, you must change none of your former habits. You must continue your long walks as usual, either alone, or with me; but

Monsieur de Présanges must not meet you as formerly, for we shall of course be followed and watched by this accursed man, this emissary of Satan. Let him watch ; he will discover nothing. Monsieur de Présanges must come here openly, as usual. Nothing, apparently, will be changed ; and, by-and-by, we will see what can be done."

"So be it," sighed Gabrielle ; "and you must tell Monsieur de Présanges that he must come no more to meet me."

"Write to him, madame ; and the next time he is here, slip the note into his hand."

"Impossible! we are never alone."

"Ah! well, madame, I do not know how ; but you must find some means of giving him the note unobserved, for I shall not be able to take a single step that my husband will not know—I am quite sure of that. You know how he watched me before, pretending that he was jealous. Jealous! He is only jealous of my affection for you ! All your messengers will be questioned, and all your letters will be opened and read. You must find some way to warn Monsieur de Présanges yourself—but you must be prudent."

"I will try," said Gabrielle, in a dejected tone, unclasping her hands and letting them fall with a gesture of weariness and despair.

It was a troubled, anxious night for both mistress and maid. Robert did not go to bed at all, but spent the entire night in writing and in making up accounts. Toinon, lying upon the bed, though nearly worn out with fatigue and pain, only pretended to sleep, and watched his every movement closely. He copied several long columns of figures upon a large sheet of paper, added them up, and verified the results two or three times; then he wrote a long letter, which he re-read and punctuated with great care. Finally, he placed both the letter and the accounts in one envelope, sealed it securely with red wax, wrote the superscription with the same care, and placed the envelope with its contents in a private drawer, Toinon being unable to distinguish the address he had written.

When he had finished his task, Robert sat silent and motionless in his large leathern arm-chair. Two or three times Toinon fell asleep for a few moments, but on waking she found her husband in the same attitude, perfectly quiet, but with wide open eyes.

As the first gray light of dawn became visible in the heavens, and sounds from the servants' department indicated that morning was come, Robert rose, opened the drawer, took out the letter, and went down-stairs.

Ten minutes later the sound of a horse's hoofs resounded upon the stone pavement of the courtyard, and a servant departed bearing the missive.

Robert soon after re-entered the room and threw himself down upon the bed, without taking any apparent notice of his wife's presence, and in a few moments was sleeping heavily.

At the usual hour Toinon rose very quietly, and hastily examined the papers lying upon Robert's desk. They proved to be accounts relating to the farms, the expenditures at the château, and the pay of the workmen. After looking at them, she turned and looked at her husband, to make sure that he was still sleeping, and then hastened to the chamber of the marquise. She entered the room softly, but Gabrielle was not asleep. She, also, had apparently spent most of the night in writing, for the hearth was strewn with fragments of torn and charred letters, which had been written only to be destroyed.

"Ah, well, madame, have you written the note?" asked Toinon.

"I have written more than a hundred pages. I cannot condense all I must say upon a tiny scrap of paper which can be furtively slipped into his hand."

"But, madame, you need not explain so fully to a man who loves you far better than his life. Write this : 'Danger threatens us ; wait until I let you know when we can meet again.' Will he find this message difficult to understand ?"

"You are always right, Toinon," said Gabrielle, gratefully ; and hastening to her *escriatoire*, she wrote the few words Toinon had dictated ; then folded the paper and concealed it in her bosom.

"And now I will try to sleep," said the marquise. "Monsieur de Présanges will be here to-morrow, and I shall have other visitors."

"Let him come, madame," replied Toinon. "It will be an excellent opportunity to give him the note."

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOVE HAS MANY ARROWS.

ON entering her mother's room that same morning, Lucile was struck by her excessive pallor and exhaustion.

"I slept poorly," was Gabrielle's reply to her daughter's anxious questioning. But loss of rest for a single night was not enough to produce such a change in the appearance of the marquise, and Lucile concluded that the conversation of the previous evening had pained her mother and aggravated the secret wound that seemed always rankling in her heart; and so with thoughtful tenderness she endeavored to comfort her.

"Do you love me very much?" asked Gabrielle, suddenly taking her daughter's face in her hands and gazing searchingly into the innocent eyes.

"Oh, mother," murmured Lucile, "how can you doubt it?"

Her artless, sympathetic heart was grieved by the thought that her mother had need to ask such a question to convince herself of the fact, and the girl's dark eyes filled with tears.

"No, I do not doubt it," said Gabrielle; "but I like to hear you say so. It is so pleasant to be loved by one's children."

"We both love you, my mother, and René would tell you so, too; but as for me, I love you, I love you more than anything in the whole world."

Gabrielle read the girl's sincerity and truth in her eloquent eyes, and pressed a passionate kiss upon the pure forehead uplifted to her lips.

"And you will always love me?" murmured the wretched mother, "even if I"—she paused suddenly—"even when you—"

"When I am married?" continued Lucile, rather bitterly. "Ah! certainly, all husbands are not even as kind as my father, for in the servants' hall they say that Robert has been beating Toinon."

"I have forbidden you to listen to the servants' gossip," said Gabrielle, severely.

The young girl, knowing herself in fault, hung her head, and pressed her lips tenderly upon her mother's hand.

It happened that René came down from Paris that day, and seemed even more than usually affectionate towards his mother; but he was inconsolable at the sight of her haggard features and sunken eyes.

"Why, mother! my own mother! you are not looking so well as usual, and you are to have guests to-morrow! You must look beautiful; you must use a little *rouge*!"

As Gabrielle shook her head with a sad smile, Lucile said :

"Everybody uses it—"

"Except yourself," replied her mother.

"Oh, I am of no consequence!" said Lucile, naïvely. "You say yourself that I am not brilliant like many persons."

"The same may be said of me," sighed Gabrielle; "but for all that, we love each other, you see."

René left the same evening, and in spite of her great love for her son, the marquise was glad to think that he would not be present when she gave Julien the little note that was burning in her bosom.

In spite of the guilt and deception of the past three years, Gabrielle was no accomplished deceiver. She had never given, nor had she ever received, any note from Julien in the presence of a third party; and the thought of such an ordeal was perfect torture. She could not imagine how she might give it to him in the presence of others, unobserved; and she dared not hope to see him

alone. She was only too sure that Robert would watch her closely whenever he saw her no longer under the observation of some visitor who was innocently acting the part of a spy.

But chance favored the marquise. On the morning of the dreaded day, Lucile entered her mother's room with her hands full of pretty knick-knacks that a messenger had just brought from Paris.

"See, mother," said she, gayly, "here are some lovely new knots of ribbon for your dress. I want you to be beautiful enough to turn everybody's head to-day!"

"What is that?" asked Gabrielle, pointing to a tiny package in the pocket of Lucile's apron.

"Why, these are the tablets I intended for René. You know I embroidered the case for them myself, but they did not send the tablets as they promised, and now René has gone."

Gabrielle examined them, thoughtfully. They were like all tablets—simple ivory leaves; but were enclosed in a little portfolio that Lucile had embroidered very skilfully.

"You might give them to some one else," said her mother, slowly, as a sudden thought entered her mind. "You will have plenty of time to embroider another case before René comes again."

"Willingly, mamma; but to whom shall I give them?"

"Would you like to give them to Monsieur de Présanges?" asked Gabrielle, turning away her head to conceal the blush she felt mounting to her forehead.

Pleased, but surprised, Lucile looked at her mother, but could not see her face.

"Certainly, mamma," she replied; "but I should never dare to do it. You must present them to him for me."

This was exactly what Gabrielle had planned and hoped for.

"Very well," she responded, eagerly, "leave them with me. We will give them to him by-and-by."

Soon after dinner, which took place in the middle of the day, carriages began to roll into the court-yard. There had been quite a number of guests invited, and Julien came neither among the first nor the last of the visitors, for he endeavored, in every possible way, to avoid drawing attention to himself and his movements.

A collation was served, and after that was concluded, the guests rambled through the lovely gardens. Lucile had scarcely left her mother's

side. She was waiting with vague emotion for the moment when her mother would offer her little gift to Julien. To her, this act had a peculiar significance, for it was the first outward token of the love and sympathy which she had never dared to manifest. Several times, thinking the opportunity favorable for the presentation, she furtively touched her mother's arm ; but Gabrielle seemed to think differently. At last, it chanced that Julien and the old *chevalier*, who has been spoken of before, were the only guests in the drawing-room ; and the latter was engaged in the examination of a new book of poems which had been received only that morning from Paris. Gabrielle, rather hastily, drew the little portfolio from the pocket of her dress, and handed it to Julien.

"My daughter has embroidered this, monsieur," she said. "It was intended for her brother; but she begs that you will accept it."

Julien, apparently much surprised, bowed his acceptance of the gift. At that moment Robert appeared on the threshold, and threw open the large doors that opened out upon the garden. Julien was about to examine the tablets, when an almost imperceptible gesture from Gabrielle deterred him. He turned to Lucile, bowed and thanked

her somewhat confusedly; then offered his hand to lead her down the steps into the garden.

Robert looked after them as they walked away, but stood mute and motionless until the marquise and her remaining guest passed on also into the garden.

“Ah! tell me, marquise, do you intend to marry your daughter to Monsieur de Présanges?” asked the old *chevalier*, in a low voice.

Gabrielle trembled in spite of herself, as she faltered,

“No, oh, no!”

“Why not? He is a very fine young man, and wealthy.”

“But he has no title,” stammered the wretched mother.

“Ah! that is true, and the Maurèzes ally themselves only with the nobility. A thousand pardons—I had forgotten.”

Robert closed the doors behind them, and stood with his forehead pressed against the window-pane, watching the groups as they sauntered through the gardens. He had decided upon his course.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A GAME FOR TWO.

THREE weeks after this scene, the marquis received a letter from Robert, which caused him the greatest surprise and dismay. Until now, he had supposed that his property was being admirably managed, and was certain to afford him a handsome revenue; but here, according to Robert's account, everything was changed. The tenants would not be able to pay their rents for several years, the forests were yielding him no income, and the château needed many and expensive repairs—in short, the marquis would be a ruined man in less than six months.

“The scoundrel must have been robbing me,” concluded the marquis, after reading Robert's letter for the third time; he immediately requested an extended leave of absence, and sent a courier to Maurèze to announce his speedy return.

When it was known among the officers that the marquis was about to leave them, there was a general lamentation. What would they do with-

out their colonel? Was he not the life and soul of everything? His courtly grace, his wit, his dignity and wisdom—worldly and warlike wisdom, it is true, but real, nevertheless, made him quite an oracle with his brother officers.

“It is all very well, my dear friends,” said the marquis, listening to their protestations and entreaties with a good-humored smile; “but my steward has been defrauding me, and if I do not go home and attend to my affairs, I shall be a ruined man. Then, the devil! I have children. I have a daughter who, if I am not mistaken, is quite old enough to be married, and I must arrange that.”

“But you will return, will you not, Maurèze?”

“Certainly, I shall come back. How could I live anywhere else?”

A farewell banquet was decided upon; and at its close the marquis was to depart for Maurèze, as he preferred to travel by night, and thus escape the dust and heat. When the last evening came, the officers and all the nobility of the neighbourhood were assembled around the long, richly-served table. The feast had been superb in every respect. The time for drinking toasts was at hand, and one of the officers rose and lifted a glass, brimming over with amber wine.

"I drink, gentlemen," said he, "to the family of Maurèze, which has given us so brilliant an officer, so excellent a colonel, and so perfect a gentleman; and which, they say, promises to continue worthy of its present fame. To the house of Maurèze!"

"In my son's name, permit me to thank you, gentlemen," said the marquis, when the sound of the "*Vivas*" had somewhat abated. "I hope, indeed, that he will be a worthy representative of our race, and that he will perpetuate it; and, therefore, I shall arrange a marriage for him without losing time."

"How old is your son?" asked one of the guests.

"Twenty, I believe."

"He is still very young to marry."

"One is free the sooner," exclaimed a third. "Since marriage is a chain, one should assume it when one is young."

"To have time to accustom one's self to it?" asked a sceptic.

"By no means; only that he may be free from it the sooner. For, gentlemen, why do we marry? For the sake of having legitimate children and heirs, do we not?"

"Assuredly!"

"Well, as soon as one has children, he is free as air, for he has fulfilled his duty to his family and to himself."

The marquis became thoughtful all at once, for he remembered the tears Gabrielle had shed at his departure.

"Are you sure, gentlemen, that then one has really fulfilled his duty toward his family?" he asked, gravely.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed a young captain, handsome as Antinous, who had been a successful rival of his colonel, on two or three occasions; "the head of the family is like the head of the state. He is accountable to no one, and may act as it pleases him. He is king. To the health of the king."

And the health of the king was drunk, right royally. An old baron, who had resided in the town for years, who had seen many a regiment come and go, and who could have given a very interesting account of the social life of the place, had he chosen to do so, exclaimed in sarcastic tones:

"Ah, well! marry, gentlemen, marry, and have heirs, and then abandon your wives. We, bachelors, are here to console them."

"You flatter yourself, baron," cried a youthful voice.

"Not at all. I have had my day, as you are now having yours, young gentlemen; and I remember well how grateful I have been to the obliging husbands who chose to absent themselves for years at a time. Occasionally, it is true, they were inconsiderate enough to return, and then there was danger of some severe sword-thrusts; but they do not always kill. Here is a proof of that before you."

"They may not *always* kill, perhaps," growled the marquis, who was not pleased with the turn the conversation had taken.

Yet why should he be displeased? He could scarcely explain, for he had expressed similar sentiments a hundred times, himself; but to-day he was more fastidious.

"I like to believe, gentlemen," said he, raising his voice; "that there are, nevertheless, some wives who remain faithful to their duties, and who respect the honor of their name."

He spoke in such forbidding tones that every one instantly remembered that Maurèze was a married man, and that he had left a wife in his deserted home.

"The house of Maurèze is quite above suspicion," replied one of the guests; "and apropos of this subject, permit me to repeat my toast—'To the prosperity of Maurèze.'"

"The horses are ready," announced a lackey, who entered the room, just as the guests were replacing their empty glasses upon the table.

"Then, gentlemen, the hour has come," said the marquis, rising to depart. "I will not say farewell, only *au revoir*."

His friends accompanied him to the carriage, with shouts and noisy farewells. The private soldiers of the regiment, armed with torches, lined the immense court-yard, and the red glare of the resinous flame cast a fantastic light over the scene. The glittering windows of the carriage, the prancing white horses, and the gorgeous uniforms of the officers—all gave a triumphal aspect to his departure. The marquis leaned from the carriage window, waved his hat, and was driven away, amid loud cries of "*Vive Maurèze.*"

Soon the shouts died away in the distance, and the carriage entered a broad road bordered by large trees and dense shrubbery; the even, dusty road seemed as smooth as velvet, and the freshness and stillness of the cool night air calmed the fever

of excitement caused by the gayety of the evening. With a feeling of regret, the marquis turned to look back once more upon the town he had just left.

Silent and sleeping some distance behind him, it seemed to have already forgotten him. What had he left behind him there, save the mere memory of a good colonel?—but after a good colonel, a regiment always has another as good, or better, or not as good. The difference, after all, is not so very great; and he asked himself, somewhat sadly, how long his friends would remember him, and if thoughts of him were not already cast aside, while they did honor to his successor; and then his mind turned to Maurèze.

The carriage rolled smoothly on; the little bells on the horses tinkled softly; the stars glittered in the clear sky, and an air of profound repose pervaded the entire scene; but the marquis tried in vain to sleep. The excitement of the evening, and also a secret uneasiness, prevented him from closing his eyes.

How would he find things at his old home? he asked himself again and again. During the eighteen years that had elapsed since his departure from Maurèze, the château, the gardens, and the

forest, had probably changed but little; but his children, whom he had left in their cradles—these children, whom he loved almost without knowing them—would they love him? Would they welcome him with joy, or would they greet him as a stranger?

Then his thoughts insensibly glided into another channel. His wife was so young when he left Maurèze, she must have spent many lonely, dreary years. This idea occurred to him for the first time, and a feeling of melancholy stole over him at the thought. She had been very lovely and very charming—the Gabrielle of those days; and how tenderly she had loved him! What bitter tears she had shed over his departure! Had she mourned long? What had she done since? Had she consoled herself, become indifferent, or grown to hate him? He came to the conclusion that she must hate him; it would be only natural, when he had acted with such selfishness and egotism.

Here the remembrance of his many love adventures since that time occurred to him; and more than one of his fleeting conquests had fallen into his arms, owing to the absence of a husband.

Nothing like this could have happened at Maurèze, for Robert would have informed him.

That faithful servant would not have failed to warn his master. But if it proved that Robert had been defrauding him, in whom could he confide?—whom could he believe hereafter?

Some new emotion stirred the soul of the marquis; and, although it was not actual remorse that he felt, he, nevertheless, reproached himself quite bitterly.

“I should not have remained absent so long,” he said to himself. “Gabrielle cannot have betrayed me,” he thought afterwards; “it is impossible! She loved me too much for that!”

Reassured by the remembrance of this love, which he had so long ignored, the marquis leaned back in the carriage, and soon fell asleep. He had not thought of his wife so tenderly for more than ten years.

When he awoke it was daylight, and they were entering a village where they were to find fresh horses awaiting them. The bright sun was shining into his eyes and made him uncomfortable; the damp air had entered through the open window of the carriage, and he felt a twinge of rheumatism in his right leg. He moved it carefully, but the pain made him frown. Then he took a tiny mirror and comb from his pocket, shook the

powder from his hair, and looked at himself carefully in the glass.

“ My hair is white, quite white—there is no denying it; and there are crows-feet around my temples. Well! Maurèze, you have done a wise thing at last. You are fifty years old, and you have the rheumatism. You are quite right to go home; and you had better stay there if you wish to live to a good old age.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HOME-COMING.

THE courier sent by the marquis arrived at Maurèze some days before his master. He brought a letter for Robert, and one for Gabrielle.

Robert read his without a frown, although it was composed chiefly of angry reproaches. But it did not appear to disturb him in the least; and, after perusing it, he put it calmly into his pocket.

Gabrielle was sitting in a little *boudoir*, busy with her embroidery, and Lucile was by her side, as usual, when the messenger, preceded by Robert, entered the room.

At the words, "A letter from monsieur le marquis," she looked up, without any apparent surprise, and opened the missive with a steady hand; but as her eyes scanned the first line, the color forsook her cheek, and her hand trembled violently. Robert watched her with half-closed eyes and impassive face. As she looked up, she encountered his glance, and at once understood

from whence came the blow that had struck her. Then she made an almost superhuman effort.

“Call my household,” she said, calmly. “Lucile, my child,” she added, “your father is on his way home.”

Lucile greeted this announcement with a cry of joy; and snatching the hand that still held the letter, she covered both with ardent kisses.

The entire household responded promptly to the call; and Toinon, also summoned, but not knowing for what purpose, appeared upon the threshold. When all had assembled, Gabrielle rose and said with dignity :

“I have just now received a letter from monsieur le marquis, and he informs me that he will be here in five days.”

Toinon cast a horrified glance at her mistress, which did not escape Robert’s watchful eye; but Gabrielle’s composure did not desert her. In the presence of this great disaster, which she had always foreseen and dreaded, she did not lose her self-control.

“Write to your brother,” she said to Lucile, “that he may obtain leave of absence and come here to meet his father. It is proper that he should meet him here in his own home.”

"Monsieur le marquis will remain over in Paris one day, at the house of monseigneur le duc," remarked Robert, who still lingered about the room.

"My son will meet the marquis only at Maurèze," said Gabrielle, authoritatively. "I deem it proper that he should receive his father's embrace, here, in the presence of his mother. It is my right and also my command," said Gabrielle, haughtily.

Robert, greatly discomfited, bowed, and angrily, though silently, left the room. Gabrielle, once more alone with her daughter, fell back in her armchair, exhausted and overcome. After the terrible effort she had made must come the reaction; and Lucile feared that her mother was about to faint, she grew so white and cold.

"Dear mother, it is from joy, is it not? and from surprise?" she exclaimed, tenderly. "Ah! how happy you must be after all these years!"

Lucile's kisses revived the marquise, and when she had regained, in some degree, her strength and self-control, she went to her own room and sent for Toinon.

The latter came at once, even more pallid and terrified than her mistress; and, sobbing wildly, threw herself down at Gabrielle's feet. Seeing

her so completely unnerved, restored the courage and coolness of the marquise, for she was one of those to whom a sense of peril imparts energy and determination.

"I must see Monsieur de Présanges," she said to her servant. "It is absolutely necessary. Send some messenger to him—find some one. The case is a desperate one, and we must adopt measures equally desperate."

Toinon thought a moment, then a plan occurred to her.

"My sister, who nursed Lucile, will do anything for her young mistress," she said, at last, with some hesitation.

Gabrielle shuddered. The idea of again making use of her daughter was intensely repugnant to her; but it was to no lovers' *rendezvous* that she summoned Julien. Nothing was further from her thought; henceforth Julien de Présanges must be an absolute stranger to her.

"So be it," she said, finally. "I will write the note, and you must say to your sister that it is Lucile who sends it. May God forgive me this deception, for it is the last, and I am in desperate need."

The preparations for the reception of the

marquis caused great bustle and activity in the château. For the first and last time Robert and his mistress were in accord. Both were agreed that Maurèze must appear at its best, for the eyes of its master. The tenantry were all bidden to the château, and a triumphal procession was arranged. All these preparations, of course, required much time and trouble. For three days there was no opportunity to meet Julien, as a perfect army of gardeners had been set to work upon the always well-kept gardens and park. On the fourth day, the marquise wrote the following note to Julien :

“ You must understand that we are separated for ever. Meet me to-night, at the cottage. Bring my letters—we will burn them together; and prepare to bid me an eternal farewell.”

This note was intrusted to Lucile’s former nurse, and she delivered it faithfully. She was a little astonished that her young lady should have occasion to send any secret message to Monsieur de Présanges; but she thought no evil, and charitably concluded that the message was connected with some surprise that was being arranged for the reception of the marquis, which was now the subject engrossing the mind of every one.

Julien had heard, through public rumor, of the expected return of the Marquis de Maurèze. He was petrified with horror and anguish, for this return, which the marquise had always prophesied, had seemed to him an utter impossibility. He had come to regard as a myth this man whom he had never seen; and now the prospect of his speedy arrival appalled him. What should he do when he met this man face to face? Should he have the courage to take his hand, and to utter the customary words of greeting and of welcome? Could he do this—he, the lover of this man's wife? In society, people are not much troubled by such compunctions of conscience; but Julien, though guilty, was not depraved. His fault had been the fruit of irresistible passion, not of precocious depravity.

"No," he said, bitterly, "I cannot take this man's hand. I should die of shame!"

Gabrielle's prolonged silence had caused him the most intense anxiety. Anticipating such a terrible calamity, why did she say nothing?

The arrival of her note was hailed with delight; but its contents extinguished his joy. An eternal farewell? Was it for this that he had lavished all his love and his every thought upon this woman

—the only woman in the world for him? Was this sweet bond to be broken—this bond so sweet, in spite of its bitterness—was it to be broken irreversibly? He loved Gabrielle more, perhaps, on account of all he had lavished upon her, than on account of the happiness her love had brought him. He had looked forward to passing his life near her. He had thought he should grow old by her side; that he would console her when her children had married and left her alone. He had anticipated a time when years would have changed their mutual love into a tender friendship; but he had never thought that he would be called upon to bid Gabrielle an eternal farewell.

“It is true, then,” he thought. “We *have* been guilty of a crime; and every crime brings its own punishment with it.”

Yes, after three years of intoxication, the punishment had indeed come, and it threatened to destroy the entire peace and happiness of his life. Julien had no thought now of the trials, the conflicts and the tears of the past three years. He remembered only his happiness and its threatened destruction, and, miserable and despairing, he said to himself, “My life is lost!”

Other thoughts, no less bitter, succeeded these.

What would become of Gabrielle? How could she endure her life, consumed by remorse, and with every object around her reminding her of past happiness and present misery! And this sensitive, loyal soul, which had fought so bravely against temptation, yielding little by little—what would she do? How could she live in the presence of an outraged husband?

“She will betray herself,” thought Julien.
“She does not know how to deceive.”

Gloomy and wretched, he rushed from the house, and paced madly back and forth through the garden, while he awaited the hour appointed for his interview with Gabrielle.

It was a dark, sultry night, with an atmosphere of velvety softness. Not a star was visible in the sky; not a sound disturbed the perfect stillness; and the misty, motionless air was heavy with the perfume of flowers. A light was shining in one of the windows of the house—the very window through which the bright May sunshine had streamed in upon Gabrielle, as she gently closed the eyes of his dead mother. With that May sunshine, the sorrow and the passion of his life had entered his soul.

“I owe it to her to be a man,” he thought. “I

was a child before I knew her. The teaching of pedagogues is of little benefit until love has been one's instructor. And how have I repaid her? What have I brought her but remorse?"

For the first time Julien really comprehended the extent of his fault; but, as is always the case, he did not realize it until it was too late. He understood now, how much happier Gabrielle would have been had he been content to live near her and love her chastely.

"I have done her a grievous wrong," he said to himself. "Hereafter, I will be guided by her; and whatever she may command, I will obey. It shall be the beginning of my atonement."

He wandered disconsolately to and fro through the garden. He recalled the hours of love stolen from destiny, and from Gabrielle herself, and thought how happy he had been.

"But *she* suffers; she is dying of shame and remorse. Oh, weak egotist! miserable coward! you have brought misery upon the noblest of women; and now, whatever you may do, you will stand between her and her God at the hour of death."

He threw himself down despairingly upon a garden seat. Truly, sin had brought its own pun-

ishment to him, for his soul now writhed in anguish.

At last the appointed hour came, and he mounted his horse, which had learned the way to the cottage, and had grown accustomed to waiting patiently in the wood.

On this occasion, Julien did not repair to the *rendezvous* with the same feverish haste as usual. He sprang easily and quietly over the wall, and walked slowly towards the cottage, which he entered very cautiously.

Gabrielle stood awaiting him there, with a tiny dark lantern in her hand.

"I have escaped for a moment," she said, hurriedly; "but I think some one has followed me."

"But Toinon?"

"She remained at the château. I did not wish to involve her in my disgrace, if I should be discovered. There are enough innocent ones already who will suffer, perhaps, for my fault. Julien, have you brought me my letters?"

"They are all here," replied the young man, laying Lucile's gift—the little portfolio—upon the table. "They are all here—yours and mine. Let them all be destroyed, together with our happiness."

Gabrielle, without a word, took the letters, one by one, and held them in the blaze of the little candle, that burned in her lantern, until all were consumed. When her task was finished, she stood motionless, with downcast head and drooping arms.

“Farewell!” she said at last, in an almost inaudible voice.

“Farewell?” exclaimed Julien. “Are we to part thus—without a last caress—without a word, or a sign to tell me that *all* the happy past is not a dream—that you have loved me?”

“Ah! truly I have loved you,” said Gabrielle, with bowed head. “Yes, I have loved you, and I shall always love you to my own sorrow.”

“Ah, then, Gabrielle!” cried Julien, extending his arms, and trying to draw her to him, “lay your head once more upon the heart that throbs only for you, and weep with me over all that we are losing.”

Gabrielle recoiled a step.

“No,” said she, in the same sad, heart-broken voice; “in a few hours the marquis will be here. Do you wish him to find upon my forehead the trace of adulterous kisses?”

“Have pity!” cried Julien, falling on his knees before her, “have pity on me! I assure you that I am punished!”

"I do not reproach you," said Gabrielle, quietly. "We are both equally guilty, and I believe equally punished. I have loved you deeply; I love you yet. I will pray God to forgive you."

"Ah!" she cried, passionately, a few moments after, burying her face in her hands, "I love you so well that I would gladly take your guilt upon myself, if God would permit it."

Julien tried again to take her in his arms, but she gently, yet decidedly, repulsed him.

"You do not yet understand," said she, sadly. "You do not understand, because you do not know how terrible it is to find yourself face to face with the man you have outraged. You will understand it better to-morrow."

"Why?"

"Have you thought," asked Gabrielle, "that you could escape entirely the ordeal to which I am to be subjected? Do you not know that you must meet the marquis, and take his hand in yours?"

"Oh, my God!" cried Julien, pleadingly. "Not that—not that; I beseech you!"

"You desire, then, that at the reunion of all our neighbors to-morrow, your absence should be remarked? You have been in the habit of coming here two or three times a week; and yet, when

the master returns, you do not come to welcome him ? Do you wish me to be lost ? ”

Julien stood motionless, without attempting to reply.

“ You will come here to-morrow with the others,” Gabrielle continued. “ You must come a few times, and then you can make some excuse—go away on a journey ; but the marquis must meet you. It is shameful, is it not, thus to deceive an honest man ? Yes, I admit it ; but I also must deceive him, and our punishment will be to lie to him, like cowards, all the while despising ourselves and each other.”

“ No,” cried Julien, springing towards her ; “ you know that I esteem and honor you above all other women ; and oh ! you cannot, cannot despise me ! ”

Gabrielle drew back and laid her hand upon the latch of the door.

“ It is true,” she said, gently, “ I do not despise you. You have been kind and loyal. The misfortune has been that I was not free. All is now over between us,” she added, turning to depart.

“ But I—I love you,” murmured Julien, despairingly.

Gabrielle came back and took his face tenderly between her hands.

"See," she said, sadly, "we are both equally miserable. Whatever happens, we must always love each other. We have sinned, and now comes the expiation. I shall love you to the end. Farewell!"

She opened the door and went out alone into the night. As she flew on, a shadow, concealed by the dense shrubbery, followed her closely. It was Robert.

Julien, wild with anguish and remorse, returned home, and in his lonely vigil determined to immure himself within the walls of a cloister.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I HAVE DONE MY BEST.

THE marquise, on reaching the château, found Toinon waiting anxiously for her return. The faithful creature had scarcely time to divest her mistress of her clothing, which was wet and drabbled with dew, before the quick ring of a horse's hoofs resounded upon the paved court-yard below. A hum of excitement was heard ascending from the servants' hall, and Lucile came and rapped impatiently at her mother's door.

"Mamma," she cried, "it is a messenger come from my father! He will be here in an hour."

Toinon and the marquise looked at each other in dismay. If this had happened a quarter of an hour earlier, all would have been lost! The entire household was soon in commotion, and Gabrielle hurriedly dressed herself. By hastening his arrival, the marquis had missed the triumphal *entrée* which had been prepared for him; but possibly that was what he desired.

The windows of the château glowed like fire in

the rays of the rising sun, when the marquis re-entered the home of his ancestors. His wife and daughter awaited him at the grand entrance, and the beauty of both fairly dazzled him. He kissed each of them upon the forehead with equal tenderness, and hastily entered. Although it was summer-time, the fresh morning air made him shiver slightly. Gabrielle and Lucile, weary and cold after their sleepless night, trembled with cold and excitement. They followed him into the large hall, where the marquis received the homage of his vassals; then a repast was served, of which, however, no one partook. This early arrival had thrown the entire household into confusion, and every one was fatigued.

The marquis retired to his own apartments to rest a little after his journey, and Lucile took refuge with her mother.

“How handsome my father is!” she exclaimed, in childish admiration; “but tell me, mamma, is he not much older than you?”

“He is fifteen years older,” replied Gabrielle, “and I am no longer a young woman.”

Lucile looked at her mother admiringly, and laughingly shook her head. The sense of danger and the excitement had given the marquise a

superb color, and her wealth of golden hair formed a regal coronet above her low, white forehead ; her eyes alone showed her fatigue, for she had wept so much ; but the tinge of *bistre* upon their lids imparted to them an unusual and almost startling brilliancy.

Although thirty-six years of age, Gabrielle did not look more than twenty-eight, and the marquis, stout and gray-haired, in spite of his noble bearing and fine physique, might have been her father rather than her husband.

“One might say that my father had two daughters,” said Lucile, softly.

This delicate flattery brought a fleeting smile to the mother’s lips. Gabrielle dreaded to be left alone, and kept her daughter by her side until the dinner hour, which came in the middle of the day. She feared her own thoughts, and her daughter’s joyous prattle served to divert her mind from her anxiety and gloomy forebodings.

Meanwhile the marquis had been sleeping ; but he rose and dressed in time to preside at the family dinner. Some of the more intimate of their acquaintances had called to welcome him, and the repast was a delightful one. After so many years of wandering, the master of the house experienced

an unexpected delight in finding himself surrounded by his own belongings. To sleep in his own bed, to eat from his own silver, were novel pleasures to him—it had been so long since he had tasted them—and he heartily enjoyed the compliments and congratulations that were showered upon him from every side.

"Eh ! eh ! marquis," said our old friend, the *chevalier*, "you have come home like the prodigal son. Madame la marquise has killed the fatted calf, and now we will make merry !"

Gabrielle responded to this and similar remarks with a vague, constrained smile ; and she had need to summon all her pride and determination to give polite and suitable replies to the congratulations of her friends. Lucile looked first at her mother, and then at her father, with astonished eyes, and was dumb with wonder at seeing them so unlike what she had expected. The marquise did not appear like herself. Here was a pale, restless, nervous woman, who trembled at the slightest noise, and who looked furtively around her like a criminal awaiting sentence of death.

"How much she must have suffered during my father's absence," thought Lucile, "since his return has thus overcome her!"

Then she looked again at the marquis, and she found new cause for astonishment. In imagination she had pictured her father as still young, tall and slender, with a black moustache, a stern bearing, and reserved manner. She saw before her a man evidently enchanted with life, and somewhat of an epicure; a man who loved good cheer and gay company, and who laughed the careless, satisfied laugh peculiar to stout people, who are well contented with the world as they find it. Certainly, the marquis was quite as handsome as his daughter had imagined him. His superb white head, his clearly and delicately cut features, and bright, dark eyes, made him well worthy of admiration; but, in his daughter's opinion, he was almost an old man. Still, Lucile felt more than ever inclined to love him; and she secretly thought that it would be a thousand times easier to give him her love and confidence than she had supposed.

In the afternoon, René arrived. The formal ceremonies which should attend his meeting with his father had been carefully arranged in advance by the Duke de Maurèze, who had made it the subject of quite a lengthy conversation with René; but the marquis did not trouble himself on that score.

When René bowed before him, he looked at his

son with an astonishment bordering upon stupefaction. He saw a man when he had expected to see a mere youth ; then his surprise gave place to sincere pleasure.

“*Mon Dieu !*” he exclaimed, as his son drew near to kiss his father’s hand ; “you are much older and larger than I supposed. I trust we shall find great pleasure in each other’s society when we become better acquainted.”

“I know you well already, father,” said René, affectionately. “Since your departure, I have constantly lived near you in thought.”

“Ah, truly ! and what has prevented you from forgetting me ?”

René turned to his mother, who stood watching him proudly, with eyes brimful of love. At that moment she was a mother, to the exclusion of every other sentiment.

“It was my mother, monsieur,” he said, pointing to Gabrielle, with a gesture at once enthusiastic and respectful. “She has always told us how much devotion and love we owe our father.”

The marquise turned to Gabrielle. The proud, joyful expression had vanished entirely, and a livid pallor overspread her face.

“I thank you, madame,” said the marquis, raising

his wife's icy hand to his lips. "You have given me children, beautiful in person, and, apparently, as good as they are beautiful."

"I have done my best," stammered Gabrielle.

"Monsieur de Présanges!" interrupted the clear voice of Robert, who was announcing the visitors as they entered the room.

At a single glance the young man understood the situation, and knew that thus far Gabrielle was safe; and, made bold by the very necessity of appearing at ease, he bowed courteously and deferentially to the marquis, as Gabrielle, with a powerful effort at self-control, presented him to her husband. After a few words of compliment and welcome, the entrance of other guests permitted Julien to pass on and join a little group of neighbors and friends standing near by.

Robert, who had watched him closely from beneath his half-closed eyelids, left his post of duty, and called another servant to announce any other guests who might present themselves. Gabrielle noticed this, and her terror increased. She felt the links of an invisible chain closing tighter and tighter around her. She longed to go to Julien and beseech him to depart at once; but she dared not attempt it—sure that she could not

elude Robert's watchful eyes; so she stood motionless, with a forced smile upon her lips, and a horrible fear in her heart.

"If I could only fall down dead!" she prayed, in her despair.

But the wild prayer of the guilty woman met with no answer from heaven.

The day ended at last. In the afternoon, the marquis received a deputation of his tenantry, and listened to an address of welcome from the village magistrate. A collation was served, and the château and the grounds were thronged with people. Julien did not have courage to remain through these ceremonies, and took advantage of the departure of some other of the guests to make his own *adieux*. As he was leaving the house, he met Lucile, who was struck by his worn, haggard look.

"You are ill? You are suffering, monsieur?" she said, moved by the secret sympathy she always felt for him.

"Yes, mademoiselle," he replied, with an effort. "I am going, that I may not cast a gloom over your joy."

"Can I do nothing for you?" insisted Lucile. As he looked at her, his evident misery grieved the young girl's tender and innocent heart.

"You? No, nothing, mademoiselle; but I will not suffer long," he answered, bitterly, as he bowed, and was about passing on.

Lucile stretched out her hand to detain him.

"You frighten me," she said, anxiously; "your words are terrible. Think, monsieur, your life belongs also to your friends. My mother—"

Julien gave a violent start, and looked at her with eyes so full of anguish that, seized by a sudden fear, she paused, feeling that she must have touched some terrible wound.

"You are right, mademoiselle," he answered, still looking searchingly into her eyes. "I should not trouble others with my own sorrows. Do not speak of this conversation, I entreat you."

"I promise you, monsieur," replied Lucile, gently, much surprised.

Julien bowed once more, and left the house. A moment after, Lucile saw him mounted upon his black horse, galloping madly towards his solitary home.

Lucile re-entered the château thoughtful and sad, and haunted by some vague premonition of coming sorrow.

CHAPTER XXX.

ALL THINGS COME TO THOSE THAT WAIT.

NIGHT had come, and Gabrielle was sitting in her own room, thinking over the events of the day, when some one tapped at the door. It was the marquis. He came in, dismissed Toinon, who was there waiting to undress her mistress, drew an arm-chair up to the light, and seated himself opposite his wife.

The latter looked up timidly, fearful of encountering the face of a pitiless judge; but she saw, instead, a countenance beaming with kindness.

"It is a long time since I went away," said the marquis, gently; "and I have for some time been considering several things about which I have now come to speak with you."

The marquise trembled, and waited with drooping head for what was to follow.

"You remember," continued the marquis, "that when my son was seven years old, he was removed from your guardianship, and that, at the same time, your daughter, who was still very young, was taken from you."

Gabrielle remembered only too well. Had that event never occurred, her life would have been busy and happy—and free from evil. She gave the least possible sign of assent.

“And now, my dear wife,” continued the marquis, drawing his chair nearer his wife, “I own that I did very wrong to give my consent to such an act of cruelty towards you, and I beseech you to forgive me.”

Gabrielle, astonished beyond measure, raised her eyes; was this indeed her husband who was speaking?

“You?” said she, “you, monsieur, ask my forgiveness?”

“Yes, and I also ask your pardon for not having allowed you to nurse your own children as you wished to do. It was a reasonable desire of nature, and I should have permitted you to satisfy it. I know that my refusal caused you great unhappiness, and I am now sorry and ashamed of my conduct.”

Since that time, Rousseau had made maternal love the *mode*, and it was no longer the universal custom to have one’s children reared at a distance from their parents. Had it not been for this change in opinion and fashion, the marquis might

never have been conscious of his mistake; but now, at least, he had the good grace to admit it.

"It is you, monsieur, you, who ask me to pardon you?" repeated Gabrielle.

"Does it surprise you so much?" he resumed. "I know but too well that you are little used to kindness, or even justice from me; but, although I may seem old to you, I am, perhaps, still young enough to see and acknowledge my faults, and endeavor to atone for them. Yes," he continued, "I did very wrong to deprive you of the happiness of nursing your children, and I did very wrong to take your daughter from you. She should have been left with you to console you for the necessary absence of her brother, for I could not refuse my father's desire to take charge of the education of his heir; but Heaven had given you Lucile as an alleviation of your loneliness, and it was an act of needless cruelty to take her from you. Can you say that you forgive me for these wrongs and all the wrongs—of which I will not speak—that I have committed against you during the eighteen years I have been absent?"

He waited for some reply from Gabrielle. The latter threw out her hand with a gesture, as he supposed, of repulsion or impatience; but made

no response. At last, in a voice hoarse with emotion, she answered :

“Yes, yes, monsieur, I forgive you all, all—”

“All that I have made you suffer!” concluded the marquis, for her.

Gabrielle’s only reply was a slight inclination of the head. Yes, in her heart, she freely forgave him all ; and, before God, did not hold him responsible for the sin she had committed.

“Ah, well ! Gabrielle,” resumed the marquis, after kissing her hand affectionately, “I think I shall remain here at Maurèze—that is, if you will allow me to do so,” he added, smiling. “I had no idea, when returning here, that I should find such a charming, well-ordered household ; such good and beautiful children, who love me so much more than I deserve. I owe all this happiness to you ; and this home, where I see so plainly that I have never been forgotten in spite of my long absence, attracts and enchant me. I am no longer young ; it is time now for me to act the part of a father—and of a husband,” he added, half laughingly. “I have not, heretofore, been a success in that rôle, and I dare not hope that you will forget it,” he continued, looking inquiringly at his wife. “We shall not, perhaps, exhibit to

the world, a ridiculous example of romantic conjugal love; but, if it pleases you, Gabrielle, we will live in the peace and harmony befitting those who entertain a sincere esteem and regard for each other."

He rose, wishing to give her time to reflect upon his words. She made no reply, and he took leave of his wife with respectful tenderness.

He believed that she was angry with him. Alas! the wretched woman was only overcome by humiliation and by her burden of sin in the presence of that which she was pleased to call the generosity of her husband.

On returning to his own room, the marquis found Robert, with several large account books, patiently awaiting him.

"You come now to worry me with business matters?" he asked, angrily. "It is ten o'clock, and for several nights I have been travelling. Let me rest; to-morrow will be quite time enough for me to hear how I have been plundered."

Without replying, Robert bowed and took away the books. His vengeance was ripe; it was only necessary for him to touch the tree and it would fall; he could afford to bide his time.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MOTHER AND SON.

THE marquis, after a good night's rest, rose quite late and dressed leisurely. René was to return to Paris at noon; so, as soon as his father was awake, he went to his room to bid him good-bye; and the marquis was still more delighted with his son's wit and good sense. He was specially impressed by the love that René evinced for his mother, and this influenced the marquis still more strongly in Gabrielle's favor.

René went to spend the last hour before his departure with his sister, for, in the bustle and excitement of the previous evening, he had scarcely seen her. After his son left the room, the marquis, feeling that he ought to inquire into the condition of his business affairs, sent for Robert.

The latter came immediately, bringing with him, as on the preceding evening, a huge bundle of books and papers. He deposited these upon a chair near the door, and respectfully awaited his master's orders.

"Ah, well! Robert," said the marquis, in a more affable tone, "it seems to me that you have not made very good use of the power I intrusted to you."

"Will you pardon me, monsieur?" replied the steward. "I have, at least, tried to do my best; and with regard to your business matters, I do not think you have any cause of complaint."

"You have tried to do your best?" interrupted the marquis. "Then your best is nothing very great, in my opinion. Let us look over your accounts a little."

Robert came forward, placed a large ledger upon the table, opened it at a page already yellow with age, and pointed to a column of figures.

"In the year 1742," he said, slowly, "the marquis left this estate, which then yielded an income of thirty-two thousand five hundred livres, while the property was mortgaged to the amount of fifteen thousand livres."

"Those figures are correct," replied the marquis, "go on."

Robert turned to another page, quite new and fresh, apparently, and pointed to another column of figures.

"To-day," he continued, "this same estate is

free from all encumbrance, and yields a yearly revenue of forty-three thousand seven hundred livres—of which so much has been annually remitted to monsieur le marquis; so much has been devoted to the education and expenses of Monsieur René, and so much expended in keeping up the château and grounds of Maurèze. The remainder has been invested in good securities, and the interest more than suffices for the personal expenses of madame la marquise and Mademoiselle Lucile."

The marquis, bewildered, sank back in his chair and looked at Robert in open-mouthed wonder, unable to understand him.

"But then," he said, at last, "I am richer than ever?"

Robert bowed, and an expression of pride and of serene contentment was visible upon his thin face.

"My feeble efforts are abundantly rewarded if I have had the happiness of gaining my master's approbation," he said, in the same quiet, calm manner.

The marquis reflected, looking first at the huge ledger, and then at his faithful servant. Suddenly a thought struck him.

“This peril, this ruin involving the house of Maurèze—was it a falsehood, then? Did you invent the story to arouse me from my indifference? Robert, this exceeds the limits of pleasantry; and, however delightful the surprise you have prepared for me, I cannot allow a servant thus to deceive and cajole the Marquis de Maurèze.”

Robert took a step forward and looked his master full in the face.

“I have not deceived you, monsieur le marquis, I have not jested with you—Maurèze *is* in danger; but it is not the wealth of Maurèze, it is a more serious—”

“Eh? what?” exclaimed the marquis, springing up hastily from his chair.

The two men looked each other full in the face for a moment, without speaking; then Robert, almost in a whisper, made the long contemplated avowal:

“It is the honor of Maurèze that is in danger!—”

“The honor of Maurèze!” cried the marquis, in a tone of thunder. “Ah, knave! I will teach you to question the honor of Maurèze!”

As he spoke he caught up a pistol that was lying upon the table, and aimed it at Robert.

"Fire! monsieur le marquis," said Robert, unmoved, "and I shall not have time to speak, and you will see for yourself, when it is too late, that which I desire to tell you now."

The marquis let his weapon drop by his side, with an impatient gesture; then, turning his back upon Robert, said angrily:

"Speak, then; but, if you deceive me, you are lost!"

"I know it, monsieur," replied Robert, very calmly.

Then, in a low, monotonous voice, he told the marquis—not his suspicions or the name of the guilty man, but the plain, simple fact that he had witnessed the evening but one previous the interview of the marquise with some man in the cottage.

"You tell me that the marquise was there with some man?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You are certain of it?"

"Upon my life, monsieur."

"Then," exclaimed the marquis, frantic with rage, "come and repeat this in her presence!"

As he spoke, he seized Robert roughly by the arm, and rushed towards his wife's apartment, dragging him along with an iron grasp. He

reached the door of Gabrielle's chamber, burst it rudely open, and, still dragging Robert after him, entered the room.

As he crossed the threshold, he exclaimed :

"This man pretends that he saw you, at night, meet a stranger at a secret *rendezvous*! Throw the lie back in his face!"

At that moment, René, equipped for his journey, came to his mother's room to bid her good-bye. Frozen with horror, he paused upon the threshold, an involuntary and unobserved witness of the awful scene.

The marquise cast upon Robert a withering glance of scorn and contempt. She hesitated, but only for an instant—then haughtily replied:

"Since a menial is called as a witness against his mistress, so be it. I freely admit it. He has spoken the truth."

The marquis let go his hold on Robert's arm, and tottered as though struck by a heavy blow. René looked from his father to his mother. His father he knew only through the representations of his mother; and to this mother he owed all that he was, and all that he would ever become. He read in his mother's eyes that all she held dear was threatened with total shipwreck, and

pity—a pity so tender that it touched even Robert himself—inspired him with a sudden resolve.

“He spoke the truth, father,” he exclaimed, coming forward, and falling upon one knee before the marquis; “but *I* was the stranger!”

Gabrielle trembled violently from head to foot.

“My son!” she cried, extending her arms; but René did not turn his head.

“It was I,” he repeated. “I had lost a considerable sum at play, and that I might not be seen by that man there”—pointing to Robert, who was regarding him with an expression of concentrated rage—“that man, who has assumed far too much authority in this house, I came at night, like a thief, to secretly implore my mother to give me the money, which I needed the next day.”

“When was this?” demanded the marquis, still uncertain.

“Night before last,” replied Gabrielle, resolutely.

The marquis extended his hand, and gently raised his son; then turned to his wife.

“Madame,” said he, “this is a more grievous wrong than any of the others I have done you, and I fear that you can never forgive me; but if I may hope to efface it, my entire life shall henceforth be devoted to making you happy.”

After these words, he quitted the apartment. Robert had not remained as long. When René was speaking of him, he had left the room without uttering a word.

The son was left alone with his mother. She looked at him with eyes brimming over with tears; then she buried her face in her hands to hide her shame, and stood before her son with bowed head, as if to entreat his pardon.

He stepped to her side, and demanded in a hoarse whisper :

“Who is this man?”

“Do not ask,” replied the marquise, resolutely; “you shall never know.”

“I must know! I will know!”

“Never!”

“Then I will retract my words.”

“Do so,” said Gabrielle, with a look as full of disdain as that she had cast upon Robert a moment before. “Add your name to those of your mother’s defamers. Disgrace the mother you have just saved.”

René’s head drooped. His mother came nearer, and, falling at his feet, exclaimed imploringly :

“My son, in the name of your outraged father, who must always remain ignorant of my crime,

pardon your erring mother! Every link is now broken. I have renounced my sin; and if I had no excuse, think how tenderly I have loved you, how they took you from me, and how unhappy I have been."

René, unable to speak, pressed his mother's hand in token of forgiveness, and rushed from her presence.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LOST PORTFOLIO.

AFTER this repulse, Robert, far from considering himself defeated, set to work to discover some means of regaining his lost ground. The marquis, on meeting him in the corridor, administered a very severe reproof, concluding in these words :

“I do not discharge you, because you yourself were deceived, and because you have been a really devoted servant. Try to gain the forgiveness of madame la marquise, and, above all, do not give way to any more such fancies.”

Robert bowed silently, as was his wont, and went out into the open air to think over his defeat. After two or three turns in the garden, he wandered on into the park, and naturally, instinctively, his steps turned towards the gardener’s cottage.

The door was not locked, for the key was on the inside, and he entered and seated himself upon an old sofa which, with two or three chairs, made up the entire furniture of the desolate room.

Was this, then, the end of all his tireless watching, and of all his well-meant efforts? René had overturned all his carefully-arranged plans, and, had it not been for the veneration that Robert always felt for the members of the Maurèze family, he would have cursed him and his interference; but every such feeling was soon overpowered by his intense desire to humble the marquise to the very dust.

Until now, Robert had been actuated in all that he had done by no personal dislike for Gabrielle. He had defended Maurèze through an instinctive feeling of attachment—precisely as a dog defends his master. If he had injured her deeply, it was not from malice, but simply because he considered her an obstacle to the prosperity of the house he guarded.

But from that day, all was changed. He longed intensely to avenge his defeat, and to regain his lost influence; but he desired, above all else, to utterly ruin the marquise, whose crime he would just now have exposed, had it not been for her son's unexpected aid.

Robert was engrossed in thoughts like these, when, glancing upon the floor, his eyes fell upon a small object forgotten by Présanges in the agony

of his last interview with Gabrielle. It was the little portfolio, embroidered by Lucile, that had contained the letters of the lovers. Robert picked it up and examined it carefully: in the desperate strait to which he was driven, the least clue might be of service. At first he was not certain that he had ever seen this portfolio in the hands of any person, but he felt quite sure that it did not belong to any of the inmates of the château. Suddenly a light broke upon his mind. He remembered the exact day on which the marquise had presented a similar one to Julien de Présanges in his presence.

“The bunglers! They must be more adroit when they are dealing with an old fox like me!” he exclaimed.

After examining the portfolio, he placed it in his pocket, and returned to the château. On his way back, he met Lucile, who was taking her customary after-dinner promenade among the roses.

“Have you lost a little, blue satin portfolio, mademoiselle?” he asked, without wasting time in unnecessary questions.

Lucile, surprised, shook her head.

“One of the stable-boys has found a small, embroidered portfolio in the court-yard,” Robert continued.

"Ah! I know," interrupted Lucile. "It must be the one I gave to Monsieur de Présanges. He probably lost it yesterday," she added, as she recollect ed the young man's absent and preoccupied manner. "Where is it?" she continued. "I will have it returned to him."

"Very well, mademoiselle. I will see that it is returned to him. He shall see it again, be assured of that."

Lucile nodded, and passed on. Robert's eyes followed her with an expression of malicious satisfaction.

"That is as it should be," he muttered. "The son ruined me, but the daughter has saved me."

Two or three days passed quietly. René had gone to Paris, but was to return in the course of the week. The marquis tried his best to win his wife's favor; but he had too much tact to force his presence or his love upon her. He realized, too, that he had no very easy task to perform to make her forget his recent unfortunate mistake and insult.

Lucile, who neither knew nor suspected aught of the storm in which her mother was so near perishing, came and went, charming her father with her youthful grace and vivacity, for he had

never before known what it was to be so near a really artless and innocent young girl. She was the joy of this household over which such a dire calamity was impending, and won smiles even from her mother, who was bowed down into the very dust by the burden of her shame.

Julien had not repeated his visit. Courage had failed him, and he knew nothing of what had occurred. His life was so intolerable that he decided to leave France for an indefinite time, and go on a long journey. It mattered little to him what skies were above his head. Was he not an orphan—lonely and forsaken?

Since his last interview with the marquise, he comprehended the extent of his crime as he had never done before. It was easy, perhaps, to wrong a husband when he was far away; but when that husband returned to his desecrated fireside, the horror of the base treason confronted Julien as it had never ceased to confront Gabrielle.

Overcome by remorse, Julien had arranged his affairs for a long absence, and was only waiting for a favorable opportunity to call and take leave of the marquis and his wife. He was desirous of making his *adieu*s when he would not be likely to meet other guests there, who might speculate

and gossip about his sudden departure and its cause; but this desired opportunity did not present itself, for reception-days had multiplied at Maurèze, and the house was constantly thronged with visitors.

In spite of these social diversions, the Marquis de Maurèze was ill at ease. He had almost exhausted René's endurance by frequent reproaches relating to the latter's pretended losses at the gaming-table. René had listened with apparent humility, and had promised never to repeat the offence; but the marquis felt that the fault would be his own, if his son ever became a confirmed gambler. Gabrielle had given the boy every good counsel; but of course she could not warn him against dangers of which she knew nothing. A mother could not be expected to warn her son against the pleasures of the world—especially when this same mother had herself been rigorously withheld from all contact with the world. It was a father's duty to guide the first steps of his son in such paths—to teach him prudence and wisdom in matters of this kind; and the marquis blamed himself bitterly for his thoughtlessness and neglect.

In truth, he was not very well pleased with any one, save his daughter; for he found Gabrielle's manner towards him so cold and reserved that it

seemed another reproach for his shortcomings. For what, indeed, could be more natural than this sadness and indifference on the part of his wife, after all these years of neglect? And even his return home had been marked by a mortal offence and insult to her—a fitting climax, he thought, to his life of dissipation and selfishness and his ill-treatment of her, his loyal wife and the mother of his children.

At thirty the marquis would have looked upon his conduct differently. It would then have appeared the most natural and proper thing in the world for him to consult only his own pleasure, and do as he chose in every respect; but age and rheumatism had modified his opinions—had wrought a change in the vintage of life. The rich wine had slowly cleared, while the transient foam had bubbled up and disappeared. He felt, now, a strong desire to live happily and quietly in his own home, and this feeling gave him a dignity which he had formerly lacked. But he could not forgive himself for having committed such a grave offence against his wife, almost the very hour of his return to Maurèze.

This regret annoyed him continually, and he blamed Robert as the sole cause of his *faux pas*.

One morning, when the latter came to take his master's orders, the marquis could restrain his wrath no longer, and he began to abuse Robert in no very measured terms.

"Only an idiot like you would have made me commit such an infernal blunder!" the marquis exclaimed, angrily.

Robert was silent, but he laid his hand upon the little portfolio which he carried in the inside pocket of his coat. The opportunity for which he had been waiting so long might, perhaps, offer itself now.

"And what an egregious old fool you must be," continued the marquis, rubbing his leg, through which sharp rheumatic twinges were darting, "not to be able to distinguish my son from a perfect stranger."

Robert still made no reply, and this irritated his master yet more.

"Why do you not answer?" he asked, harshly. "You do not seem disposed to even attempt any excuse for your stupidity."

Robert took his hand from beneath his coat, and laid Lucile's little portfolio upon the table beside the marquis.

"It may be that I am mistaken," he said,

quietly, “but this does not belong to *Monsieur le Comte René*.”

The marquis trembled, in spite of himself, at the sight of this object, and at the grave voice of the speaker.

“What is all this?” he asked, with no little agitation.

“I found this article in the cottage of which I spoke to monsieur.”

The marquis took up the tablets, opened them, and upon one of the ivory leaves read the name of Julien de Présanges.

“You are sure?” faltered the marquis.

Robert made a sign in the affirmative, and looked keenly at his master.

“You swear it,” said the marquis, rising and holding up his hand.

“By my hope of eternal salvation,” said Robert, raising his hand to heaven.

“That is enough: go,” said the marquis, regaining his self-control.

Robert bowed and retired.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DAUGHTER'S LOVE.

LEFT alone, the marquis reseated himself, with his eyes still riveted upon the open tablets, upon which each letter of the accusing name was plainly visible: Julien de Présanges.

Of the person bearing this name the marquis knew nothing. In the crowd of visitors, upon the day of his return, this young man had passed almost unnoticed; but now, in an instant, this person, so nearly a stranger, had assumed the most important place in the life and mind of the marquis; this was a man whom he must hate—*whom he must kill!*

Who was Julien de Présanges? The marquis might inquire of Robert; he laid his hand upon the bell for an instant, then withdrew it. Interrogate a servant? What good? The Marquis de Maurèze had other means of ascertaining that which he desired to know. He took up the portfolio and went to his wife's room.

Gabrielle was seated by the window, looking

sadly out upon the road—the same window from which, in years gone by, she had watched so anxiously for her husband's coming. The years had vanished, but the same feeling of anxious waiting remained—but now she awaited the coming, not of happiness, but of exposure and misery.

Lucile, kneeling on a cushion in the deep embrasure of the other window, was busy arranging some flowers in a vase. A large table hid her from sight, and her light, graceful movements could scarcely be heard in the immense room; but her invisible presence comforted and quieted her mother's troubled spirit.

Lucile was her only safeguard against utter despair. In her daughter's presence Gabrielle might be sad, but she could not give way to her grief; and the feeling of uncertainty and remorse that embittered her life was less acute while Lucile's presence filled the room with an atmosphere of youth and innocence.

A heavy, resolute tread was heard coming down the corridor. The marquise looked up anxiously. The hour had come at last.

Without perceiving his daughter, and with his mind engrossed by a single thought, the marquis walked straight to his wife, and, handing her the portfolio, said, calmly:

“Do you recognize this, madame?”

Gabrielle instantly remembered where and when she had last seen it, and felt that she was lost.

“I do not know,” she said, faintly, still trying to save herself, like one drowning, who catches at a straw.

“The name of the person who has lost it is written on the inside,” said the marquis, even more calmly. “It is Monsieur de Présanges.”

Gabrielle could not answer. She clenched her hands beneath the folds of her dress and her head drooped.

“Monsieur de Présanges is not careful,” continued the marquis, still not observing his daughter, who, on hearing his words, had risen, and was standing with dilated eyes and parted lips.

Lucile suddenly comprehended the drama in which she had unwittingly played her part for more than three years; and, dumb with horror, she awaited the thunder-bolt which was about to fall.

“Monsieur de Présanges,” continued the outraged husband, “left this in the cottage where you granted him a *rendezvous*, madame. Monsieur de Présanges is your lover.”

“Father!” cried Lucile, springing forward to

support her mother, who tottered as though about to fall, "father, it is mine!"

The marquis recoiled. Gabrielle, leaning against the wall which alone prevented her from falling to the floor, tried to speak—to cry out; but the sound died away in her parched throat.

"You!" shouted the marquis, "you have dishonored my house?"

Lucile fell on her knees before him, but did not release her hold upon her mother's hand, which she pressed convulsively.

"Forgive me, my father!"

"You," repeated the marquis, "you have a lover?"

"Yes," replied Lucile, simply.

"You shall marry him," cried the marquis, in a transport of fury, "or I will kill him."

The same thought agitated both the women, who still held each other closely by the hand, but neither spoke.

"Let him be sent for immediately, mademoiselle," said the marquis, restraining his anger, though it cost him an intense effort. "Send for him, and do not let me look upon your face again until you are his wife. The *curé* shall be in readiness—go!"

Lucile left the room without raising her eyes.

"Madame," the marquis said, turning to his wife, "after this I know there will be no hope of winning your pardon; but I must say to you that we are indeed unfortunate in our children."

Gabrielle caught at the side of the wall for support, then fell heavily to the floor in a dead swoon. The marquis rang the bell furiously, and Toinon came quickly to the aid of her mistress. When his wife had been partially restored to consciousness, he withdrew, thinking his presence might be unwelcome; and, finding that Lucile had not executed his orders, he, himself, sent a messenger to Monsieur de Présanges, requesting him to come to Maurèze without delay.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A TERRIBLE DISCLOSURE.

WHEN Julien, greatly disquieted by this peremptory summons, arrived at the château, he was, by command of the marquis, ushered immediately into the presence of Lucile.

On seeing him, the young girl's face grew white, and she could not hide a movement of shame, but she quickly conquered her emotion and quietly handed him the tablets.

Julien now understood it all only too well; and he bowed humbly, waiting for her to speak.

"My father wishes me to marry you," she said, after a moment's silence; "but you know how utterly impossible such a marriage would be."

"You?" said Julien, looking at her in astonishment and thinking that he must have misunderstood her.

"Yes," she answered, quietly; "you were with me when you lost this article."

Présanges fell on his knees before Lucile, while tears of admiration filled his eyes.

"I understand you," he said, in faltering tones, "and I honor you."

She motioned him to rise, with a proud gesture.

"My father wishes me to marry you," she continued, in a low voice; "but I do not desire it. I will not do so. What will be the consequences of this refusal?"

Julien shrugged his shoulders.

"What does it matter?" said he.

"It matters this much: my mother must not suffer a single pang that can be spared her."

The young man looked at Lucile and realized, as he had never done before, the depth of her filial love.

"Ah! well, mademoiselle, your father or your brother will challenge me, and I shall be killed—that is all."

Lucile shuddered. The thought of death is always terrible, and the thought of Julien's death seemed to her most horrible of all. In spite of the dreadful part he had played in her life's drama, she could not help sympathizing with him.

On the stage and in romance one may suddenly become imbued with a mortal hatred against this or that person who has done wrong; but in real life our feelings do not change so suddenly and so

easily from sympathy to aversion, and from love to hate.

Lucile had loved Julien for more than three years with the unselfish devotion of a heart that loves without hope; and she was so ignorant of the world and its evil that she had taken her mother's fault upon herself, scarcely knowing that it was a crime.

Why should she hate Julien? She only felt that there was an impassable gulf between them, and she had no desire to look beyond that.

"That must not be," she said, after a moment's silence. "You must not die."

"I do not wish to live; I cannot endure my life," murmured Julien.

"And I," said Lucile, in a constrained voice, "do not wish you to add still more to the burden of remorse my mother bears."

Julien bowed his head, conquered by this young girl.

"What must I do?" he asked, dejectedly.

"Go away; go immediately and forever!"

"Such would be the conduct of a coward!" exclaimed Julien.

"It is the expiation of a crime," replied Lucile, firmly, but quietly.

"They will not give me time to depart!"

"That shall be my care," answered Lucile. "My brother will undoubtedly be charged with seeing you. I will speak to him."

Julien was silent. It was hard to consent to her demand, and it was certainly the first time such a proposition had ever been made to any gentleman. He would rather die a hundred deaths than be to all appearances a coward; but, as Lucile said, he had no right to add still more to her mother's misery and remorse.

Then he thought of the fate of her who was sacrificing herself for them; of the future that she was accepting for herself; and of the wrath and disgrace that would fall upon her innocent head after his departure.

"And you?" he asked. "What is to become of you?"

"Whatever is the will of God," she answered, simply.

Overwhelmed by such nobility of soul, and by such complete resignation, Julien felt the keenest regret and remorse piercing the inmost depths of his being. Here might have been happiness! Here was the strong, pure, womanly heart which rose far above the temptation before which he had

succumbed! If he had only refused to yield to his guilty passion—if he had only conquered himself, he might have brought peace and joy to this household instead of utter dishonor and shame.

“May God bless and protect you,” he said, fervently, as he bowed reverently and for the last time before this virgin martyr whose executioner he was. “I depart forever.”

She longed to send him away with some word of hope and pardon; but she felt that it was impossible, and with downcast eyes she stood motionless until the door closed behind him, and he was gone! She stifled a sob as the sound of his horse’s hoofs came up from below.

“Oh, what misery!” she exclaimed.

She dared add nothing more to this thought; and crushing down her own grief, and dashing away a furtive tear, she waited for that which was to come.

A moment after, the marquis, astonished at Julien’s departure, entered the room, accompanied by his wife, who had summoned up all her self-command and courage to meet the ordeal.

“And now?” asked the marquis, harshly.

Lucile looked sadly at her father. For an instant her heart and courage failed her, when she

thought of the fearful blow she was about to deal him; but the sight of her mother strengthened her resolution.

“I have told Monsieur de Présanges,” she said, firmly, “that I could not and would not marry him.”

The marquis stepped back, horrified.

“How! after all that has passed between you—”

The marquise threw herself between her husband and Lucile, as if to defend her daughter.

“I have questioned my heart,” said Lucile, gently, but firmly; “and I find that I do not love him.”

“And you are disgraced!” exclaimed the frenzied father. “Shameless girl! I curse you!”

He advanced with uplifted hand, as if about to strike; but Gabrielle intercepted him, and Lucile hastily left the room.

“Ah!” cried the marquis, in despair; his mood changing suddenly from fierce anger to the most profound grief. “How unfortunate we are!”

He flung himself down into an arm-chair, and took Gabrielle’s hands in his.

“It is all my fault,” he said, bitterly, while great tears of rage and sorrow welled up in his eyes. “God has punished me for deserting my own

fireside. My son is a gambler and my daughter is depraved. It is a chastisement for my own sins. My poor, dear wife! how I have made you suffer! You have, indeed, a right to curse me."

Gabrielle tried vainly to free her hands from her husband's grasp. He held them tightly in his, and covered them with tears and kisses.

"Yes," he continued, "I have been a bad husband—a bad father. My own vile instincts and passions have been transmitted to my children. You, my angel wife, you alone, have guarded the honor of my home—you alone!"

"No!" cried Gabrielle, passionately, tearing her hands free, "no! it is a horrible lie—a shameful hypocrisy! Your children are the best—the purest children on earth!"

Maurèze sprang up, and forced his wife down upon her knees before him. His teeth were set; his face was white with rage.

"Yes," she continued, wildly, "on my knees before you! it is my place, for I have deceived you. I have dishonored you. Your children have lied to save me. It is I alone who am guilty."

"Wretch!" shouted the marquis, "wretch!"

"Oh," sobbed Gabrielle, "now I fear nothing! I

only ask to die; but, know at least, what hearts your children have, and how they have loved their mother."

Her words dispelled her husband's anger, as if by magic. To find that his children were indeed innocent, and in every way worthy of his love, was an unexpected and unspeakable relief and consolation.

"Rise, madame," he said, coldly, to his still kneeling wife. "I shall kill your lover."

Gabrielle rose; she was indifferent to everything in the future, even to Julien. Her life was ended, and the walls of the tomb seemed to be already closing around her. With faltering steps she retired to her own room, and fell prostrate before her crucifix; but she could not pray. Every support of her soul seemed to have been swept away.

The marquis, left alone, wished to go in search of his daughter; but his limbs refused to support him. He tried to call out, but his tongue refused to speak. A strange sensation of numbness and fatigue stole over him and held him prisoner in his chair.

It was an attack of paralysis.

He remained in this condition for some time, trying to call for assistance, but unable to articulate a word, when the door opened and Lucile

re-entered the apartment. Hearing no sound, she had supposed the room deserted. When she saw her father she started back in fright; but the look which she met was one of entreaty, not of anger. Struck by the change in his appearance, she approached him.

"Do you want anything, father?" she asked, no longer fearing for herself, but troubled by the expression of her father's face.

The marquis endeavored to reply, but his indistinct speech betrayed him.

"Ah!" cried Lucile. "You are ill—you are suffering, and it is I, I alone, who—"

He still retained the use of his right hand, and with it he made a negative gesture, and motioned his daughter to come nearer. She came and knelt beside him, with eyes uplifted and full of terror. He made a violent effort and succeeded in uttering these words:

"I bless thee, my daughter," he said, laying his hand, not without difficulty, upon her head. "Send for René."

Lucile hastened to call assistance; the marquis was removed to his own room, and a messenger was despatched to Paris for a noted physician and for the young count.

During the time that was required for the

courier to go and to return, the marquis would not allow his daughter to leave him. If she was absent from the room for a moment, he seemed much disturbed, and indicated by his gestures a desire for her immediate return, for the power of speech, which had been restored only for an instant, had now entirely failed him.

He feared that Lucile would have some conversation with her mother, and she had, in truth, found a moment in which to slip away to the marquise. They had not time for much conversation; besides, what could they say? Gabrielle knew, only too well, what must have been said during the interview between her daughter and Julien; and Lucile knew that her mother must have confessed the truth, from her father's changed manner toward herself. Tears and kisses! this was all, but no language could have been more eloquent.

The physician, accompanied by René, arrived during the night, and the former, after examining the patient, declared that the attack of paralysis was light, and only partial. Some days of rest and quiet, and some powerful remedies, would soon restore to the marquis the use of his faculties; but it would be necessary for him to use great care and precaution for a long time.

René listened to the physician's opinion of the case with breathless attention. The messenger had given him only a vague account of the cause and circumstances of his father's sudden illness, but he understood very well that his generous falsehood had been in vain, though he dared not question any one.

When he was alone with his father, who had motioned the attendants to leave the room, the marquis with great difficulty drew out from under his pillow the little portfolio which he had made his *valet-de-chambre* place there, and gave it to his son. René opened it, and read: Julien de Présanges. Stupefied with horror, and unwilling to believe the appalling truth, he looked at his father, who, seizing a pencil, wrote beneath the name, in the strange, irregular scrawl of those who are paralyzed, these two words: "Kill him!"

"Him!" exclaimed René; "him! Présanges?"

The marquis made a sign in the affirmative, and dropped his weary hand with a sigh of relief. Soon after he fell asleep, but not without having cast a look of command upon his son.

The young man went out into the park in search of solitude and repose, for his soul was overwhelmed by this terrible disclosure.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MUTUAL LOVE.

SINCE the day on which he had saved his mother by a deliberate falsehood, one purpose had been uppermost in René's mind—that of finding and killing the man who had dishonored her. He had thought of this man as a vicious and corrupt creature—a sort of tempting serpent, who, jealous of the happiness and goodness of the marquise, had stolen into their Eden.

The name of Présanges destroyed this romantic illusion. Présanges was young, handsome, and attractive. René could no longer regard it only as seduction. It was mutual love!—and this changed everything; for while Présanges was well fitted to inspire love, the marquise had been deprived of all that would have been her protection. René remembered her long years of solitude and of isolation while bereft of her children, and in his secret heart he no longer ventured to judge or condemn her.

But Présanges! his friend! his confidant! And during all their intimacy, this man had been concealing this horrible crime!

The noble counsels, the lessons of lofty morality, that had fallen from his friend's lips—were they only the fruits of base hypocrisy? Had he made use of these only to conceal this shameful outrage?

But here, too, René dared not altogether condemn. Julien might have been weak—might have sinned deeply; but he was neither vile nor depraved.

Yet, like an avenging spirit, rose up before René the honor of Maurèze. To wash out the stain from its escutcheon, he knew full well that all Julien's blood and Gabrielle's tears must flow. It was for him to satisfy its requirements. It was the inevitable!

He resolved upon his course; then turned towards the château. On his way back he met Lucile. She was seeking him, and had availed herself of her father's slumber to have a few moments' conversation with her brother.

Without wasting time in preliminaries, Lucile spoke to René at once on the subject that engrossed her thoughts.

"You are going to challenge Julien de Pré-sanges?" she asked.

"What!" cried René, in surprise. "You know all?"

"Yes. The ostensible cause of the duel would be that I have refused to marry him."

"You, too, have tried to save her!" exclaimed René, more and more amazed; for those few words of Lucile's told him all.

"But," she resumed, "the cause of this duel does not matter. You must not fight this man. Neither he nor you must die in such an encounter; it would be too horrible."

"I do not expect to die," muttered René. "If I should perish by his hand, there would be no justice in heaven."

"Neither must he die," insisted Lucile. "What would become of *her* when *she* knew that you had killed him?"

René had not thought of his mother. He had considered only the honor of his name, and he repulsed this sad thought with a wild gesture.

"He must die," he said, gloomily. "This man must not live."

"She will die," replied Lucile, softly; "and you will be her murderer!"

René indicated by a gesture that it was no fault of his; but Lucile would not desist.

"How can she look upon you when she sees between herself and you, the blood of—"

She paused; she could not mention Julien's name.

"Shall he live," exclaimed René, angrily, "to

carry with him through the world the remembrance of our disgrace—our dishonor?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Lucile, in her turn; "our dishonor, as you call it, has neither body nor soul; and had it not been for Robert's cruel machinations, neither you, nor I, nor any one else, would ever have known that it existed!"

Struck by this thought, René looked at his sister; she continued:

"Our dishonor? It may be! but no one is aware of it. You and my father have always borne yourselves proudly; you alone know of this disgrace; is it necessary for you to come forward and declare your shame to the world? Do you not think that *she* is sufficiently punished, and will the death of the man who has injured us repair the wrong?"

"Our father may die," said René, passionately; "it is only just that he who has killed him should die in his turn."

"Then," said Lucile, quickly, "kill Robert. It was he who struck our father this blow!"

"Robert is a faithful servant," replied René; "he has loved our house only too well—"

"And hated our mother!" interrupted Lucile. "So long as he is alive there is one too many on this earth for me!"

"You hate him like that?" René said, in surprise.

"He is the very spirit of evil," replied Lucile; "he does evil for evil's sake—for his hatred's sake. He is more cruel than the brutes, for they attack only when they are hungry."

There was silence for a moment.

"René," Lucile resumed, "be generous; remember how much she has loved you, what she has suffered for you. Do not bow her down with unnecessary anguish and remorse."

"I cannot disobey my father," exclaimed René.

"I do not ask you to do that," Lucile replied, quickly. "I only ask you to allow him time to disappear."

"He would flee, then!" cried René, in furious anger.

"He promised me. I entreated him to do so."

"The coward!" exclaimed the young man, laying his hand upon the sword which hung by his side. "The miserable coward! He shall die for his cowardice!"

And, in spite of Lucile's prayers and entreaties, René rushed towards the stables. A moment later she saw him riding impetuously in the direction of Présanges.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

IT was nightfall when René dismounted at Julien's door. He knew by the bright light shining from the windows of a room on the second floor, usually occupied by Julien, that he whom he sought had not yet departed from his home. René was ushered into the reception-room, and almost immediately Julien entered.

The two young men looked at each other without a word. All the friendly regard that he had formerly entertained for Julien seemed only to increase René's sense of disgrace.

With difficulty restraining his anger, he made a step towards Julien, and flung his glove on the floor at Julien's feet.

The latter did not move; his face was but imperfectly visible in the dim candle-light; yet the young count read there, not without some emotion, a mortal anguish.

"My father is dying, monsieur," René said, at last, in a voice broken by a thousand conflicting emotions; "and it is you who have killed him."

Présanges bowed his head. Who, then, was to deal him the mortal blow? Was it to be this young man whom he loved as a brother? He felt that he must reply, yet knew not what to say, as he was uncertain whether or not Lucile's stratagem had succeeded.

"Mademoiselle de Maurèze hates me," said he, in some hesitation.

"I forbid you to mention my sister," cried René, in a voice of thunder. "My sister has no connection with the cause of his illness."

Julien looked at René with so much horror, and so much pity in his gaze, that the latter felt his wrath blaze more fiercely, like a flame fed by the wind.

"Let us end this," he said, in a voice quivering with passion; "all these words are useless."

"Ah, well!" replied Présanges, in a sad, quiet tone, "kill me; you know very well that I shall make no attempt to defend myself."

René paused in dismay. In his fury he had expected anything save this.

"Then you are a coward!" he exclaimed, "and you wish me to despise you."

Julien sadly shook his head.

"You will not succeed in making me angry,"

he replied, with the same melancholy calmness. “ You cannot suppose that I would raise my hand against a son of her—”

“ Be silent! ” commanded René, drawing his sword.

“ Against a son of her whose life I would, if I could, have made a paradise, but which, alas, I have made a hell! If I fought with you, René, I might, involuntarily, defend myself, and, great God! if I should—after having already caused her so much misery and so many tears—if I should cause the blood of her son to flow—”

He spoke like one in a dream, slowly and in a monotonous tone. René was overcome, in spite of himself, by this dead indifference to personal danger. In vain he tried to revive the fury that had burned so fiercely in his breast a moment before, but he could not.

“ Yet, monsieur,” he resumed, “ you know that your life—”

“ My life is yours; take it whenever it may please you,” said Julien, sadly; “ but for God’s sake, René, let her remain in ignorance of it. Do not let her know that you are responsible for my death. Do not make her life still more horrible by the thought of my blood. Believe me, she

suffers enough already; add no more to the heavy cross she bears."

René replaced his sword in its sheath, and turned away without a word.

"You have loved her," continued Présanges. "Do you remember the time when she told you not to weep, not to give others the satisfaction of seeing your tears and hers? Yes, I know all that," he said, as he observed René's movement of surprise. "I know all her trials and sufferings, when you were far away, your sister absent, your father—"

René stopped him with an imperious gesture. Julien bowed his head.

"You are right; it is not for me to act as an accuser; but she was so miserable—more miserable than you could think possible. She was alone, no one to love her. You yourself know that she has been a martyr, as she was a saint, until the day— You are right—kill me, René, for the fault was wholly mine, and I am weary of life!"

He looked at René with eyes so full of anguish, entreaty and remorse, that the latter was overcome, and went hurriedly to the other end of the room, threw himself down into an arm-chair and buried his face in his hands.

“Yes,” continued Julien, “it is I alone who am guilty—she is an angel. It is for this reason that I entreat you now not to cause her still more sorrow. As for me, I am weary of suffering and remorse. Kill me, but never reveal the truth to her. Tell her that I fled like a coward before your just anger.”

“She will not believe it,” murmured René, forced, in spite of himself, to do Julien’s character justice.

There was silence for a while in the little *salon*. The measured movement of the pendulum of the mantel clock measured the flight of time, but the young men took no note of it, and a long interval passed in this way.

René at last raised his eyes, and his glance encountered that of Julien.

“I willingly yield myself to death,” said Pré-sanges; “willingly, yes, gladly; but she—have I not told you that she is miserable enough without adding to her sorrow?”

The young count bowed his head and reflected for a moment.

“You have loved her,” pleaded Julien; “you still love her; and in years to come, when time shall have effaced in some measure the horror of

this revelation, you will love her still more fondly. The day will come when you will regard her as an innocent victim—a victim to the customs of the time and to her education. You may then also be more merciful in your judgment of me, who will be no longer on earth—at least, I hope not,” he added, with a weary sigh.

Silence fell again upon the two young men who, only a day before, had been devoted friends, but whom henceforth nothing could ever re-unite.

“Go!” said René, at last; “go! Neither she, nor I, nor any one of us, must ever see your face again. You are right—she has suffered enough.”

Julien rose, and approached René, who had also risen, and stood ready to depart.

“You must not tell her now,” he said, in low, heart-broken tones, while his features worked convulsively—“not now; but later, when years have passed over us all; when her last hours have come, and she stands at the portals of death, tell her that I humbly entreat her forgiveness—that I have never ceased to deplore my fault—mine alone; tell her that I revere her as a mother, and as a wife, and that”—his voice faltered, and he was silent for a moment; then, with a desperate effort, he continued—“and that I hope she will

find in her last moments that heavenly joy and peace she herself brought to the bedside of my dying mother."

René could endure no more. He interrupted Julien by a gesture. It was a gesture of pardon—at least, Julien so understood, for he clasped his hands with rapturous thankfulness; and the eyes of the two young men met—this time without that expression of hatred on the part of Maurèze.

"Farewell!" said Julien, mournfully. "May God bless you and your house."

René turned, and went away without a word. An hour later, Julien, accompanied by a single servant, abandoned forever the home where he had experienced so much happiness and so much misery. He sought a refuge on the shores of America, and his name is recorded with those martyrs who fell fighting for liberty under Lafayette and Rochambeau.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SAD TIDINGS.

RENÉ returned slowly to Maurèze. He knew only too well how much his father would disapprove of the course he had taken; and, after reflection, he decided to say that he had not found Présanges.

The marquis was asleep, while Lucile sat watching beside him. The latter shuddered at the sight of her brother, and tried to read in his face what had occurred. But René's features, although dreadfully haggard and worn, did not bear the impress of violent passion. She was reassured, and asked by a gesture the question that was burning in her heart and upon her lips.

"Gone!" said René, in the faintest possible whisper.

Lucile bowed her head; a sad joy filled her poor heart, and involuntary and irrepressible tears sprang to her weary eyes. She rose, and motioned René to take her place. He looked at her inquiringly, but she made no reply to his mute questioning, and

glided from the room. There was another in the château who was suffering far more than the marquis, and whose wounded heart she must console.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, she went and tapped softly at her mother's door. It was opened by the faithful Toinon, who refused to leave her mistress either by night or by day. She would not even speak to her husband now; he had become so odious in her sight.

Gabrielle was not asleep; and there was an expression of fear in the eyes, dimmed with watching and weeping, that she turned upon Lucile, who approached the bed and dropped upon her knees beside it.

"Mother," she said, "this night René has been—"

Her mother cast upon her a look of feverish anxiety. She understood what was to follow.

"He has gone forever!" murmured Lucile. "I entreated him to do so."

A sensation of indescribable relief filled Gabrielle's heart, and great tears streamed down her cheeks. Lucile took her mother in her arms, and soothed and caressed her as if she were a sick child.

"Do not weep, my mother," she said, gently; "you know how much I love you."

"You still love me?" asked Gabrielle, through her tears.

"Always, and more than ever, my poor mother."

"She does not know how I have sinned," thought the marquise, "and when she knows it—"

"I will never leave you, mother, never," continued Lucile; "I shall never marry—"

"Why?" asked Gabrielle, moved by some irresistible impulse.

Lucile hid her crimson face in the pillow.

"Marriage is full of dangers," said she. "I shall never marry, and we will spend our lives together in praying for those who are suffering. You have told me to do that."

Gabrielle remembered under what circumstances she had bidden her daughter do this. Then, as now, it was Julien who was suffering. And Lucile—must she also suffer?

"We shall be quite happy, my mother," said Lucile, "when my father is well again."

Alas! what change would come then? But Gabrielle thought that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and that whatever the future

might have in store for her could be no worse than the present.

Lucile remained with her mother until day-break, and then returned to her father's bedside.

Some hours later, the marquise received a visit from her son. Through the long, silent hours of the night, René had meditated upon Julien's words, and that charity for the faults of others, which usually comes only with age, filled his heart. He appeared before his mother, not as a judge, but as a messenger of peace.

Gabrielle dared not interrogate him, though his look was not forbidding. What could she say to him? Was he not now the representative of the house of Maurèze—invested with all its rights and all its privileges?

No word passed between them. René lifted his mother's hot, dry hand, tenderly to his lips and then withdrew; but she understood, as plainly as if he had spoken, the result of the painful interview of the previous evening, seeing it plainly by the deference René still paid her, and in which he had never failed since the day he accused himself falsely for her sake.

The marquis improved but slowly, and each member of the family awaited with anxiety his

convalescence, for then, doubtless, there would be some important change in the mode of life at Maurèze. The marquis did not wait until then, however, to question René on the subject of his visit to Julien de Présanges. On hearing that Julien had left France, he only smiled scornfully, and after that, though he said nothing to his son, he began to think that René had not met or seen Présanges.

One day, after he was able to sit up for a few hours, he sent for his son.

“It was unfortunate,” he said, as soon as René entered the room; “extremely unfortunate, that I, myself, could not have executed that commission connected with the blue portfolio. I am quite certain that I should have been more fortunate and found the house still occupied.”

“Father,” began René, much embarrassed.

“Well, well, I do not reproach you. Your duty and mine, perhaps, were not precisely the same in this matter; and since a sudden dispensation of Providence has prevented me . . . Let him go—thank God, the ocean is broad and he will never return.”

This was the only allusion he ever made to Présanges.

Some time after this conversation, he recovered sufficiently to go down-stairs and meet his household, who were all assembled in honor of his restoration to health. There was a great crowd, and the acclamations and congratulations were many and loud, for the master was beloved in spite of Robert's severe rule, and the illness that had struck the marquis down so soon after his return had made him an object of interest to all in the neighborhood.

"Thanks, my friends, thanks," said the marquis, on finding himself surrounded by his devoted vassals; "and since you are all gathered here, I will take this opportunity to announce the fact that madame la marquise has decided to spend the winter in retirement at the convent of *Visitandines*. I say this in order that those of you who attend madame may prepare to accompany her."

Gabrielle's head drooped. No word had been exchanged between her husband and herself since the day of that terrible confession, and exile was a mild and merciful punishment in comparison with the torture of her present life at the château. But the eyes of the servants were upon her, and she lifted her head proudly and replied, in a clear, calm voice :

"I thank you, monsieur, for having acceded to my wish. If you will permit it, however, I shall take with me only Toinon, my *femme de chambre*. Her services will suffice, but are necessary to me."

"As it may please you, madame," replied the marquis, gallantly.

He was satisfied. Gabrielle had upheld the dignity of his house, and no one could detect the slightest shadow of a disagreement between the husband and wife.

"And I, my father?" asked Lucile, gently, when the marquis had returned to his own room, and was ensconced in his arm-chair.

"You," said the marquis, drawing her to him and kissing her upon the forehead with inexpressible tenderness, "you, my darling, are the angel of Maurèze. I keep you here with me."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FORGIVENESS, DEATH, AND SUICIDE.

AUTUMN had come; and a cold wind was moaning through the branches of the leafless trees, when Gabrielle re-entered the convent that had been her home during her childhood. Her retirement was to all appearance voluntary, and not in the least singular. The return of the marquis must, necessarily, have made a great change in the habits of her entire life, and nothing could be more natural than a desire on her part to leave Maurèze, at least for a while.

The mother superior gave her a reception befitting a person of such exalted rank. It was not the same superior—the other had been dead for several years—but the features only of the *religieuse* were altered. The same austere garb fell in the same rigid folds; the same dim, uncertain light stole in through the grated windows. When the doors of the cloister closed behind her, the clear, glad sound of children's voices brought back forcibly to Gabrielle's mind the scene of twenty

years before. A bevy of young girls, clustering about the top of the staircase, were looking down curiously at the noble and still beautiful lady who had come to the convent. The joyous ring of their voices made the marquise raise her head: their fresh, rosy faces were bending smilingly over her. She remembered the morning of her marriage-day, and the little bouquet of snow-drops thrown down upon her breast from a child's mischievous hand. Alas! those pure flowers had passed out from Gabrielle's life forever!

Supported by Toinon, she walked sadly through the garden, which was shut in by high gray walls. The turf where they had once gathered the snow-drops was hidden beneath the sere, dead leaves. Gabrielle mournfully shook her head. Once she had believed that another spring-time would come—that more than once in one's life one could gather flowers. But she had learned there was only one spring-time for women; that those who have failed to gather snow-drops then must be content never to know them; while those who have gathered them, only to see them quickly fade, must be content to live in their remembrance.

But Gabrielle did not look back regretfully upon

her youthful days. Since then she had suffered too much.

She lived on at *Visitandines*, sharing the tasks and devotions of the nuns, although not obliged to do so, and leading such a life of penance and self-denial that more than once she was held up as an example to the nuns themselves. Toinon did not imitate her mistress. In her opinion there were others who had greater need to expiate their sins than the marquise, and the pious acts of the latter did not excite her admiration nor even her approbation.

Still another reflection prevented Toinon's soul from soaring to these serene heights. This was the thought of Monsieur Robert's discomfiture when he found himself compelled to keep his immaculate linen in order and to wrestle with refractory buttons.

René came more than once to see his mother; but these short visits, while they gave Gabrielle much happiness, rendered her at the same time very miserable,—for the young man never referred to his father, and the marquise would have given anything on earth for a word of forgiveness from her husband.

But one day the portals opened to admit a

young creature full of life and health. It was Lucile who entered, half laughing, half crying, and Gabrielle, who had not dared hope for this visit, was so overcome that she nearly fainted. But Lucile revived her with a word.

"It was my father who sent me," she said. "He was anxious for news of you, and he wishes me to come often to see you."

That day, after Lucile had gone, Gabrielle thanked God with all the passionate fervor of her penitent soul, and felt that she was forgiven at last.

After this Lucile came to see her mother quite frequently. The health of the marquis was slowly failing. Remorse had penetrated his inmost soul and tortured him continually. He still loved Gabrielle in spite of her fault, and he was constantly saying to himself that if he had not deserted her, she would have remained blameless. This thought haunted him incessantly, and finally took complete possession of his mind.

Lucile alone had power to cheer him and to make him forget his gloomy thoughts; but Lucile knew and loved only her mother, hence her mother was naturally her chief topic of conversation. At first this was very distasteful to the marquis, but,

little by little, he became accustomed to hearing his wife spoken of, and it was through his daughter that he really learned to know his wife.

On one occasion, tormented by a thought to which he had never before dared give utterance, he asked Lucile what motive had induced her to declare herself guilty on that fatal day.

She replied frankly and without embarrassment, but not without a deep blush :

“A father does not kill his daughter, however guilty she may be. You might, perhaps, have killed my mother, and then what remorse would have been yours !”

It was the day after this conversation that the marquis sent Lucile to visit her mother.

In proportion as his strength waned, Guy de Maurèze felt his need of peace and forgiveness grow stronger.

Pride forbade him to admit this, but his powers of perception seemed to increase as his physical strength declined.

One day, while Lucile was visiting her mother at *Visitandines*, Robert entered the room.

“ You are an old mischief-maker,” the marquis said to him. “ You have ruined my happiness, and you have done no one else any good.”

"It was through my devotion to the house of Maurèze," Robert replied, "and monsieur le marquis cannot wish me to be blind to his interest."

"That is not what I mean," said his master. "You have made every one unhappy by trying to do too much, and you must be punished for it. Sit down here, and write as I dictate."

Robert seated himself, and prepared to write. But at the first words of his master he paused; upon an imperative gesture from the marquis, he resumed his work, but soon paused again.

"Well, what is it?" asked the marquis.

"Will my master excuse me?" replied Robert. "I cannot go on."

"Nevertheless, you must do so," said Maurèze, "for I desire it; and if you refuse, I discharge you."

Robert bent his head over the paper, and resumed his writing.

"That is your punishment," said the marquis, when Robert had completed his task. "It is only just that you should be punished, for you have done more harm than many a wicked man. Give it to me, that I may sign it."

He read the document and signed it, then placed it in a drawer of his writing-desk, closed

the drawer and locked it, although the desk was near at hand, and now he never left his room.

A spring and a summer passed in this manner; then, one autumn day, while the bright sunshine was falling softly on the purple hills, the Marquis de Maurèze sent for the priest, and requested him to administer the last sacrament.

"I know how I feel," he said to those around him when they expressed surprise at this request. "I am much more ill than you think. Send a messenger to Paris to summon my son—and the marquise."

While they were executing his orders, he sank rapidly—so rapidly that Lucile, who was watching over him, feared that he would expire before the arrival of those whom he desired to see once more on earth.

René came on horseback, closely followed by his mother, and the sound of her carriage wheels were soon heard in the court-yard below. At this sound the marquis made a slight movement. He had not spoken for two hours, though, on his son's entrance, he had welcomed him with a smile.

An instant after, Gabrielle entered the room. Upon seeing her the marquis lifted himself up, and drew out from beneath his pillow the document whose contents had so incensed Robert.

"These are my last wishes," said he; "I desire all present to respect them."

He spoke in a loud, clear voice, and no one would have supposed the end so near; but the shadow of death was even then gathering over his eyes.

"May each one," he continued, more feebly, "forgive me my trespasses as I forgive—. You, my wife, above all, forgive me—as I forgive you."

Gabrielle, kneeling beside his couch, bent her head—which suffering and remorse had made snow-white—and tearfully kissed her husband's hand.

The next moment, he was dead.

The will of the marquis contained the following clause :

"The entire control of and right to all my property, both real and personal, as well as the guardianship of my daughter, Lucile, is hereby given, without reservation or exception, into the hands of my wife, Anne Gabrielle de Maurèze. I beseech her to consider this last will of her husband as some atonement for the sorrow I have caused her during my life."

The marquis was mourned long and sincerely by his wife and children. Gabrielle remained at the château, and Lucile, as she had once promised,

declined all offers of marriage, that she might remain with her mother. Perhaps the remembrance of Julien, buried in the inmost recesses of her heart, rendered it invulnerable to every other love.

On the day appointed for the funeral rites of the marquis, Robert committed suicide by hanging himself in the park, near the gardener's cottage. It was generally believed that he could not survive the loss of his master, and his devotion was greatly admired.

Toinon alone seemed indifferent to his tragical end, and was more than once reproached for her indifference, even by her mistress. But when the latter reproved her, she maintained an obstinate silence, or smiled sarcastically. No one knew that she had destroyed a letter, left by Robert upon his bed, in which he had declared that he would rather die than see the marquise re-enter the château. The posthumous vengeance of this too-devoted servant did not accomplish its purpose; and, after him, no one ever disturbed the melancholy peace of Maurèze.

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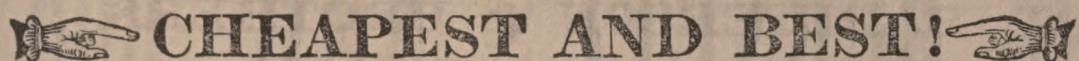
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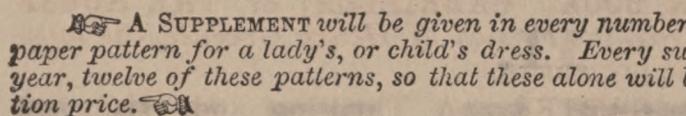
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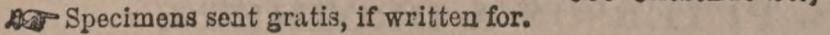
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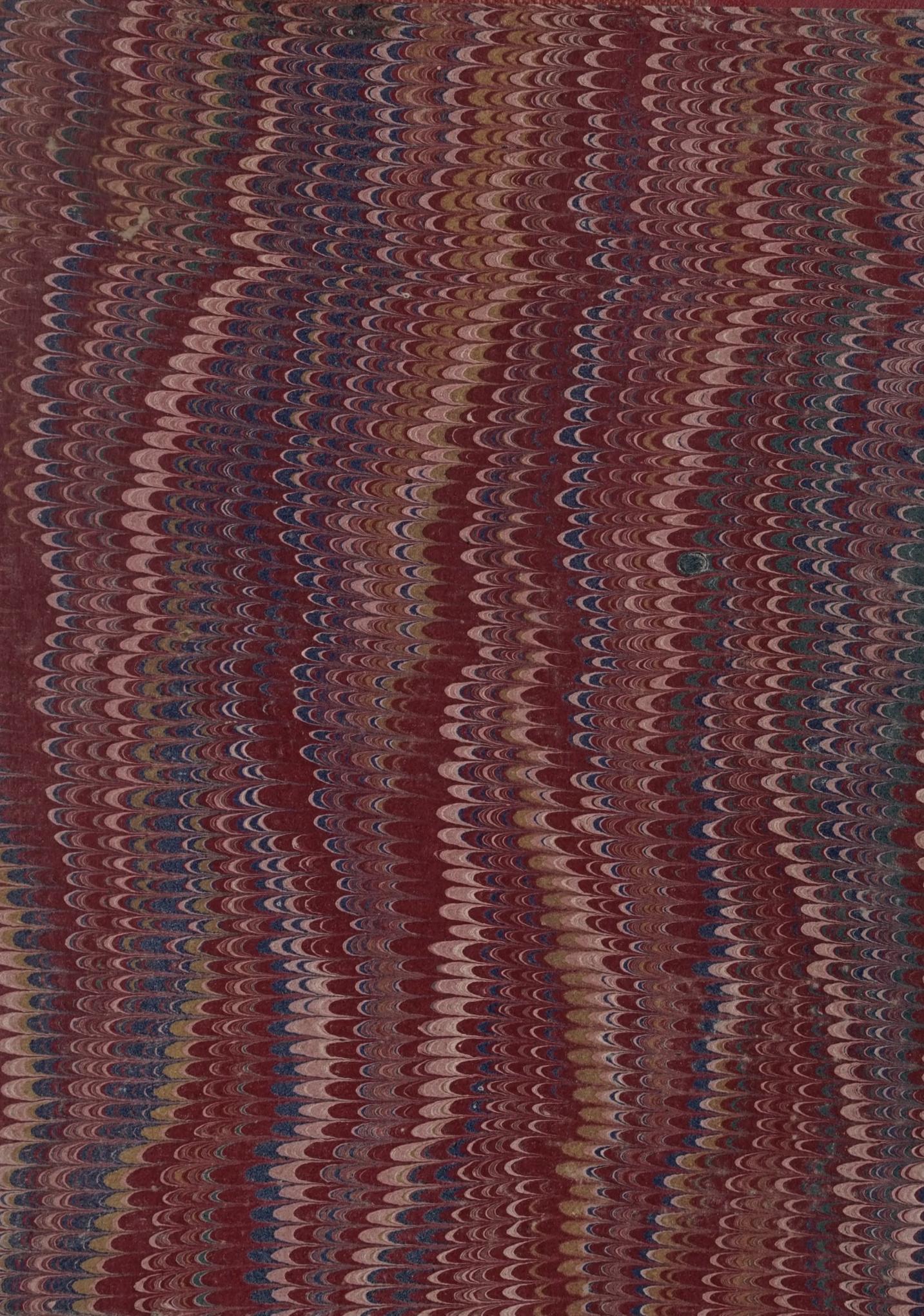
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