

Prince Zilah — Complete eBook

Prince Zilah — Complete by Jules Arsène Arnaud Claretie

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Page 1

JULES CLARETIE

Arsene Arnaud Claretie (commonly called Jules), was born on December 3, 1840, at Limoges, the picturesque and smiling capital of Limousin. He has been rightly called the “Roi de la Chronique” and the “Themistocle de la Litterature Contemporaine.” In fact, he has written, since early youth, romances, drama, history, novels, tales, chronicles, dramatic criticism, literary criticism, military correspondence, virtually everything! He was elected to the French Academy in 1888.

Claretie was educated at the Lycee Bonaparte, and was destined for a commercial career. He entered a business-house as bookkeeper, but was at the same time contributing already to newspapers and reviews. In 1862 we find him writing for the *Diogene*; under the pseudonym, “Olivier de Jalin,” he sends articles to *La France*; his nom-de-plume in *L'Illustration* is “Perdican”; he also contributes to the *Figaro*, ‘*L'Independence Belge*, *Opinion Nationale*’ (1867-1872); he signs articles in the ‘*Rappel*’ as “Candide”; in short, his fecundity in this field of literature is very great. He is today a most popular journalist and writes for the ‘*Presse*, *Petit Journal*, *Temps*’, and others. He has not succeeded as a politician. Under the second Empire he was often in collision with the Government; in 1857 he was sentenced to pay a fine of 1,000 francs, which was a splendid investment; more than once lectures to be given by him were prohibited (1865-1868); in 1871 he was an unsuccessful candidate for *L'Assemblée Nationale*, both for *La Haute Vienne* and *La Seine*. Since that time he has not taken any active part in politics. Perhaps we should also mention that as a friend of Victor Noir he was called as a witness in the process against Peter Bonaparte; and that as administrator of the *Comedie Francaise* he directed, in 1899, an open letter to the “President and Members of the Court Martial trying Captain Dreyfus” at Rennes, advocating the latter’s acquittal. So much about Claretie as a politician!

The number of volumes and essays written by Jules Claretie surpasses imagination, and it is, therefore, almost impossible to give a complete list. As a historian he has selected mostly revolutionary subjects. The titles of some of his prominent works in this field are ‘*Les Derniers Montagnards* (1867); *Histoire de la Revolution de 1870-71* (second edition, 1875, 5 vols.); *La France Envahie* (1871); *Le Champ de Bataille de Sedan* (1871); *Paris assiege and Les Prussiens chez eux* (1872); *Cinq Ans apres, L'Alsace et la Lorraine depuis l'Annexion* (1876); *La Guerre Nationale 1870-1871*’, *etc.*, most of them in the hostile, anti-German vein, natural to a “Chauvinist”; ‘*Ruines et Fantomes* (1873). *Les Femmes de la Revolution* (1898)’ contains a great number of portraits, studies, and criticisms, partly belonging to political, partly to literary, history. To the same category belong: *Moliere, sa Vie et ses OEuvres* (1873); *Peintres et Sculpteurs Contemporains*, and *T. B. Carpeaux* (1875); *L'Art et les Artistes Contemporains* (1876)’, and others. Quite different from the above, and in another phase of thought, are: ‘*Voyages d'un Parisien* (1865); *Journees de Voyage en Espagne et France* (1870); *Journees de Vacances* (1887)’; and others.

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It is, however, as a novelist that the fame of Claretie will endure. He has followed the footsteps of George Sand and of Balzac. He belongs to the school of "Impressionists," and, although he has a liking for exceptional situations, wherefrom humanity does not always issue without serious blotches, he yet is free from pessimism. He has no nervous disorder, no "brain fag," he is no pagan, not even a nonbeliever, and has happily preserved his wholesomeness of thought; he is averse to exotic ideas, extravagant depiction, and inflammatory language. His novels and tales contain the essential qualities which attract and retain the reader. Some of his works in chronological order, omitting two or three novels, written when only twenty or twenty-one years old, are: 'Pierrille, Histoire de Village (1863); Mademoiselle Cachemire (1867); Un Assassin, also known under the title Robert Burat (1867); Madeleine Bertin, replete with moderated sentiment, tender passion, and exquisite scenes of social life (1868); Les Muscadins (1874, 2 vols.); Le Train No. 17 (1877); La Maison Vide (1878); Le Troisieme dessous (1879); La Maitresse (1880); Monsieur le Ministre (1882); Moeurs du Jour (1883); Le Prince Zilah (1884), crowned by the Academy four years before he was elected; Candidat! (1887); Puyjoli (1890); L'Americaine (1892); La Frontiere (1894); Mariage Manque (1894); Divette (1896); L'Accusateur (1897), and others.

It is, perhaps, interesting to know that after the flight of the Imperial family from the Tuileries, Jules Claretie was appointed to put into order the various papers, documents, and letters left behind in great chaos, and to publish them, if advisable.

Very numerous and brilliant have also been the incursions of Jules Claretie into the theatrical domain, though he is a better novelist than playwright. He was appointed director of the Comedie Francaise in 1885. His best known dramas and comedies are: 'La Famille de Gueux, in collaboration with Della Gattina (Ambigu, 1869); Raymond Lindey (Menus Plaisirs, 1869, forbidden for some time by French censorship); Les Muscadins (Theatre Historique, 1874); Un Pyre (with Adrien Decourcelle, Gymnase, 1874); Le Regiment de Champagne (Theatre Historique, 1877); Monsieur le Ministre, together with Dumas fils and Busnach (Gymnase, 1883); and Prince Zilah (Gymnase, 1885).

Some of them, as will be noticed, are adapted to the stage from his novels. In Le Regiment de Champagne, at least, he has written a little melodramatically. But thanks to the battles, fumes of powder, muskets, and cannons upon the stage the descendants of Jean Chauvin accept it with frenetic applause. In most of the plays, however, he exhibits a rather nervous talent, rich imagination, and uses very scintillating and picturesque language, if he is inclined to do so—and he is very often inclined. He received the "Prix Vitet" in 1879 from the Academy for Le Drapeau. Despite our unlimited admiration for Claretie the journalist, Claretie the historian, Claretie the dramatist, and Claretie the art-critic, we think his novels conserve a precious and inexhaustible mine for the Faguets and Lansons of the twentieth century, who, while frequently utilizing him for the exemplification of the art of fiction, will salute him as "Le Roi de la Romance."



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Compte D'HAUSSONVILLE
de L'Academie Francaise.

Prince Zilah

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I

THE BETROTHAL FETE

"Excuse me, Monsieur, but pray tell me what vessel that is over there."

The question was addressed to a small, dark man, who, leaning upon the parapet of the Quai des Tuileries, was rapidly writing in a note-book with a large combination pencil, containing a knife, a pen, spare leads, and a paper-cutter—all the paraphernalia of a reporter accustomed to the expeditions of itinerant journalism.

When he had filled, in his running hand, a leaf of the book, the little man tore it hastily off, and extended it to a boy in dark blue livery with silver buttons, bearing the initial of the newspaper, L'Actualite; and then, still continuing to write, he replied:

"Prince Andras Zilah is giving a fete on board one of the boats belonging to the Compagnie de la Seine."

"A fete? Why?"

"To celebrate his approaching marriage, Monsieur."

"Prince Andras! Ah!" said the first speaker, as if he knew the name well; "Prince Andras is to be married, is he? And who does Prince Andras Zil—"

"Zilah! He is a Hungarian, Monsieur."

The reporter appeared to be in a hurry, and, handing another leaf to the boy, he said:

"Wait here a moment. I am going on board, and I will send you the rest of the list of guests by a sailor. They can prepare the article from what you have, and set it up in advance, and I will come myself to the office this evening and make the necessary additions."

"Very well, Monsieur Jacquemin."

"And don't lose any of the leaves."

“Oh, Monsieur Jacquemin! I never lose anything!”

“They will have some difficulty, perhaps, in reading the names—they are all queer; but I shall correct the proof myself.”

“Then, Monsieur,” asked the lounge again, eager to obtain all the information he could, “those people who are going on board are almost all foreigners?”

“Yes, Monsieur; yes, Monsieur; yes, Monsieur!” responded jacquemin, visibly annoyed. “There are many foreigners in the city, very many; and I prefer them, myself, to the provincials of Paris.”

The other did not seem to understand; but he smiled, thanked the reporter, and strolled away from the parapet, telling all the people he met: “It is a fete! Prince Andras, a Hungarian, is about to be married. Prince Andras Zilah! A fete on board a steamer! What a droll idea!”

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Others, equally curious, leaned over the Quai des Tuileries and watched the steamer, whose tricolor flag at the stern, and red streamers at the mastheads, floated with gay flutterings in the fresh morning breeze. The boat was ready to start, its decks were waxed, its benches covered with brilliant stuffs, and great masses of azaleas and roses gave it the appearance of a garden or conservatory. There was something highly attractive to the loungers on the quay in the gayly decorated steamer, sending forth long puffs of white smoke along the bank. A band of dark-complexioned musicians, clad in red trousers, black waistcoats heavily embroidered in sombre colors, and round fur caps, played odd airs upon the deck; while be vies of laughing women, almost all pretty in their light summer gowns, alighted from coupes and barouches, descended the flight of steps leading to the river, and crossed the plank to the boat, with little coquettish graces and studied raising of the skirts, allowing ravishing glimpses of pretty feet and ankles. The defile of merry, witty Parisiennes, with their attendant cavaliers, while the orchestra played the passionate notes of the Hungarian czardas, resembled some vision of a painter, some embarkation for the dreamed-of Cythera, realized by the fancy of an artist, a poet, or a great lord, here in nineteenth century Paris, close to the bridge, across which streamed, like a living antithesis, the realism of crowded cabs, full omnibuses, and hurrying foot-passengers.

Prince Andras Zilah had invited his friends, this July morning, to a breakfast in the open air, before the moving panorama of the banks of the Seine.

Very well known in Parisian society, which he had sought eagerly with an evident desire to be diverted, like a man who wishes to forget, the former defender of Hungarian independence, the son of old Prince Zilah Sandor, who was the last, in 1849, to hold erect the tattered standard of his country, had been prodigal of his invitations, summoning to his side his few intimate friends, the sharers of his solitude and his privacy, and also the greater part of those chance fugitive acquaintances which the life of Paris inevitably gives, and which are blown away as lightly as they appeared, in a breath of air or a whirlwind.

Count Yanski Varhely, the oldest, strongest, and most devoted friend of all those who surrounded the Prince, knew very well why this fanciful idea had come to Andras. At forty-four, the Prince was bidding farewell to his bachelor life: it was no folly, and Yanski saw with delight that the ancient race of the Zilahs, from time immemorial servants of patriotism and the right, was not to be extinct with Prince Andras. Hungary, whose future seemed brightening; needed the Zilahs in the future as she had needed them in the past.

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"I have only one objection to make to this marriage," said Varhely; "it should have taken place sooner." But a man can not command his heart to love at a given hour. When very young, Andras Zilah had cared for scarcely anything but his country; and, far from her, in the bitterness of exile, he had returned to the passion of his youth, living in Paris only upon memories of his Hungary. He had allowed year after year to roll by, without thinking of establishing a home of his own by marriage. A little late, but with heart still warm, his spirit young and ardent, and his body strengthened rather than worn out by life, Prince Andras gave to a woman's keeping his whole being, his soul with his name, the one as great as the other. He was about to marry a girl of his own choice, whom he loved romantically; and he wished to give a surrounding of poetic gayety to this farewell to the past, this greeting to the future. The men of his race, in days gone by, had always displayed a gorgeous, almost Oriental originality: the generous eccentricities of one of Prince Andras's ancestors, the old Magyar Zilah, were often cited; he it was who made this answer to his stewards, when, figures in hand, they proved to him, that, if he would farm out to some English or German company the cultivation of his wheat, corn, and oats, he would increase his revenue by about six hundred thousand francs a year:

"But shall I make these six hundred thousand francs from the nourishment of our laborers, farmers, sowers, and gleaners? No, certainly not; I would no more take that money from the poor fellows than I would take the scattered grains from the birds of the air."

It was also this grandfather of Andras, Prince Zilah Ferency, who, when he had lost at cards the wages of two hundred masons for an entire year, employed these men in constructing chateaux, which he burned down at the end of the year to give himself the enjoyment of fireworks upon picturesque ruins.

The fortune of the Zilahs was then on a par with the almost fabulous, incalculable wealth of the Esterhazys and Batthyanyis. Prince Paul Esterhazy alone possessed three hundred and fifty square leagues of territory in Hungary. The Zichys, the Karolyis and the Szchenyis, poorer, had but two hundred at this time, when only six hundred families were proprietors of six thousand acres of Hungarian soil, the nobles of Great Britain possessing not more than five thousand in England. The Prince of Lichtenstein entertained for a week the Emperor of Austria, his staff and his army. Old Ferency Zilah would have done as much if he had not always cherished a profound, glowing, militant hatred of Austria: never had the family of the magnate submitted to Germany, become the master, any more than it had bent the knee in former times to the conquering Turk.

From his ancestors Prince Andras inherited, therefore, superb liberality, with a fortune greatly diminished by all sorts of losses and misfortunes—half of it confiscated by Austria in 1849, and enormous sums expended for the national cause, Hungarian emigrants and proscribed compatriots. Zilah nevertheless remained very rich, and was an imposing figure in Paris, where, some years before, after long journeyings, he had taken up his abode.

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The little fete given for his friends on board the Parisian steamer was a trifling matter to the descendant of the magnificent Magyars; but still there was a certain charm about the affair, and it was a pleasure for the Prince to see upon the garden-like deck the amusing, frivolous, elegant society, which was the one he mingled with, but which he towered above from the height of his great intelligence, his conscience, and his convictions. It was a mixed and bizarre society, of different nationalities; an assemblage of exotic personages, such as are met with only in Paris in certain peculiar places where aristocracy touches Bohemianism, and nobles mingle with quasi-adventurers; a kaleidoscopic society, grafting its vices upon Parisian follies, coming to inhale the aroma and absorb the poison of Paris, adding thereto strange intoxications, and forming, in the immense agglomeration of the old French city, a sort of peculiar syndicate, an odd colony, which belongs to Paris, but which, however, has nothing of Paris about it except its eccentricities, which drive post-haste through life, fill the little journals with its great follies, is found and found again wherever Paris overflows—at Dieppe, Trouville, Vichy, Caunteret, upon the sands of Etretat, under the orange-trees of Nice, or about the gaming tables of Monaco, according to the hour, season, and fashion.

This was the sort of assemblage which, powdered, perfumed, exquisitely dressed, invaded, with gay laughter and nervous desire to be amused, the boat chartered by the Prince. Above, pencil in hand, the little dark man with the keen eyes, black, pointed beard and waxed moustache, continued to take down, as the cortege defiled before him, the list of the invited guests: and upon the leaves fell, briskly traced, names printed a hundred times a day in Parisian chronicles among the reports of the races of first representations at the theatres; names with Slav, Latin, or Saxon terminations; Italian names, Spanish, Hungarian, American names; each of which represented fortune, glory, power, sometimes scandal—one of those imported scandals which break out in Paris as the trichinae of foreign goods are hatched there.

The reporter wrote on, wrote ever, tearing off and handing to the page attached to 'L'Actualite' the last leaves of his list, whereon figured Yankee generals of the War of the Rebellion, Italian princesses, American girls flirting with everything that wore trousers; ladies who, rivals of Prince Zilah in wealth, owned whole counties somewhere in England; great Cuban lords, compromised in the latest insurrections and condemned to death in Spain; Peruvian statesmen, publicists, and military chiefs at once, masters of the tongue, the pen, and the revolver; a crowd of originals, even a Japanese, an elegant young man, dressed in the latest fashion, with a heavy sombrero which rested upon his straight, inky-black hair, and which every minute or two he took off and placed under his left arm, to salute the people of his acquaintance with low bows in the most approved French manner.

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All these odd people, astonishing a little and interesting greatly the groups of Parisians gathered above on the sidewalks, crossed the gangway leading to the boat, and, spreading about on the deck, gazed at the banks and the houses, or listened to the czardas which the Hungarian musicians were playing with a sort of savage frenzy beneath the French tricolor united to the three colors of their own country.

The Tzigani thus saluted the embarkation of the guests; and the clear, bright sunshine enveloped the whole boat with a golden aureole, joyously illuminating the scene of feverish gayety and childish laughter.

CHAPTER II

THE BARONESS'S MATCHMAKING

The Prince Zilah met his guests with easy grace, on the deck in front of the foot-bridge. He had a pleasant word for each one as they came on board, happy and smiling at the idea of a breakfast on the deck of a steamer, a novel amusement which made these insatiable pleasure-seekers forget the fashionable restaurants and the conventional receptions of every day.

"What a charming thought this was of yours, Prince, so unexpected, so Parisian, ah, entirely Parisian!"

In almost the same words did each newcomer address the Prince, who smiled, and repeated a phrase from Jacquemin's chronicles: "Foreigners are more Parisian than the Parisians themselves."

A smile lent an unexpected charm to the almost severe features of the host. His usual expression was rather sad, and a trifle haughty. His forehead was broad and high, the forehead of a thinker and a student rather than that of a soldier; his eyes were of a deep, clear blue, looking directly at everything; his nose was straight and regular, and his beard and moustache were blond, slightly gray at the corners of the mouth and the chin. His whole appearance, suggesting, as it did, reserved strength and controlled passion, pleased all the more because, while commanding respect, it attracted sympathy beneath the powerful exterior, you felt there was a tender kindness of heart.

There was no need for the name of Prince Andras Zilah—or, as they say in Hungary, Zilah Andras—to have been written in characters of blood in the history of his country, for one to divine the hero in him: his erect figure, the carriage of his head, braving life as it had defied the bullets of the enemy, the strange brilliance of his gaze, the sweet inflections of his voice accustomed to command, and the almost caressing gestures of his hand used to the sword—all showed the good man under the brave, and, beneath the indomitable soldier, the true gentleman.

When they had shaken the hand of their host, the guests advanced to the bow of the boat to salute a young girl, an exquisite, pale brunette, with great, sad eyes, and a smile of infinite charm, who was half-extended in a low armchair beneath masses of brilliant parti-colored flowers. A stout man, of the Russian type, with heavy reddish moustaches streaked with gray, and an apoplectic neck, stood by her side, buttoned up in his frock-coat as in a military uniform.

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Every now and then, leaning over and brushing with his moustaches her delicate white ear, he would ask:

“Are you happy, Marsa?”

And Marsa would answer with a smile ending in a sigh, as she vaguely contemplated the scene before her:

“Yes, uncle, very happy.”

Not far from these two was a little woman, still very pretty, although of a certain age—the age of embonpoint—a brunette, with very delicate features, a little sensual mouth, and pretty rosy ears peeping forth from skilfully arranged masses of black hair. With a plump, dimpled hand, she held before her myopic eyes a pair of gold-mounted glasses; and she was speaking to a man of rather stern aspect, with a Slav physiognomy, a large head, crowned with a mass of crinkly hair as white as lamb’s wool, a long, white moustache, and shoulders as broad as an ox; a man already old, but with the robust strength of an oak. He was dressed neither well nor ill, lacking distinction, but without vulgarity.

“Indeed, my dear Varhely, I am enchanted with this idea of Prince Andras. I am enjoying myself excessively already, and I intend to enjoy myself still more. Do you know, this scheme of a breakfast on the water is simply delightful! Don’t you find it so? Oh! do be a little jolly, Varhely!”

“Do I seem sad, then, Baroness?”

Yanski Varhely, the friend of Prince Andras, was very happy, however, despite his rather sombre air. He glanced alternately at the little woman who addressed him, and at Marsa, two very different types of beauty: Andras’s fiancée, slender and pale as a beautiful lily, and the little Baroness Dinati, round and rosy as a ripe peach. And he was decidedly pleased with this Marsa Laszlo, against whom he had instinctively felt some prejudice when Zilah spoke to him for the first time of marrying her. To make of a Tzigana—for Marsa was half Tzigana—a Princess Zilah, seemed to Count Varhely a slightly bold resolution. The brave old soldier had never understood much of the fantastic caprices of passion, and Andras seemed to him in this, as in all other things, just a little romantic. But, after all, the Prince was his own master, and whatever a Zilah did was well done. So, after reflection, Zilah’s marriage became a joy to Varhely, as he had just been declaring to the fiancée’s uncle, General Vogotzine.

Baroness Dinati was therefore wrong to suspect old Yanski Varhely of any ‘arriere-pensee’. How was it possible for him not to be enchanted, when he saw Andras absolutely beaming with happiness?

They were now about to depart, to raise the anchor and glide down the river along the quays. Already Paul Jacquemin, casting his last leaves to the page of L'Actualite, was quickly descending the gangplank. Zilah scarcely noticed him, for he uttered a veritable cry of delight as he perceived behind the reporter a young man whom he had not expected.

"Menko! My dear Michel!" he exclaimed, stretching out both hands to the newcomer, who advanced, excessively pale. "By what happy chance do I see you, my dear boy?"

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"I heard in London that you were to give this fete. The English newspapers had announced your marriage, and I did not wish to wait longer—I——."

He hesitated a little as he spoke, as if dissatisfied, troubled, and a moment before (Zilah had not noticed it) he had made a movement as if to go back to the quay and leave the boat.

Michel Menko, however, had not the air of a timid man. He was tall, thin, of graceful figure, a man of the world, a military diplomat. For some reason or other, at this moment, he exhibited a certain uneasiness in his face, which ordinarily bore a rather brilliant color, but which was now almost sallow. He was instinctively seeking some one among the Prince's guests, and his glance wandered about the deck with a sort of dull anger.

Prince Andras saw only one thing in Menko's sudden appearance; the young man, to whom he was deeply attached, and who was the only relative he had in the world (his maternal grandmother having been a Countess Menko), his dear Michel, would be present at his marriage. He had thought Menko ill in London; but the latter appeared before him, and the day was decidedly a happy one.

"How happy you make me, my dear fellow!" he said to him in a tone of affection which was almost paternal.

Each demonstration of friendship by the Prince seemed to increase the young Count's embarrassment. Beneath a polished manner, the evidence of an imperious temperament appeared in the slightest glance, the least gesture, of this handsome fellow of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years. Seeing him pass by, one could easily imagine him with his fashionable clothes cast aside, and, clad in the uniform of the Hungarian hussars, with closely shaven chin, and moustaches brushed fiercely upward, manoeuvring his horse on the Prater with supple grace and nerves like steel.

Menko's gray eyes, with blue reflections in them, which made one think of the reflection of a storm in a placid lake, became sad when calm, but were full of a threatening light when animated. The gaze of the young man had precisely this aggressive look when he discovered, half hidden among the flowers, Marsa seated in the bow of the boat; then, almost instantaneously a singular expression of sorrow or anguish succeeded, only in its turn to fade away with the rapidity of the light of a falling star; and there was perfect calm in Menko's attitude and expression when Prince Zilah said to him:

"Come, Michel, let me present you to my fiancée. Varhely is there also."

And, taking Menko's arm, he led him toward Marsa. "See," he said to the young girl, "my happiness is complete."

She, as Michel Menko bowed low before her, coldly and almost imperceptibly inclined her dark head, while her large eyes, under the shadow of their heavy lashes, seemed vainly trying to meet the gray eyes of the young man.

Andras beckoned Varhely to come to Marsa, who was white as marble, and said softly, with a hand on the shoulder of each of the two friends, who represented to him his whole life—Varhely, the past; Michel Menko, his recovered youth and the future.

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"If it were not for that stupid superstition which forbids one to proclaim his happiness, I should tell you how happy I am, very happy. Yes, the happiest of men," he added.

Meanwhile, the little Baroness Dinati, the pretty brunette, who had just found Varhely a trifle melancholy, had turned to Paul Jacquemin, the accredited reporter of her salon.

"That happiness, Jacquemin," she said, with a proud wave of the hand, "is my work. Without me, those two charming savages, so well suited to each other, Marsa and Andras Zilah, would never have met. On what does happiness depend!"

"On an invitation card engraved by Stern," laughed Jacquemin. "But you have said too much, Baroness. You must tell me the whole story. Think what an article it would make: The Baroness's Matchmaking! The romance! Quick, the romance! The romance, or death!"

"You have no idea how near you are to the truth, my dear Jacquemin: it is indeed a romance; and, what is more, a romantic romance. A romance which has no resemblance to—you have invented the word—those brutalistic stories which you are so fond of."

"Which I am very fond of, Baroness, I confess, especially when they are just a little—you know!"

"But this romance of Prince Andras is by no means just a little—you know! It is—how shall I express it? It is epic, heroic, romantic—what you will. I will relate it to you."

"It will sell fifty thousand copies of our paper," gayly exclaimed Jacquemin, opening his ears, and taking notes mentally.

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF THE ZILAHS

Andras Zilah, Transylvanian Count and Prince of the Holy Empire, was one of those heroes who devote their whole lives to one aim, and, when they love, love always.

Born for action, for chivalrous and incessant struggle, he had sacrificed his first youth to battling for his country. "The Hungarian was created on horseback," says a proverb, and Andras did not belie the saying. In '48, at the age of fifteen, he was in the saddle, charging the Croatian hussars, the redcloaks, the terrible darkskinned Ottochan horsemen, uttering frightful yells, and brandishing their big damascened guns. It seemed then to young Andras that he was assisting at one of the combats of the Middle Ages, during one of those revolts against the Osmanlis, of which he had heard so much when a child.



In the old castle, with towers painted red in the ancient fashion, where he was born and had grown up, Andras, like all the males of his family and his country, had been imbued with memories of the old wars. A few miles from his father's domain rose the Castle of the Isle, which, in the middle of the sixteenth century, Zringi had defended against the Turks, displaying lofty courage and unconquerable audacity, and forcing Soliman the Magnificent to leave thirty thousand soldiers

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beneath the walls, the Sultan himself dying before he could subjugate the Hungarian. Often had Andras's father, casting his son upon a horse, set out, followed by a train of cavaliers, for Mohacz, where the Mussulmans had once overwhelmed the soldiers of young King Louis, who died with his own family and every Hungarian who was able to carry arms. Prince Zilah related to the little fellow, who listened to him with burning tears of rage, the story of the days of mourning and the terrible massacres which no Hungarian has ever forgotten. Then he told him of the great revolts, the patriotic uprisings, the exploits of Botzkai, Bethlen Gabor, or Rakoczy, whose proud battle hymn made the blood surge through the veins of the little prince.

Once at Buda, the father had taken the son to the spot, where, in 1795, fell the heads of noble Hungarians, accused of republicanism; and he said to him, as the boy stood with uncovered head:

"This place is called the Field of Blood. Martinowitz was beheaded here for his faith. Remember, that a man's life belongs to his duty, and not to his happiness."

And when he returned to the great sombre halls of the castle, whence in bygone days the Turks had driven out his ancestors, and whence, in their turn, throwing off the yoke of the conquerors, his ancestors had driven out the Turks, little Prince Andras found again examples before him in the giants in semi-oriental costumes, glittering in steel or draped in purple, who looked down upon him from their frames; smoke-blackened paintings wherein the eagle eyes and long moustaches of black hussars, contemporaries of Sobieski, or magnates in furred robes, with aigrettes in their caps, and curved sabres garnished with precious stones and enamel, attracted and held spellbound the silent child, while through the window floated in, sung by some shepherd, or played by wandering Tzigani, the refrain of the old patriotic ballad 'Czaty Demeter', the origin of which is lost in the mist of ages—

Remember, oh, yes! remember our ancestors! Brave, proud Magyars, when you left the land of the Scythians, brave ancestors, great forefathers, you did not suspect that your sons would be slaves! Remember, oh, yes! remember our ancestors!

Andras did remember them, and he knew by heart their history. He knew the heroism of Prince Zilah Sandor falling in Mohacz in 1566 beside his wife Hanska who had followed him, leaving in the cradle her son Janski, whose grandson, Zilah Janos, in 1867, at the very place where his ancestor had been struck, sabred the Turks, crying: "Sandor and Hanska, look down upon me; your blood avenges you!"

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There was not one of those men, whose portraits followed the child with their black eyes, who was not recorded in the history of his country for some startling deed or noble sacrifice. All had fought for Hungary: the greater part had died for her. There was a saying that the deathbed of the Zilahs was a bloody battleground. When he offered his name and his life to Maria Theresa, one of the Zilah princes had said proudly to the Empress: "You demand of the Hungarians gold, they bring you steel. The gold was to nourish your courtiers, the steel will be to save your crown. Forward!" These terrible ancestors were, besides, like all the magnates of Hungary, excessively proud of their nobility and their patriarchal system of feudalism. They knew how to protect their peasants, who were trained soldiers, how to fight for them, and how to die at their head; but force seemed to them supreme justice, and they asked nothing but their sword with which to defend their right. Andras's father, Prince Sandor, educated by a French tutor who had been driven from Paris by the Revolution, was the first of all his family to form any perception of a civilization based upon justice and law, and not upon the almighty power of the sabre. The liberal education which he had received, Prince Sandor transmitted to his son. The peasants, who detested the pride of the Magyars, and the middle classes of the cities, mostly tradesmen who envied the castles of these magnates, soon became attracted, fascinated, and enraptured with this transformation in the ancient family of the Zilahs. No man, not even Georgei, the Spartanlike soldier, nor the illustrious Kossuth, was more popular in 1849, at the time of the struggle against Austria, than Prince Sandor Zilah and his son, then a handsome boy of sixteen, but strong and well built as a youth of twenty.

At this youthful age, Andras Zilah had been one of those magnates, who, the 'kalpach' on the head, the national 'attila' over the shoulder and the hand upon the hilt of the sword, had gone to Vienna to plead before the Emperor the cause of Hungary. They were not listened to, and one evening, the negotiations proving futile, Count Batthyanyi said to Jellachich:

"We shall soon meet again upon the Drave!"

"No," responded the Ban of Croatia, "I will go myself to seek you upon the Danube!"

This was war; and Prince Sandor went, with his son, to fight bravely for the old kingdom of St. Stephen against the cannon and soldiers of Jellachich.

All these years of blood and battle were now half forgotten by Prince Andras; but often Yanski Varhely, his companion of those days of hardship, the bold soldier who in former times had so often braved the broadsword of the Bohemian cuirassiers of Auersperg's regiment, would recall to him the past with a mournful shake of the head, and repeat, ironically, the bitter refrain of the song of defeat:

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Dance, dance, daughters of Hungary!
Tread now the measure so long delayed.
Murdered our sons by the shot or the hangman!
In this land of pleasure, oh! be not dismayed;—
Now is the time, brown daughters of Hungary,
To dance to the measure of true hearts betrayed!

And then, these melancholy words calling up the memory of disaster, all would revive before Andras Zilah's eyes—the days of mourning and the days of glory; the exploits of Bem; the victories of Dembiski; the Austrian flags taken at Goedolloe; the assaults of Buda; the defence of Comorn; Austria, dejected and defeated, imploring the aid of Russia; Hungary, beaten by the force of numbers, yet resisting Paskiewich as she had resisted Haynau, and appealing to Europe and the world in the name of the eternal law of nations, which the vanquished invoke, but which is never listened to by the countries where the lion is tearing his prey. And again, Zilah would remember the heroic fatherland struck down at Temesvar; the remnants of an armed people in refuge at Arad; and Klapka still holding out in the island of Comorn at the moment when Georgei had surrendered. Then, again, the obscure deaths of his comrades; the agonies in the ditches and in the depths of the woods; the last despairing cries of a conquered people overwhelmed by numbers:

Dance, dance, daughters of Hungary!

All this bloody past, enveloped as in a crimson cloud, but glorious with its gleams of hope and its flashes of victory, the Prince would revive with old Varhely, in the corner of whose eye at intervals a tear would glisten.

They both saw again the last days of Comorn, with the Danube at the foot of the walls, and the leaves of the trees whirling in the September wind, and dispersed like the Hungarians themselves; and the shells falling upon the ramparts; and the last hours of the siege; and the years of mournful sadness and exile; their companions decimated, imprisoned, led to the gallows or the stake; the frightful silence and ruin falling like a winding-sheet over Hungary; the houses deserted, the fields laid waste, and the country, fertile yesterday, covered now with those Muscovite thistles, which were unknown in Hungary before the year of massacre, and the seeds of which the Cossack horses had imported in their thick manes and tails.

Beloved Hungary, whose sons, disdaining the universe, used proudly to boast: "Have we not all that man needs? Banat, which gives us wheat; Tisza, wine; the mountain, gold and salt. Our country is sufficient for her children!" And this country, this fruitful country, was now covered with gibbets and corpses.

CHAPTER IV

"When Hungary is free!"

All these bitter memories Prince Andras, in spite of the years that had passed, kept ever in his mind one sad and tragic event—the burial of his father, Sandor Zilah, who was shot in the head by a bullet during an encounter with the Croats early in the month of January, 1849.

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Prince Sandor was able to grasp the hand of his son, and murmur in the ear of this hero of sixteen:

“Remember! Love and defend the fatherland!”

Then, as the Austrians were close at hand, it was necessary to bury the Prince in a trench dug in the snow, at the foot of a clump of fir-trees.

Some Hungarian ‘honveds, bourgeois’ militia, and Varhely’s hussars held at the edge of the black opening resinous torches, which the wintry wind shook like scarlet plumes, and which stained the snow with great red spots of light. Erect, at the head of the ditch, his fingers grasping the hand of Yanski Varhely, young Prince Andras gazed upon the earthy bed, where, in his hussar’s uniform, lay Prince Sandor, his long blond moustache falling over his closed mouth, his blood-stained hands crossed upon his black embroidered vest, his right hand still clutching the handle of his sabre, and on his forehead, like a star, the round mark of the bit of lead that had killed him.

Above, the whitened branches of the firs looked like spectres, and upon the upturned face of the dead soldier fell flakes of snow like congealed tears. Under the flickering of the torch-flames, blown about by the north wind, the hero seemed at times to move again, and a wild desire came to Andras to leap down into the grave and snatch away the body. He was an orphan now, his mother having died when he was an infant, and he was alone in the world, with only the stanch friendship of Varhely and his duty to his country to sustain him.

“I will avenge you, father,” he whispered to the patriot, who could no longer hear his words.

The hussars and honveds had advanced, ready to fire a final salvo over the grave of the Prince, when, suddenly, gliding between the ranks of the soldiers, appeared a band of Tzigani, who began to play the March of Rakoczy, the Hungarian Marseillaise, the stirring melody pealing forth in the night-air, and lending a certain mysteriously touching element to the sad scene. A quick shudder ran through the ranks of the soldiers, ready to become avengers.

The national hymn rang out like a song of glory over the resting-place of the vanquished. The soul of the dead seemed to speak in the voice of the heroic music, recalling to the harassed contestants for liberty the great days of the revolts of the fatherland, the old memories of the struggles against the Turks, the furious charges of the cavaliers across the free puszta, the vast Hungarian plain.

And while, with long sweeps of his arm, the chief of the Tzigani marked the measure, and the ‘czimbalom’ poured forth its heartrending notes, it seemed to the poor fellows gathered about that the music of the March of Rakoczy summoned a whole fantastic



squadron of avengers, horsemen with floating pelisses and herons' plumes in their hats, who, erect in their saddles and with sabres drawn, struck, struck the frightened enemy, and recovered, foot by foot, the conquered territory. There was in this exalted march a sound of horses' hoofs, the clash of arms, a shaking of the earth under the gallop of horsemen, a flash of agraffes, a rustle of pelisses in the wind, an heroic gayety and a chivalrous bravery, like the cry of a whole people of cavaliers sounding the charge of deliverance.

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And the young Prince, gazing down upon his dead father, remembered how many times those mute lips had related to him the legend of the czardas, that legend, symbolic of the history of Hungary, summing up all the bitter pain of the conquest, when the beautiful dark girls of Transylvania danced, their tears burning their cheeks, under the lash of the Osmanlis. At first, cold and motionless, like statues whose calm looks silently insulted their possessors, they stood erect beneath the eye of the Turk; then little by little, the sting of the master's whip falling upon their shoulders and tearing their sides and cheeks, their bodies twisted in painful, revolted spasms; the flesh trembled under the cord like the muscles of a horse beneath the spur; and, in the morbid exaltation of suffering, a sort of wild delirium took possession of them, their arms were waved in the air, their heads with hair dishevelled were thrown backward, and the captives, uttering a sound at once plaintive and menacing, danced, their dance, at first slow and melancholy, becoming gradually active, nervous, and interrupted by cries which resembled sobs. And the Hungarian czardas, symbolizing thus the dance of these martyrs, kept still, will always keep, the characteristic of contortions under the lash of bygone days; and, slow and languishing at first, then soon quick and agitated, tragically hysterical, it also is interrupted by melancholy chords, dreary, mournful notes and plaintive accents like drops of blood from a wound-from the mortal wound of Prince Sandor, lying there in his martial uniform.

The bronzed Tzigani, fantastically illumined by the red glare of the torches, stood out against the white background like demons of revenge; and the hymn, feverish, bold, ardent, echoed through the snow-covered branches like a hurricane of victory. They were wandering musicians, who, the evening before, had been discovered in a neighboring village by some of Jellachich's Croats, and whom Prince Sandor had unceremoniously rescued at the head of his hussars; and they had come, with their ancient national airs, the voice of their country, to pay their debt to the fallen hero.

When they had finished, the wintry night-wind bearing away the last notes of their war-song, the pistols of the hussars and the guns of the honveds discharged a salute over the grave. The earth and snow were shovelled in upon the body of Sandor Zilah, and Prince Andras drew away, after marking with a cross the place where his father reposed.

A few paces away, he perceived, among the Tzigani musicians, a young girl, the only woman of the tribe, who wept with mournful sobbings like the echoes of the deserts of the Orient.

He wondered why the girl wept so bitterly, when he, the son, could not shed a tear.

"Because Prince Zilah Sandor was valiant among the valiant," she replied, in answer to his question, "and he died because he would not wear the talisman which I offered him."

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Andras looked at the girl.

“What talisman?”

“Some pebbles from the lakes of Tatra, sewn up in a little leather bag.”

Andras knew what a powerful superstition is attached by the people of Hungary to these deep lakes of Tatra, the “eyes of the sea,” where, say the old legends, the most beautiful carbuncle in the world lies hidden, a carbuncle which would sparkle like the sun, if it could be discovered, and which is guarded by frogs with diamond eyes and with lumps of pure gold for feet. He felt more touched than astonished at the superstition of the Tzigana, and at the offer which, the evening before, Prince Sandor had refused with a smile.

“Give me what you wished to give my father,” he said. “I will keep it in memory of him.”

A bright, joyous light flashed for a moment across the face of the Tzigana. She extended to the young Prince the little bag of leather containing several small, round pebbles like grains of maize.

“At all events,” exclaimed the young girl, “there will be one Zilah whom the balls of the Croats will spare for the safety of Hungary.”

Andras slowly detached from his shoulder the silver agraffe, set with opals, which clasped his fur pelisse, and handed it to the gypsy, who regarded it with admiring eyes as it flashed in the red light.

“The day when my father is avenged,” he said, “and our Hungary is free, bring me this jewel, and you and yours come to the castle of the Zilahs. I will give you a life of peace in memory of this night of mourning.”

Already, at a distance, could be heard a rapid fusillade about the outposts. The Austrians had perhaps perceived the light from the torches, and were attempting a night attack.

“Extinguish the torches!” cried Yanski Varhely.

The resinous knots hissed as they were thrust into the snow, and the black, sinister night of winter, with the cries of the wind in the branches, fell upon the troop of men, ready to die as their chief had died; and all disappeared vision, phantoms—the Tzigani silently taking refuge in the sombre forest, while here and there could be heard the rattle of the ramrods as the honveds loaded their guns.

This January night appeared now to Andras as an almost fantastic dream. Since then he had erected a mausoleum of marble on the very spot where Prince Sandor fell; and



of all the moments of that romantic, picturesque war, the agonizing moment, the wild scene of the burial of his father, was most vivid in his memory—the picture of the warrior stretched in the snow, his hand on the handle of his sword, remained before his eyes, imperishable in its melancholy majesty.

CHAPTER V

“My father was A Russian!”

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When the war was over, the Prince roamed sadly for years about Europe—Europe, which, unmindful of the martyrs, had permitted the massacre of the vanquished. It was many years before he could accustom himself to the idea that he had no longer a country. He counted always upon the future; it was impossible that fate would forever be implacable to a nation. He often repeated this to Yanski Varhely, who had never forsaken him—Yanski Varhely, the impoverished old hussar, the ruined gentleman, now professor of Latin and mathematics at Paris, and living near the Prince off the product of his lessons and a small remnant he had managed to save from the wreck of his property.

“Hungary will spring up again, Yanski; Hungary is immortal!” Andras would exclaim.

“Yes, on one condition,” was Varhely’s response. “She must arrive at a comprehension that if she has succumbed, it is because she has committed faults. All defeats have their geneses. Before the enemy we were not a unit. There were too many discussions, and not enough action; such a state of affairs is always fatal.”

The years brought happy changes to Hungary. She practically regained her freedom; by her firmness she made the conquest of her own autonomy by the side of Austria. Deak’s spirit, in the person of Andrassy, recovered the possession of power. But neither Andras nor Varhely returned to their country. The Prince had become, as he himself said with a smile, “a Magyar of Paris.” He grew accustomed to the intellectual, refined life of the French city; and this was a consolation, at times, for the exile from his native land.

“It is not a difficult thing to become bewitched with Paris,” he would say, as if to excuse himself.

He had no longer, it is true, the magnificent landscapes of his youth; the fields of maize, the steppes, dotted here and there with clumps of wild roses; the Carpathian pines, with their sombre murmur; and all the evening sounds which had been his infancy’s lullaby; the cowbells, melancholy and indistinct; the snapping of the great whips of the czikos; the mounted shepherds, with their hussar jackets, crossing the plains where grew the plants peculiar to the country; and the broad horizons with the enormous arms of the windmills outlined against the golden sunset. But Paris, with its ever-varying seductions, its activity in art and science, its perpetual movement, had ended by becoming a real need to him, like a new existence as precious and as loved as the first. The soldier had become a man of letters, jotting down for himself, not for the public, all that struck him in his observation and his reading; mingling in all societies, knowing them all, but esteeming only one, that of honest people; and thus letting the years pass by, without suspecting that they were flying, regarding himself somewhat as a man away on a visit, and suddenly awaking one fine morning almost old, wondering how he had lived all this time of exile which, despite many mental troubles, seemed to him to have lasted only a few months.

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"We resemble," he said to Varhely, "those emigrants who never unpack their boxes, certain that they are soon to return home. They wait, and some day, catching a glimpse of themselves in a glass, they are amazed to find wrinkles and gray hairs."

No longer having a home in his own country, Prince Andras had never dreamed of making another abroad. He hired the sumptuous hotel he inhabited at the top of the Champs Elysees, when houses were rather scattered there. Fashion, and the ascensional movement of Paris toward the Arc de Triomphe, had come to seek him. His house was rich in beautiful pictures and rare books, and he sometimes received there his few real friends, his companions in troublous times, like Varhely. He was generally considered a little of a recluse, although he loved society and showed himself, during the winter, at all entertainments where, by virtue of his fame and rank, he would naturally be expected to be present. But he carried with him a certain melancholy and gravity, which contrasted strongly with the frivolous trivialities and meaningless smiles of our modern society. In the summer, he usually passed two months at the seashore, where Varhely frequently joined him; and upon the leafy terrace of the Prince's villa the two friends had long and confidential chats, as they watched the sun sink into the sea.

Andras had never thought of marrying. At first, he had a sort of feeling that he was doomed to an early death, ever expecting a renewal of the struggle with Austria; and he thought at that time that the future would bring to him his father's fate—a ball in the forehead and a ditch. Then, without knowing it, he had reached and passed his fortieth year.

"Now it is too late," he said, gayly. "The psychological moment is long gone by. We shall both end old bachelors, my good Varhely, and spend our evenings playing checkers, that mimic warfare of old men."

"Yes, that is all very well for me, who have no very famous name to perpetuate; but the Zilahs should not end with you. I want some sturdy little hussar whom I can teach to sit a horse, and who also will call me his good old Yanski."

The Prince smiled, and then replied, gravely, almost sadly: "I greatly fear that one can not love two things at once; the heart is not elastic. I chose Hungary for my bride, and my life must be that of a widower."

In the midst of the austere and thoughtful life he led, Andras preserved, nevertheless, a sort of youthful buoyancy. Many men of thirty were less fresh in mind and body than he. He was one of those beings who die, as they have lived, children: even the privations of the hardest kind of an existence can not take away from them that purity and childlike trust which seem to be an integral part of themselves, and which, although they may be betrayed, deceived and treated harshly by life, they never wholly lose; very manly and heroic in time of need and danger, they are by nature peculiarly exposed to treasons and deceptions which astonish but do not alter them. Since man, in the

progress of time, must either harden or break to pieces, the hero in them is of iron; but, on the other hand, their hearts are easily wounded by the cruel hand of some woman or the careless one of a child.

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Andras Zilah had not yet loved deeply, as it was in his nature to love. More or less passing caprices had not dried up the spring of real passion which was at the bottom of his heart. But he had not sought this love; for he adored his Hungary as he would have loved a woman, and the bitter recollection of her defeat gave him the impression of a love that had died or been cruelly betrayed.

Yanski, on the whole, had not greatly troubled himself to demonstrate mathematically or philosophically that a "hussar pupil" was an absolute necessity to him. People can not be forced, against their will, to marry; and the Prince, after all, was free, if he chose, to let the name of Zilah die with him.

"Taking life as it is," old Varhely would growl, "perhaps it isn't necessary to bring into the world little beings who never asked to come here." And yet breaking off in his pessimism, and with a vision before his eyes of another Andras, young, handsome, leading his hussars to the charge "and yet, it is a pity, Andras, it is a pity."

The decisions of men are more often dependent upon chance than upon their own will. Prince Andras received an invitation to dinner one day from the little Baroness Dinati, whom he liked very much, and whose husband, Orso Dinati, one of the defenders of Venice in the time of Manin, had been his intimate friend. The house of the Baroness was a very curious place; the reporter Jacquemin, who was there at all times, testing the wines and correcting the menus, would have called it "bizarre." The Baroness received people in all circles of society; oddities liked her, and she did not dislike oddities. Very honest, very spirituelle, an excellent woman at heart, she gave evening parties, readings from unheard-of books, and performances of the works of unappreciated musicians; and the reporters, who came to absorb her salads and drink her punch, laughed at her in their journals before their supper was digested.

The Prince, as we have said, was very fond of the Baroness, with an affection which was almost fraternal. He pardoned her childishness and her little absurdities for the sake of her great good qualities. "My dear Prince," she said to him one day, "do you know that I would throw myself into the fire for you?"

"I am sure of it; but there would not be any great merit in your doing so."

"And why not, please?"

"Because you would not run any risk of being burned. This must be so, because you receive in your house a crowd of highly suspicious people, and no one has ever suspected you yourself. You are a little salamander, the prettiest salamander I ever met. You live in fire, and you have neither upon your face nor your reputation the slightest little scorch."

"Then you think that my guests are"——

“Charming. Only, they are of two kinds: those whom I esteem, and who do not amuse me—often; and those who amuse me, and whom I esteem—never.”

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"I suppose you will not come any more to the Rue Murillo, then?"

"Certainly I shall—to see you."

And it really was to see her that the Prince went to the Baroness Dinati's, where his melancholy characteristics clashed with so many worldly follies and extravagances. The Baroness seemed to have a peculiar faculty in choosing extraordinary guests: Peruvians, formerly dictators, now become insurance agents, or generals transformed into salesmen for some wine house; Cuban chiefs half shot to pieces by the Spaniards; Cretes exiled by the Turks; great personages from Constantinople, escaped from the Sultan's silken bowstring, and displaying proudly their red fez in Paris, where the opera permitted them to continue their habits of polygamy; Americans, whose gold-mines or petroleum-wells made them billionaires for a winter, only to go to pieces and make them paupers the following summer; politicians out of a place; unknown authors; misunderstood poets; painters of the future—in short, the greater part of the people who were invited by Prince Andras to his water-party, Baroness Dinati having pleaded for her friends and obtained for them cards of invitation. It was a sort of ragout of real and shady celebrities, an amusing, bustling crowd, half Bohemian, half aristocratic, entirely cosmopolitan. Prince Andras remembered once having dined with a staff officer of Garibaldi's army on one side of him, and the Pope's nuncio on the other.

On a certain evening the Baroness was very anxious that the Prince should not refuse her latest invitation.

"I am arranging a surprise for you," she said. "I am going to have to dinner"—

"Whom? The Mikado? The Shah of Persia?"

"Better than the Mikado. A charming young girl who admires you profoundly, for she knows by heart the whole history of your battles of 1849. She has read Georgei, Klapka, and all the rest of them; and she is so thoroughly Bohemian in heart, soul and race, that she is universally called the Tzigana."

"The Tzigana?"

This simple word, resembling the clank of cymbals, brought up to Prince Andras a whole world of recollections. 'Hussad czigany'! The rallying cry of the wandering musicians of the puszta had some element in it like the cherished tones of the distant bells of his fatherland.

"Ah! yes, indeed, my dear Baroness," he said; "that is a charming surprise. I need not ask if your Tzigana is pretty; all the Tzigani of my country are adorable, and I am sure I shall fall in love with her."

The Prince had no notion how prophetic his words were. The Tzigana, whom the Baroness requested him to take in to dinner, was Marsa, Marsa Laszlo, dressed in one of the black toilettes which she affected, and whose clear, dark complexion, great Arabian eyes, and heavy, wavy hair seemed to Andras's eyes to be the incarnation, in a prouder and more refined type, of the warm, supple, nervous beauty of the girls of his country.

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He was surprised and strangely fascinated, attracted by the incongruous mixture of extreme refinement and a sort of haughty unconventionality he found in Marsa. A moment before, he had noticed how silent, almost rigid she was, as she leaned back in her armchair; but now this same face was strangely animated, illumined by some happy emotion, and her eyes burned like coals of fire as she fixed them upon Andras.

During the whole dinner, the rest of the dining-room disappeared to the Prince; he saw only the girl at his side; and the candles and polished mirrors were only there to form a sparkling background for her pale, midnight beauty.

"Do you know, Prince," said Marsa, in her rich, warm contralto voice, whose very accents were like a caress, "do you know that, among all those who fought for our country, you are the one admiration of my life?"

He smiled, and mentioned more illustrious names.

"No, no," she answered; "those are not the names I care for, but yours. I will tell you why."

And she recalled, in a voice vibrating with emotion, all that Prince Zilah Sandor and his son had attempted, twenty years before, for the liberty of Hungary. She told the whole story in the most vivid manner; had her age permitted her to have been present at those battles, she could not have related them with more spirited enthusiasm.

"I know, perfectly, how, at the head of your hussars, you wrested from the soldiers of Jellachich the first standard captured by the Hungarians from the ranks of Austria. Shall I tell you the exact date? and the day of the week? It was Thursday."

The whole history, ignored, forgotten, lost in the smoke of more recent wars, the strange, dark-eyed girl, knew day by day, hour by hour; and there, in that Parisian dining-room, surrounded by all that crowd, where yesterday's 'bon mot', the latest scandal, the new operetta, were subjects of paramount importance, Andras, voluntarily isolated, saw again, present and living, his whole heroic past rise up before him, as beneath the wave of a fairy's wand.

"But how do you know me so well?" he asked, fixing his clear eyes upon Marsa Laszlo's face. "Was your father one of my soldiers?"

"My father was a Russian," responded Marsa, abruptly, her voice suddenly becoming harsh and cutting.

"A Russian?"

“Yes, a Russian,” she repeated, emphasizing the word with a sort of dull anger. “My mother alone was a Tzigana, and my mother’s beauty was part of the spoils of those who butchered your soldiers?”

In the uproar of conversation, which became more animated with the dessert, she could not tell him of the sorrows of her life; and yet, he guessed there was some sad story in the life of the young girl, and almost implored her to speak, stopping just at the limit where sympathy might change into indiscretion.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, as she was silent, with a dark shadow overspreading her face. “I have no right to know your life simply because you are so well acquainted with mine.”

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"Oh! you!" she said, with a sad smile; "your life is history; mine is drama, melodrama even. There is a great difference."

"Pardon my presumption!"

"Oh! I will willingly tell you of my life, if the existence of a useless being like myself can interest you; but not here in the noise of this dinner. It would be absurd," with a change of tone, "to mingle tears with champagne. By-and-bye! By-and-bye!"

She made an evident effort to appear gay, like the pretty women who were there, and who, despite their prettiness, seemed to Andras perfectly insignificant; but she did not succeed in driving away the cloud of sadness which overshadowed her exquisite, dark face. And in the ears of the Prince rang again the bitter accents of that voice saying in a harsh, almost revolted tone:

"Yes, a Russian! My father was a Russian!"

CHAPTER VI

A GYPSY PRINCESS

The mystery which seemed to envelop Marsa, the flash of anger with which she had spoken of the Russian who was her father, all attracted the Prince toward her; and he experienced a deliciously disquieting sentiment, as if the secret of this girl's existence were now grafted upon his own life.

She seemed to have no wish to keep her secret from him. At their first meeting, during the conversation which followed the dinner and the musical exhibition given by extraordinary musicians with long, unkempt locks, Marsa, trusting with a sort of joy to the one whom she regarded as a hero, told Prince Andras the story of her life.

She related to him the assault made by soldiers of Paskiewich upon the little Hungarian village, and how her grandfather, leaving his czimbalom, had fired upon the Russians from the ranks of the honveds. There was a combat, or rather a butchery, in the sole street of the town, one of the last massacres of the campaign. The Russians destroyed everything, shooting down the prisoners, and burning the poor little houses. There were some women among the Hungarians and Tzigani; they had loaded the guns of the wounded, comforted the dying and avenged the dead. Many of them were killed. One of them, the youngest and prettiest, a gypsy, was seized by the Russian officer, and, when peace was declared soon after, carried off by him to Russia. This was Tisza Laszlo, Marsa's mother. The officer, a great Russian nobleman, a handsome fellow and extremely rich, really loved her with a mad sort of love. He forced her to become his mistress; but he tried in every way to make her pardon the brutality of his passion; keeping her half a captive in his castle near Moscow, and yet offering her, by way of



expiation, not only his fortune but his name, the princely title of which the Tcheretteff s, his ancestors, had been so proud, and which the daughter of wandering Tzigani refused with mingled hatred and disgust. Princess? She, the gypsy, a Russian princess? The title

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would have appeared to her like a new and still more abhorrent stigma. He implored her, but she was obdurate. It was a strange, tragic existence these two beings led, shut up in the immense castle, from the windows of which Tisza could perceive the gilded domes of Moscow, the superb city in which she would never set her foot, preferring the palace, sad and gloomy as a cell. Alone in the world, the sole survivor of her massacred tribe, the Russians to her were the murderers of her people, the assassins of the free musicians with eagle profiles she used to follow as they played the czardas from village to village.

She never saw Prince Tcheretteff, handsome, generous, charming, loving her and trembling before her glance although he had ruthlessly kidnapped her from her country, that she did not think of him, sword in hand, entering the burning Hungarian village, his face reddened by the flames, as the bayonets of his soldiers were reddened with blood. She hated this tall young man, his drooping moustache, his military uniform, his broad figure, his white-gloved hands: he represented to the imprisoned Tzigana the conqueror and murderer of her people. And yet a daughter was born to them. She had defended herself with the cries of a tigress; and then she had longed to die, to die of hunger, since, a close prisoner, she could not obtain possession of a weapon, nor cast herself into the water. She had lived, nevertheless, and then her daughter reconciled her to life. The child which was born to her was all in all to Tisza. Marsa was an exact reproduction, feature by feature, of her mother, and, strange to say, daughters generally resembling the father, had nothing of Tcheretteff, nothing Russian about her: on the contrary, she was all Tzigana—Tzigana in the clear darkness of her skin, in her velvety eyes, and her long, waving black hair, with its bronze reflections, which the mother loved to wind about her thin fingers.

Her beauty, faded by long, slow sorrow, Tisza found again in her child, a true daughter of Hungary like herself; and, as Marsa grew up, she told her the legends, the songs, the heroism, the martyrdom, of Hungary, picturing to the little girl the great, grassy plain, the free puszta, peopled with a race in whose proud language the word honor recurs again and again.

Marsa grew up in the Muscovite castle, loving nothing in the world except her mother, and regarding with frightened eyes the blond stranger who sometimes took her upon his knees and gazed sadly into her face. Before this man, who was her father, she felt as if she were in the presence of an enemy. As Tisza never went out, Marsa rarely quitted the castle; and, when she went to Moscow, she hastened to return to her mother. The very gayeties of that noisy city weighed upon her heart; for she never forgot the war-tales of the Tzigana, and, perhaps, among the passers-by was the wretch who had shot down her grandfather, old Mihal.

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The Tzigana cultivated, with a sort of passion, a love of far-off Hungary and a hatred for the master in the impressionable mind of her daughter. There is a Servian proverb which says, that when a Wallachian has crossed the threshold the whole house becomes Wallachian. Tisza did not wish the house to become Hungarian; but she did wish that the child of her loins should be and should remain Hungarian.

The servants of Prince Tcheretteff never spoke of their mistress except as The Tzigana, and this was the name which Marsa wished to bear also. It seemed to her like a title of nobility.

And the years passed without the Tzigana pardoning the Russian, and without Marsa ever having called him father.

In the name of their child, the Prince one day solemnly asked Tisza Laszlo to consent to become his wife, and the mother refused.

“But our daughter?” said the Prince.

“My daughter? She will bear the name of her mother, which at least is not a Russian name.”

The Prince was silenced.

As Marsa grew up, Moscow became displeasing to the Prince. He had his daughter educated as if she were destined to be the Czarina. He summoned to the castle a small army of instructors, professors of music and singing; French, English, and German masters, drawing masters, *etc.*, *etc.* The young girl, with the prodigious power of assimilation peculiar to her race, learned everything, loving knowledge for its own sake, but, nevertheless, always deeply moved by the history of that unknown country, which was that of her mother, and even her own, the land of her heart and her soul-Hungary. She knew, from her mother, about all its heroes: Klapka, Georgei, Dembiski; Bem, the conqueror of Buda; Kossuth, the dreamer of a sort of feudal liberty; and those chivalrous Zilah princes, father and son, the fallen martyr and the living hero.

Prince Tcheretteff, French in education and sentiment, wished to take to France the child, who did not bear his name, but whom he adored. France also exercised a powerful fascination over Marsa's imagination; and she departed joyously for Paris, accompanied by the Tzigana, her mother, who felt like a prisoner set at liberty. To quit Russian soil was in itself some consolation, and who knew? perhaps she might again see her dear fatherland.

Tisza, in fact, breathed more freely in Paris, repeating however, like a mournful refrain, the proverb of her country: Away from Hungary, life is not life. The Prince purchased, at Maisons-Lafitte, not far from the forest of Saint-Germain, a house surrounded by an

immense garden. Here, as formerly at Moscow, Tisza and the Prince lived together, and yet apart—the Tzigana, implacable in her resentment, bitterly refusing all pardon to the Russian, and always keeping alive in Marsa a hatred of all that was Muscovite; the Prince, disconsolate, gloomy, discouraged between the woman whom he adored and whose heart he could not win, and the girl, so wonderfully beautiful, the living portrait of her mother, and who treated him with the cold respect one shows to a stranger.

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Not long after their arrival in Paris, a serious heart trouble attacked Marsa's father. He summoned to his deathbed the Tzigana and her daughter; and, in a sort of supreme confession, he openly asked his child, before the mother, to forgive him for her birth.

"Marsa," he said, slowly, "your birth, which should make the joy of my existence, is the remorse of my whole life. But I am dying of the love which I can not conquer. Will you kiss me as a token that you have pardoned me?"

For the first time, perhaps, Marsa's lips, trembling with emotion, then touched the Prince's forehead. But, before kissing him, her eyes had sought those of her mother, who bowed her head in assent.

"And you," murmured the dying Prince, "will you forgive me, Tisza?"

The Tzigana saw again her native village in flames, her brothers dead, her father murdered, and this man, now lying thin and pale amid the pillows, erect, with sabre drawn, crying: "Courage! Charge! Forward!"

Then she saw herself dragged almost beneath a horse's hoofs, cast into a wagon with wrists bound together, carried in the rear of an army with the rest of the victor's spoils, and immured within Russian walls. She felt again on her lips the degradation of the first kiss of this man whose suppliant, pitiful love was hideous to her.

She made a step toward the dying man as if to force herself to whisper, "I forgive you;" but all the resentment and suffering of her life mounted to her heart, almost stifling her, and she paused, going no farther, and regarding with a haggard glance the man whose eyes implored her pardon, and who, after raising his pale face from the pillow, let his head fall back again with one long, weary sigh.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORY OF MARSZA

Prince Tcheretteff left his whole fortune to Marsza Laszlo, leaving her in the hands of his uncle Vogotzine, an old, ruined General, whose property had been confiscated by the Czar, and who lived in Paris half imbecile with fear, having become timid as a child since his release from Siberia, where he had been sent on some pretext or other, no one knew exactly the reason why.

It had been necessary to obtain the sovereign intervention of the Czar—that Czar whose will is the sole law, a law above laws—to permit Prince Tcheretteff to give his property to a foreigner, a girl without a name. The state would gladly have seized upon the fortune, as the Prince had no other relative save an outlaw; but the Czar graciously gave his permission, and Marsza inherited.

Old General Vogotzine was, in fact, the only living relative of Prince Tcheretteff. In consideration of a yearly income, the Prince charged him to watch over Marsa, and see to her establishment in life. Rich as she was, Marsa would have no lack of suitors; but Tisza, the half-civilized Tzigana, was not the one to guide and protect a young girl in Paris. The Prince believed Vogotzine to be less old and more acquainted with Parisian life than he really was, and it was a consolation to the father to feel that his daughter would have a guardian.

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Tisza did not long survive the Prince. She died in that Russian house, every stone of which she hated, even to the Muscovite crucifix over the door, which her faith, however, forbade her to have removed; she died making her daughter swear that the last slumber which was coming to her, gently lulling her to rest after so much suffering, should be slept in Hungarian soil; and, after the Tzigana's death, this young girl of twenty, alone with Vogotzine, who accompanied her on the gloomy journey with evident displeasure, crossed France, went to Vienna, sought in the Hungarian plain the place where one or two miserable huts and some crumbling walls alone marked the site of the village burned long ago by Tchereteff's soldiers; and there, in Hungarian soil, close to the spot where the men of her tribe had been shot down, she buried the Tzigana, whose daughter she so thoroughly felt herself to be, that, in breathing the air of the puszta, she seemed to find again in that beloved land something already seen, like a vivid memory of a previous existence.

And yet, upon the grave of the martyr, Marsa prayed also for the executioner. She remembered that the one who reposed in the cemetery of Pere-Lachaise, beneath a tomb in the shape of a Russian dome, was her father, as the Tzigana, interred in Hungary, was her mother; and she asked in her prayer, that these two beings, separated in life, should pardon each other in the unknown, obscure place of departed souls.

So Marsa Laszlo was left alone in the world. She returned to France, which she had become attached to, and shut herself up in the villa of Maisons-Lafitte, letting old Vogotzine install himself there as a sort of Mentor, more obedient than a servant, and as silent as a statue; and this strange guardian, who had formerly fought side by side with Schamyl, and cut down the Circassians with the sang-froid of a butcher's boy wringing the neck of a fowl, and who now scarcely dared to open his lips, as if the entire police force of the Czar had its eye upon him; this old soldier, who once cared nothing for privations, now, provided he had his chocolate in the morning, his kummel with his coffee at breakfast, and a bottle of brandy on the table all day—left Marsa free to think, act, come and go as she pleased.

She had accepted the Prince's legacy, but with this mental reservation and condition, that the Hungarian colony of Paris should receive half of it. It seemed to her that the money thus given to succor the compatriots of her mother would be her father's atonement. She waited, therefore, until she had attained her majority; and then she sent this enormous sum to the Hungarian aid society, saying that the donor requested that part of the amount should be used in rebuilding the little village in Transylvania which had been burned twenty years before by Russian troops. When they asked what name should be attached to so princely a gift, Marsa replied: "That which was my mother's and which is mine, The Tzigana." More than ever now did she cling to that cognomen of which she was so proud.

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"And," she said to Zilah, after she had finished the recital of her story, "it is because I am thus named that I have the right to speak to you of yourself."

Prince Andras listened with passionate attention to the beautiful girl, thus evoking for him the past, confident and even happy to speak and make herself known to the man whose life of heroic devotion she knew so well.

He was not astonished at her sudden frankness, at the confidence displayed at a first meeting; and it seemed to him that he had long been acquainted with this Tzigana, whose very name he had been ignorant of a few hours before. It appeared to him quite simple that Marsa should confide in him, as he on his side would have related to her his whole life, if she had asked it with a glance from her dark eyes. He felt that he had reached one of the decisive moments of his life. Marsa called up visions of his youth—his first tender dreams of love, rudely broken by the harsh voice of war; and he felt as he used to feel, in the days long gone by, when he sat beneath the starry skies of a summer night and listened to the old, heart-stirring songs of his country and the laughter of the brown maidens of Budapest.

"Prince," said Marsa Laszlo, suddenly, "do you know that I have been seeking you for a long time, and that when the Baroness Dinati presented you to me, she fulfilled one of my most ardent desires?"

"Me, Mademoiselle? You have been seeking me?"

"Yes, you. Tisza, of whom I spoke to you, my Tzigana mother, who bore the name of the blessed river of our country, taught me to repeat your name. She met you years ago, in the saddest moment of your life."

"Your mother?" said Andras, waiting anxiously for the young girl to continue.

"Yes, my mother."

She pointed to the buckle which clasped the belt of her dress.

"See," she said.

Andras felt a sudden pang, which yet was not altogether pain, dart through his heart, and his eyes wandered questioningly from the buckle to Marsa's face. Smiling, but her beautiful lips mute, Marsa seemed to say to him: "Yes, it is the agraffe which you detached from your soldier's pelisse and gave to an unknown Tzigana near your father's grave."

The silver ornament, incrusting with opals, recalled sharply to Prince Zilah that sad January night when the dead warrior had been laid in his last resting-place. He saw again the sombre spot, the snowy fir-trees, the black trench, and the broad, red

reflections of the torches, which, throwing a flickering light upon the dead, seemed to reanimate the pale, cold face.

And that daughter of the wandering musicians who had, at the open grave, played as a dirge, or, rather, as a ringing hymn of resurrection and deliverance, the chant of the fatherland—that dark girl to whom he had said: “Bring me this jewel, and come and live in peace with the Zilahs”—was the mother of this beautiful, fascinating creature, whose every word, since he had first met her a few hours before, had exercised such a powerful effect upon him.

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"So," he said, slowly, with a sad smile, "your mother's talisman was worth more than mine. I have kept the lake pebbles she gave me, and death has passed me by; but the opals of the agraffe did not bring happiness to your mother. It is said that those stones are unlucky. Are you superstitious?"

"I should not be Tisza's daughter if I did not believe a little in all that is romantic, fantastic, improbable, impossible even. Besides, the opals are forgiven now: for they have permitted me to show you that you were not unknown to me, Prince; and, as you see, I wear this dear agraffe always. It has a double value to me, since it recalls the memory of my poor mother and the name of a hero."

She spoke these words in grave, sweet accents, which seemed more melodious to Prince Andras than all the music of Baroness Dinati's concert. He divined that Marsa Laszlo found as much pleasure in speaking to him as he felt in listening. As he gazed at her, a delicate flush spread over Marsa's pale, rather melancholy face, tingeing even her little, shell-like ears, and making her cheeks glow with the soft, warm color of a peach.

Just at this moment the little Baroness came hastily up to them, and, with an assumed air of severity, began to reproach Marsa for neglecting the unfortunate musicians, suddenly breaking off to exclaim:

"Really, you are a hundred times prettier than ever this evening, my dear Marsa. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh! it is because I am very happy, I suppose," replied Marsa.

"Ah! my dear Prince," and the Baroness broke into a merry peal of laughter, "it is you, O ever-conquering hero, who have worked this miracle."

But, as if she had been too hasty in proclaiming aloud her happiness, the Tzigana suddenly frowned, a harsh, troubled look crept into her dark eyes, and her cheeks became pale as marble, while her gaze was fixed upon a tall young man who was crossing the salon and coming toward her.

Instinctively Andras Zilah followed her look. Michel Menko was advancing to salute Marsa Laszlo, and take with affectionate respect the hand which Andras extended to him.

Marsa coldly returned the low bow of the young man, and took no part in the conversation which followed. Menko remained but a few moments, evidently embarrassed at his reception; and after his departure, Zilah, who had noticed the Tzigana's coldness, asked her if she knew his friend.

"Very well," she said, in a peculiar tone.

“It would be difficult to imagine so from the way in which you received him,” said Andras, laughing. “Poor Michel! Have you any reason to be angry with him?”

“None.”

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"I like him very much. He is a charming boy, and his father was one of my companions in arms. I have been almost a guardian to his son. We are kinsmen, and when the young count entered diplomacy he asked my advice, as he hesitated to serve Austria. I told him that, after having fought Austria with the sword, it was our duty to absorb it by our talents and devotion. Was I not right? Austria is to-day subservient to Hungary, and, when Vienna acts, Vienna glances toward Pesth to see if the Magyars are satisfied. Michel Menko has therefore served his country well; and I don't understand why he gave up diplomacy. He makes me uneasy: he seems to me, like all young men of his generation, a little too undecided what object to pursue, what duty to fulfil. He is nervous, irresolute. We were more unfortunate but more determined; we marched straight on without that burden of pessimism with which our successors are loaded down. I am sorry that Michel has resigned his position: he had a fine future before him, and he would have made a good diplomatist."

"Too good, perhaps," interrupted Marsa, dryly.

"Ah, decidedly," retorted the Prince, with a smile, "you don't like my poor Menko."

"He is indifferent to me;" and the way in which she pronounced the words was a terrible condemnation of Michel Menko. "But," added the Tzigana, "he himself has told me all that you have said of him. He, on his side, has a great affection and a deep veneration for you; and it is not astonishing that it should be so, for men like you are examples for men like him, and—"

She paused abruptly, as if unwilling to say more.

"And what?" asked the Prince.

"Nothing. 'Examples' is enough; I don't know what I was going to say."

She made a little gesture with her pretty hand as if to dismiss the subject; and, after wondering a moment at the girl's singular reticence after her previous frankness, Andras thought only of enjoying her grace and charm, until the Tzigana gave him her hand and bade him good-night, begging him to remember that she would be very happy and proud to receive him in her own house.

"But, indeed," she added, with a laugh which displayed two rows of pearly teeth, "it is not for me to invite you. That is a terrible breach of the proprieties. General!"

At her call, from a group near by, advanced old General Vogotzine, whom Zilah had not noticed since the beginning of the evening. Marsa laid her hand on his arm, and said, distinctly, Vogotzine being a little deaf:

"Prince Andras Zilah, uncle, will do us the honor of coming to see us at Maisons-Lafitte."

“Ah! Ah! Very happy! Delighted! Very flattering of you, Prince,” stammered the General, pulling his white moustache, and blinking his little round eyes. “Andras Zilah! Ah! 1848! Hard days, those! All over now, though! All over now! Ah! Ah! We no longer cut one another’s throats! No! No! No longer cut one another’s throats!”

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He held out to Andras his big, fat hand, and repeated, as he shook that of the Prince:

“Delighted! Enchanted! Prince Zilah! Yes! Yes!”

In another moment they were gone, and the evening seemed to Andras like a vision, a beautiful, feverish dream.

He sent away his coupe, and returned home on foot, feeling the need of the night air; and, as he walked up the Champs-Elysees beneath the starry sky, he was surprised to find a new, youthful feeling at his heart, stirring his pulses like the first, soft touch of spring.

CHAPTER VIII

“Have I no right to be happy”

There was a certain womanly coquetry, mingled with a profound love of the soil where her martyred mother reposed, in the desire which Marsa Laszlo had to be called the Tzigana, instead of by her own name. The Tzigana! This name, as clear cut, resonant and expressive as the czimbaloms of the Hungarian musicians, lent her an additional, original charm. She was always spoken of thus, when she was perceived riding her pure-blooded black mare, or driving, attached to a victoria, a pair of bay horses of the Kisber breed. Before the horses ran two superb Danish hounds, of a lustrous dark gray, with white feet, eyes of a peculiar blue, rimmed with yellow, and sensitive, pointed ears—Duna and Bundas, the Hungarian names for the Danube and the Velu.

These hounds, and an enormous dog of the Himalayas, with a thick, yellow coat and long, sharp teeth, a half-savage beast, bearing the name of Ortog (Satan), were Marsa's companions in her walks; and their submission to their young mistress, whom they could have knocked down with one pat of their paws, gave the Tzigana reputation for eccentricity; which, however, neither pleased nor displeased her, as she was perfectly indifferent to the opinion of the public at large.

She continued to inhabit, near the forest of Saint-Germain, beyond the fashionable avenues, the villa, ornamented with the holy Muscovite icon, which Prince Tcheretteff had purchased; and she persisted in remaining there alone with old Vogotzine, who regarded her respectfully with his round eyes, always moist with ‘kwass’ or brandy.

Flying the crowded city, eager for space and air, a true daughter of Hungary, Marsa loved to ride through the beautiful, silent park, down the long, almost deserted avenues, toward the bit of pale blue horizon discernible in the distance at the end of the sombre arch formed by the trees. Birds, startled by the horses' hoofs, rose here and there out of the bushes, pouring forth their caroling to the clear ether; and Marsa, spurring her thoroughbred, would dash in a mad gallop toward a little, almost unknown grove of

oaks, with thickets full of golden furze and pink heather, where woodcutters worked, half buried in the long grass peppered with blue cornflowers and scarlet poppies.

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Or, at other times, with Duna and Bundas bounding before her, disappearing, returning, disappearing again with yelps of joy, it was Marsa's delight to wander alone under the great limes of the Albine avenue—shade over her head, silence about her—and then slowly, by way of a little alley bordered with lofty poplars trembling at every breath of wind, to reach the borders of the forest. In ten steps she would suddenly find herself plunged in solitude as in a bath of verdure, shade and oblivion. The sweet silence surrounding her calmed her, and she would walk on and on though the thick grass under the great trees. The trunks of the giant oaks were clothed in robes of emerald moss, and wild flowers of all descriptions raised their heads amid the grass. There was no footstep, no sound; a bee lazily humming, a brilliant butterfly darting across the path, something quick and red flashing up a tree—a squirrel frightened by the Danish hounds; that was all. And Marsa was happy with the languorous happiness which nature gives, her forehead cooled by the fresh breeze, her eyes rested by the deep green which hid the shoes, her whole being refreshed by the atmosphere of peace which fell from the trees.

Then, calling her dogs, she would proceed to a little farmhouse, and, sitting down under the mulberry trees, wait until the farmer's wife brought her some newly baked bread and a cup of milk, warm from the cows. Then she would remain idly there, surrounded by chickens, ducks, and great, greedy geese, which she fed, breaking the bread between her white fingers, while Duna and Bundas crouched at her feet, pricking up their ears, and watching these winged denizens of the farmyard, which Marsa forbade them to touch. Finally the Tzigana would slowly wend her way home, enter the villa, sit down before the piano, and play, with ineffable sweetness, like souvenirs of another life, the free and wandering life of her mother, the Hungarian airs of Janos Nemeth, the sad "Song of Plevna," the sparkling air of "The Little Brown Maid of Budapest," and that bitter; melancholy romance, "The World holds but One Fair Maiden," a mournful and despairing melody, which she preferred to all others, because it responded, with its tearful accents, to a particular state of her own heart.

The girl was evidently concealing some secret suffering. The bitter memory of her early years? Perhaps. Physical pain? Possibly. She had been ill some years before, and had been obliged to pass a winter at Pau. But it seemed rather some mental anxiety or torture which impelled the Tzigana to seek solitude and silence in her voluntary retreat.

The days passed thus in that villa of Maisons-Lafitte, where Tisza died. Very often, in the evening, Marsa would shut herself up in the solitude of that death-chamber, which remained just as her mother had left it. Below, General Vogotzine smoked his pipe, with a bottle of brandy for company: above, Marsa prayed.

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One night she went out, and through the sombre alleys, in the tender light of the moon, made her way to the little convent in the Avenue Egle, where the blue sisters were established; those sisters whom she often met in the park, with their full robes of blue cloth, their white veils, a silver medallion and crucifix upon their breasts, and a rosary of wooden beads suspended at their girdles. The little house of the community was shut, the grating closed. The only sign of life was in the lighted windows of the chapel.

Marsa paused there, leaning her heated brow against the cold bars of iron, with a longing for death, and a terrible temptation to end all by suicide.

"Who knows?" she murmured. "Perhaps forgetfulness, deep, profound forgetfulness, lies within these walls." Forgetfulness! Marsa, then, wished to forget? What secret torture gave to her beautiful face that expression so bitter, so terrible in its agony?

She stood leaning there, gazing at the windows of the chapel. Broken words of prayers, of muttered verses and responses, reached her like the tinkling of far-off chimes, like the rustling of invisible wings. The blue sisters, behind those walls, were celebrating their vesper service.

Does prayer drive away anguish and heartrending memories?

Marsa was a Catholic, her mother having belonged to the minority of Tzigani professing the faith of Rome; and Tisza's daughter could, therefore, bury her youth and beauty in the convent of the blue sisters.

The hollow murmur of the verses and prayers, which paused, began again, and then died away in the night like sighs, attracted her, and, like the trees of the forest, gave her an impression of that peace, that deep repose, which was the longed-for dream of her soul.

But, suddenly, the Tzigana started, removed her gaze from the light streaming through the blue and crimson glass, and hurried away, crying aloud in the darkness:

"No! repose is not there. And, after all, where is repose? Only in ourselves! It can be found nowhere, if it is not in the heart!"

Then, after these hours of solitude, this longing for the cloister, this thirsting for annihilation and oblivion, Marsa would experience a desire for the dashing, false, and frivolous life of Paris. She would quit Maisons, taking with her a maid, or sometimes old Vogotzine, go to some immense hotel, like the Continental or the Grand, dine at the table d'hôte, or in the restaurant, seeking everywhere bustle and noise, the antithesis of the life of shade and silence which she led amid the leafy trees of her park. She would show herself everywhere, at races, theatres, parties—as when she accepted the Baroness Dinati's invitation; and, when she became nauseated with all the artificiality of

worldly life, she would return eagerly to her woods, her dogs and her solitude, and, if it were winter, would shut herself up for long months in her lonely, snow-girt house.

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And was not this existence sweet and pleasant, compared with the life led by Tisza in the castle of the suburbs of Moscow?

In this solitude, in the villa of Maisons-Lafitte, Andras Zilah was again to see Marsa Laszlo. He came not once, but again and again. He was, perhaps, since the death of Prince Tcheretteff, the only man General Vogotzine had seen in his niece's house, and Marsa was always strangely happy when Andras came to see her.

"Mademoiselle is very particular when Prince Zilah is coming to Maisons," said her maid to her.

"Because Prince Zilah is not a man like other men. He is a hero. In my mother's country there is no name more popular than his."

"So I have heard Count Menko say to Mademoiselle."

If it were the maid's wish to remove all happiness from her mistress's face, she had met with complete success.

At the name of Menko, Marsa's expression became dark and threatening. Prince Andras had noticed this same change in the Tzigana's face, when he was speaking to her at Baroness Dinati's.

The Prince had forgotten no detail of that first fascinating interview, at which his love for the Tzigana was born. This man, who had hardly any other desire than to end in peace a life long saddened by defeat and exile, suddenly awoke to a happy hope of a home and family joys. He was rich, alone in the world, and independent; and he was, therefore, free to choose the woman to be made his princess. No caste prejudice prevented him from giving his title to the daughter of Tisza. The Zilahs, in trying to free their country, had freed themselves from all littleness; and proud, but not vain, they bore but slight resemblance to those Magyars of whom Szechenyi, the great count, who died of despair in 1849, said: "The overweening haughtiness of my people will be their ruin."

The last of the Zilahs did not consider his pride humiliated by loving and wedding a Tzigana. Frankly, in accents of the deepest love and the most sincere devotion, Andras asked Marsa Laszlo if she would consent to become his wife. But he was terrified at the expression of anguish which passed over the pale face of the young girl.

Marsa, Princess Zilah! Like her mother, she would have refused from a Tcheretteff this title of princess which Andras offered her, nay, laid at her feet with passionate tenderness. But—Princess Zilah!

She regarded with wild eyes the Prince, who stood before her, timid and with trembling lips, awaiting her reply. But, as she did not answer, he stooped over and took her hands in his.

“What is it?” he cried; for Marsa’s fingers were icy.

It cost the young girl a terrible effort to prevent herself from losing consciousness.

“But speak to me, Marsa,” exclaimed Andras, “do not keep me in suspense.”

He had loved her now for six months, and an iron hand seemed to clutch the heart of this man, who had never known what it was to fear, at the thought that perhaps Marsa did not return his love.

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He had, doubtless, believed that he had perceived in her a tender feeling toward himself which had emboldened him to ask her to be his wife. But had he been deceived? Was it only the soldier in him that had pleased Marsa? Was he about to suffer a terrible disappointment? Ah, what folly to love, and to love at forty years, a young and beautiful girl like Marsa!

Still, she made him no answer, but sat there before him like a statue, pale to the lips, her dark eyes fixed on him in a wild, horrified stare.

Then, as he pressed her, with tears in his voice, to speak, she forced her almost paralyzed tongue to utter a response which fell, cruel as a death-sentence, upon the heart of the hero:

“Never!”

Andras stood motionless before her in such terrible stillness that she longed to throw herself at his feet and cry out: “I love you! I love you! But your wife—no, never!”

She loved him? Yes, madly-better than that, with a deep, eternal passion, a passion solidly anchored in admiration, respect and esteem; with an unconquerable attraction toward what represented, to her harassed soul, honor without a blemish, perfect goodness in perfect courage, the immolation of a life to duty, all incarnate in one man, radiant in one illustrious name—Zilah.

And Andras himself divined something of this feeling; he felt that Marsa, despite her enigmatical refusal, cared for him in a way that was something more than friendship; he was certain of it. Then, why did she command him thus with a single word to despair? “Never!” She was not free, then? And a question, for which he immediately asked her pardon by a gesture, escaped, like the appeal of a drowning man, from his lips:

“Do you love some one else, Marsa?”

She uttered a cry.

“No! I swear to you—no!”

He urged her, then, to explain what was the meaning of her refusal, of the fright she had just shown; and, in a sort of nervous hysteria which she forced herself to control, in the midst of stifled sobs, she told him that if she could ever consent to unite herself to anyone, it would be to him, to him alone, to the hero of her country, to him whose chivalrous devotion she had admired long before she knew him, and that now—And here she stopped short, just on the brink of an avowal.

“Well, now? Now?” demanded Andras, awaiting the word which, in her overstrung condition, Marsa had almost spoken. “Now?”

But she did not speak these words which Zilah begged for with newly awakened hope. She longed to end this interview which was killing her, and in broken accents asked him to excuse her, to forgive her—but she was really ill.

“But if you are suffering, I can not, I will not leave you.”

“I implore you. I need to be alone.”

“At least you will permit me to come to-morrow, Marsa, and ask for your answer?”

“My answer? I have given it to you.”

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"No! No! I do not accept that refusal. No! you did not know what you were saying. I swear to you, Marsa, that without you life is impossible to me; all my existence is bound up in yours. You will reflect there was an accent in your voice which bade me hope. I will come again to-morrow. Tomorrow, Marsa. What you have said to-day does not count. Tomorrow, to-morrow; and remember that I adore you."

And she, shuddering at the tones of his voice, not daring to say no, and to bid him an eternal farewell, let him depart, confident, hopeful, despite the silence to which she obstinately, desperately clung. Then, when Andras was gone, at the end of her strength, she threw herself, like a mad woman, down upon the divan. Once alone, she gave way utterly, sobbing passionately, and then, suddenly ceasing, with wild eyes fixed upon vacancy, to mutter with dry, feverish lips:

"Yet—it is life he brings to me—happiness he offers me. Have I no right to be happy—I? My God! To be the wife of such a man! To love him—to devote myself to him—to make his existence one succession of happy days! To be his slave, his thing! Shall I marry him? Or—shall I kill myself? Kill myself!" with a horrible, agonizing laugh. "Yes, that is the only thing for me to do. But—but—I am a coward, now that I love him—a coward! a coward! a miserable wretch!" And she fell headlong forward, crouching upon the floor in a fierce despair, as if either life or reason was about to escape from her forever.

CHAPTER IX

"O liberty! O love! These two I need!"

When Zilah came the next day he found Marsa perfectly calm. At first he only questioned her anxiously as to her health.

"Oh! I am well," she replied, smiling a little sadly; and, turning to the piano at which she was seated, she began to play the exquisitely sad romance which was her favorite air.

"That is by Janos Nemeth, is it not?" asked the Prince.

"Yes, by Janos Nemeth. I am very fond of his music; it is so truly Hungarian in its spirit."

The music fell upon the air like sighs—like the distant tones of a bell tolling a requiem—a lament, poetic, mournful, despairing, yet ineffably sweet and tender, ending in one deep, sustained note like the last clod of earth falling upon a new-made grave.

"What is that called, Marsa?" said Andras.

She made no reply.

Rising, he looked at the title, printed in Hungarian; then, leaning over the Tzigana till his breath fanned her cheek, he murmured:

“Janos Nemeth was right. The world holds but one fair maiden.”

She turned very pale, rose from the piano, and giving him her hand, said:

“It is almost a madrigal, my dear Prince, is it not? I am going to be frank with you. You love me, I know; and I also love you. Will you give me a month to reflect? A whole month?”

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"My entire life belongs to you now," said the Prince. "Do with it what you will."

"Well! Then in a month I will give you your answer," she said firmly.

"But," said Andras, smiling beneath his blond moustache, "remember that I once, took for my motto the verses of Petoefi. You know well those beautiful verses of our country:

O Liberty! O Love!
These two I need.
My chosen meed,
To give my love for Liberty,
My life for Love.

"Well," he added, "do you know, at this moment the Andras Zilah of 'forty-eight would almost give liberty, that passion of his whole life, for your love, Marsa, my own Marsa, who are to me the living incarnation of my country."

Marsa was moved to the depths of her heart at hearing this man speak such words to her. The ideal of the Tzigana, as it is of most women, was loyalty united with strength. Had she ever, in her wildest flights of fancy, dreamed that she should hear one of the heroes of the war of independence, a Zilah Andras, supplicate her to bear his name?

Marsa knew Yanski Varhely. The Prince had brought him to see her at Maisons-Lafitte. She was aware that Count Varhely knew the Prince's most secret thoughts, and she was certain that Andras had confided all his hopes and his fears to his old friend.

"What do you think would become of the Prince if I should not marry him?" she asked him one day without warning.

"That is a point-blank question which I hardly expected," said Yanski, gazing at her in astonishment. "Don't you wish to become a Zilah?"

Any hesitation even seemed to him insulting, almost sacrilegious.

"I don't say that," replied the Tzigana, "but I ask you what would become of the Prince if, for one reason or another—"

"I can very easily inform you," interrupted Varhely. "The Prince, as you must be aware, is one of those men who love but once during their lives. Upon my word of honor, I believe that, if you should refuse him, he would commit some folly, some madness, something—fatal. Do you understand?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Marsa, with an icy chill in her veins.

“That is my opinion,” continued Yanski, harshly. “He is wounded. It remains with you to decide whether the bullet be mortal or not.”

Varhely’s response must have had great weight in Marsa Laszlo’s reflections, full of anguish, fever, revolt and despair as they were, during the few weeks preceding the day upon which she had promised to tell Prince Andras if she would consent to become his wife or not. It was a yes, almost as curt as another refusal, which fell at last from the lips of the Tzigana. But the Prince was not cool enough to analyze an intonation.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “I have suffered so much during these weeks of doubt; but this happiness makes amends for all.”

“Do you know what Varhely said to me?” asked Marsa.

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"Yes, I know."

"Well, since the Zilahs treat their love-affairs as they do their duels, and risk their whole existence, so be it! I accept. Your existence for mine! Gift for gift! I do not wish you to die!"

He did not try to understand her; but he took her burning hands between his own, and covered them with kisses. And she, with trembling lip, regarded, through her long eyelashes, the brave man who now bent before her, saying: "I love you."

Then, in that moment of infinite happiness, on the threshold of the new life which opened before her, she forgot all to think only of the reality, of the hero whose wife she was to be. His wife! So, as in a dream, without thinking, without resisting, abandoning herself to the current which bore her along, not trying to take account of time or of the future, loving, and beloved, living in a sort of charmed somnambulism, the Tzigana watched the preparations for her marriage.

The Prince, with the impatience of a youth of twenty, had urged an early day for their union. He announced his engagement to the society, at once Parisian and foreign, of which he formed a part; and this marriage of the Magyar with the Tzigana was an event in aristocratic circles. There was an aroma of chivalrous romance about this action of Prince Andras, who was rich enough and independent enough to have married, if he had wished, a shepherdess, like the kings of fairy tales.

"Isn't it perfectly charming?" exclaimed the little Baroness Dinati, enthusiastically. "Jacquemin, my dear friend, I will give you all the details of their first meeting. You can make a delicious article out of it, delicious!"

The little Baroness was almost as delighted as the Prince. Ah! what a man that Zilah was! He would give, as a wedding-gift to the Tzigana, the most beautiful diamonds in the world, those famous Zilah diamonds, which Prince Joseph had once placed disdainfully upon his hussar's uniform when he charged the Prussian cuirassiers of Ziethen, sure of escaping the sabre cuts, and not losing a single one of the stones during the combat. It was said that Marsa, until she was his wife, would not accept any jewels from the Prince. The opals in the silver agraffe were all she wanted.

"You know them, don't you, Jacquemin? The famous opals of the Tzigana? Put that all in, every word of it."

"Yes, it is chic enough," answered the reporter. "It is very romantic, a little too much so; my readers will never believe it. Never mind, though, I will write it all up in my best manner."

The fete on board the steamer, given by the Prince in honor of his betrothal, had been as much talked of as a sensational first night at the Francais, and it added decidedly to the romantic prestige of Andras Zilah. There was not a marriageable young girl who was not a little in love with him, and their mothers envied the luck of the Tzigana.

"It is astonishing how jealous the mammas are," said the Baroness, gayly. "They will make me pay dearly for having been the matchmaker; but I am proud of it, very proud. Zilah has good taste, that is all. And, as for him, I should have been in love with him myself, if I had not had my guests to attend to. Ah, society is as absorbing as a husband!"

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Upon the boat, Paul Jacquemin did not leave the side of the matchmaker. He followed her everywhere. He had still to obtain a description of the bride's toilettes, the genealogy of General Vogotzine, a sketch of the bridegroom's best friend, Varhely, and a thousand other details.

"Where will the wedding take place?" he asked the Baroness.

"At Maisons-Lafitte. Oh! everything is perfect, my dear Jacquemin, perfect! An idyl! All the arrangements are exquisite, exquisite! I only wish that you had charge of the supper."

Jacquemin, general overseer of the Baroness's parties in the Rue Murillo, did not confess himself inferior to any one as an epicure. He would taste the wines, with the air of a connoisseur, holding his glass up to the light, while the liquor caressed his palate, and shutting his eyes as if more thoroughly to decide upon its merits.

"Pomard!" would slowly fall from his lips, or "Acceptable Musigny!" "This Chambertin is really very fair!" "The Chateau Yquem is not half bad!" *etc., etc.* And the next morning would appear in the reports, which he wrote himself under various pseudonyms: "Our compliments to our friend Jacquemin, if he had anything to do with the selection of the wines, in addition to directing the rehearsals of the Baroness's operetta, which latter work he most skilfully accomplished. Jacquemin possesses talents of all kinds; he knows how to make the best of all materials. As the proverb says, 'A good mill makes everything flour.'"

Jacquemin had already cast an eye over the menu of the Prince's fete, and declared it excellent, very correct, very pure.

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The steamer was at last ready to depart, and Prince Zilah had done the honors to all his guests. It started slowly off, the flags waving coquettishly in the breeze, while the Tzigani musicians played with spirit the vibrating notes of the March of Rakoczy, that triumphant air celebrating the betrothal of Zilah, as it had long ago saluted the burial of his father.

CHAPTER X

"Is fate so just?"

"We are moving! We are off!" cried the lively little Baroness. "I hope we shan't be shipwrecked," retorted Jacquemin; and he then proceeded to draw a comical picture of

possible adventures wherein figured white bears, icebergs, and death by starvation. “A subject for a novel,—’The Shipwreck of the Betrothed.’”

As they drew away from Paris, passing the quays of Passy and the taverns of Point-du-jour, tables on wooden horses were rapidly erected, and covered with snowy cloths; and soon the guests of the Prince were seated about the board, Andras between Marsa and the Baroness, and Michel Menko some distance down on the other side of the table. The pretty women and fashionably dressed men made the air resound with gayety and laughter, while the awnings flapped joyously in

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the wind, and the boat glided on, cutting the smooth water, in which were reflected the long shadows of the aspens and willows on the banks, and the white clouds floating in the clear sky. Every now and then a cry of admiration would be uttered at some object in the panorama moving before them, the slopes of Suresnes, the black factories of Saint-Denis with their lofty chimneys, the red-roofed villas of Asnieres, or the heights of Marly dotted with little white houses.

“Ah! how pretty it is! How charming!”

“Isn’t it queer that we have never known anything about all this? It is a veritable voyage of discovery.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” cried, above the other voices, Jacquemin, whom Zilah did not know, and to whom the Baroness had made him give a card of invitation, “we are now entering savage countries. It is Kamtschatka, or some such place, and there must be cannibals here.”

The borders of the Seine, which were entirely fresh to them, and which recalled the pictures of the salon, were a delightful novelty to these people, accustomed to the dusty streets of the city.

Seated between the Prince and the Japanese, and opposite Varhely and General Vogotzine, the Baroness thoroughly enjoyed her breakfast. Prince Andras had not spared the Tokay—that sweet, fiery wine, of which the Hungarians say proudly: “It has the color and the price of gold;” and the liquor disappeared beneath the moustache of the Russian General as in a funnel. The little Baroness, as she sipped it with pretty little airs of an epicure, chatted with the Japanese, and, eager to increase her culinary knowledge, asked him for the receipt for a certain dish which the little yellow fellow had made her taste at a dinner given at his embassy.

“Send it to me, will you, Yamada? I will have my cook make it; nothing gives me so much pleasure as to be able to offer to my guests a new and strange dish. I will give you the receipt also, Jacquemin. Oh! it is such an odd-tasting dish! It gives you a sensation of having been poisoned.”

“Like the guests in Lucrezia Borgia,” laughed the Parisian Japanese.

“Do you know Lucrezia Borgia?”

“Oh, yes; they have sung it at Yokohama. Oh! we are no longer savages, Baroness, believe me. If you want ignorant barbarians, you must seek the Chinese.”



The little Japanese was proud of appearing so profoundly learned in European affairs, and his gimlet eyes sought an approving glance from Paul Jacquemin or Michel Menko; but the Hungarian was neither listening to nor thinking of Yamada. He was entirely absorbed in the contemplation of Marsa; and, with lips a little compressed, he fixed a strange look upon the beautiful young girl to whom Andras was speaking, and who, very calm, almost grave, but evidently happy, answered the Prince with a sweet smile.

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There was a sort of Oriental grace about Marsa, with her willowy figure, flexible as a Hindoo convolvulus, and her dark Arabian eyes fringed with their heavy lashes. Michel Menko took in all the details of her beauty, and evidently suffered, suffered cruelly, his eyes invincibly attracted toward her. In the midst of these other women, attired in robes of the last or the next fashion, of all the colors of the rainbow, Marsa, in her gown of black lace, was by far the loveliest of them all. Michel watched her every movement; but she, quiet, as if a trifle weary, spoke but little, and only in answer to the Prince and Varhely, and, when her beautiful eyes met those of Menko, she turned them away, evidently avoiding his look with as much care as he sought hers.

The breakfast over, they rose from the table, the men lighting cigars, and the ladies seeking the mirrors in the cabin to rearrange their tresses disheveled by the wind.

The boat stopped at Marly until it was time for the lock to be opened, before proceeding to Maisons-Lafitte, where Marsa was to land. Many of the passengers, with almost childish gayety, landed, and strolled about on the green bank.

Marsa was left alone, glad of the silence which reigned on the steamer after the noisy chatter of a moment ago. She leaned over the side of the boat, listening idly to the swish of the water along its sides.

Michel Menko was evidently intending to approach her, and he had made a few steps toward her, when he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. He turned, thinking it was the Prince; but it was Yanski Varhely, who said to the young man:

"Well, my dear Count, you did right to come from London to this fete. Not only is Zilah delighted to see you, but the fantastic composition of the guests is very curious. Baroness Dinati has furnished us with an 'ollapodrida' which would have pleased her husband. There is a little of everything. Doesn't it astonish you?"

"No," said Michel. "This hybrid collection is representative of modern society. I have met almost all these faces at Nice; they are to be seen everywhere."

"To me," retorted Yanski, in his guttural voice, "these people are phenomena."

"Phenomena? Not at all. Life of to-day is so complicated that the most unexpected people and events find their place in it. You have not lived, Varhely, or you have lived only for your idol, your country, and everything amazes you. If you had, like me, wandered all over the world, you would not be astonished at anything; although, to tell the truth"—and the young man's voice became bitter, trenchant, and almost threatening—"we have only to grow old to meet with terrible surprises, very hard to bear."

As he spoke, he glanced, involuntarily perhaps, at Marsa Laszlo, leaning on the railing just below him.

“Oh! don’t speak of old age before you have passed through the trials that Zilah and I have,” responded Varhely. “At eighteen, Andras Zilah could have said: ‘I am old.’ He was in mourning at one and the same time for all his people and for our country. But you! You have grown up, my dear fellow, in happy times. Austria, loosening her clutch, has permitted you to love and serve our cause at your ease. You were born rich, you married the most charming of women”—

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Michel frowned.

"That is, it is true, the sorrow of your life," continued Varhely. "It seems to me only yesterday that you lost the poor child."

"It is over two years, however," said Michel, gravely. "Two years! How time flies!"

"She was so charming," said old Yanski, not perceiving the expression of annoyance mingled with sadness which passed over the young man's face. "I knew your dear wife when she was quite small, in her father's house. He gave me an asylum at Prague, after the capitulation signed by Georgei. Although I was an Hungarian, and he a Bohemian, her father and I were great friends."

"Yes," said Menko, rapidly, "she often spoke of you, my dear Varhely. They taught her to love you, too. But," evidently seeking to turn the conversation to avoid a subject which was painful to him, "you spoke of Georgei. Ah! our generation has never known your brave hopes; and your grief, believe me, was better than our boredom. We are useless encumberers of the earth. Upon my word, it seems to me that we are unsettled, enfeebled, loving nothing and loving everything, ready to commit all sorts of follies. I envy you those days of battle, those magnificent deeds of 'forty-eight and 'forty-nine. To fight thus was to live!"

But even while he spoke, his thin face became more melancholy, and his eyes again sought the direction of Prince Andras's fiancée.

After a little more desultory conversation, he strolled away from Varhely, and gradually approached Marsa, who, her chin resting on her hand, and her eyes lowered, seemed absorbed in contemplation of the ceaseless flow of the water.

Greatly moved, pulling his moustache, and glancing with a sort of uneasiness at Prince Andras, who was promenading on the bank with the Baroness, Michel Menko paused before addressing Marsa, who had not perceived his approach, and who was evidently far away in some day-dream.

Gently, hesitatingly, and in a low voice, he at last spoke her name:

"Marsa!"

The Tzigana started as if moved by an electric shock, and, turning quickly, met the supplicating eyes of the young man.

"Marsa!" repeated Michel, in a humble tone of entreaty.

"What do you wish of me?" she said. "Why do you speak to me? You must have seen what care I have taken to avoid you."



"It is that which has wounded me to the quick. You are driving me mad. If you only knew what I am suffering!"

He spoke almost in a whisper, and very rapidly, as if he felt that seconds were worth centuries.

She answered him in a cutting, pitiless tone, harsher even than the implacable look in her dark eyes. "You suffer? Is fate so just as that? You suffer?"

Her tone and expression made Michel Menko tremble as if each syllable of these few words was a blow in the face.

"Marsa!" he exclaimed, imploringly. "Marsa!"



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"My name is Marsa Laszlo; and, in a few days, I shall be Princess Zilah," responded the young girl, passing haughtily by him, "and I think you will hardly force me to make you remember it."

She uttered these words so resolutely, haughtily, almost disdainfully, and accompanied them with such a flash from her beautiful eyes that Menko instinctively bowed his head, murmuring:

"Forgive me!"

But he drove his nails into the palm of his clenched hand as he saw her leave that part of the boat, and retire as far from him as she could, as if his presence were an insult to her. Tears of rage started into the young man's eyes as he watched her graceful figure resume its former posture of dreamy absorption.

CHAPTER XI

A RIVER FETE

Close alongside of the Prince's boat, waiting also for the opening of the lock, was one of those great barges which carry wood or charcoal up and down the Seine.

A whole family often lives on board these big, heavy boats. The smoke of the kitchen fire issues from a sort of wooden cabin where several human beings breathe, eat, sleep, are born and die, sometimes without hardly ever having set foot upon the land. Pots of geranium or begonia give a bit of bright color to the dingy surroundings; and the boats travel slowly along the river, impelled by enormous oars, which throw long shadows upon the water.

It was this motionless barge that Marsa was now regarding.

The hot sun, falling upon the boat, made its brown, wet sides sparkle like the brilliant wings of some gigantic scarabee; and, upon the patched, scorched deck, six or seven half-naked, sunburned children, boys and girls, played at the feet of a bundle of rags and brown flesh, which was a woman, a young woman, but prematurely old and wasted, who was nursing a little baby.

A little farther off, two men—one tough and strong, a man of thirty, whom toil had made forty, the other old, wrinkled, white-haired and with skin like leather, father and grandfather, doubtless, of the little brats beyond—were eating bread and cheese, and drinking, turn by turn, out of a bottle of wine, which they swallowed in gulps. The halt was a rest to these poor people.

As Marsa watched them, she seemed to perceive in these wanderers of the river, as in a vision, those other wanderers of the Hungarian desert, her ancestors, the Tzigani, camped in the puszta, the boundless plain, crouched down in the long grass beneath the shade of the bushes, and playing their beautiful national airs. She saw the distant fires of the bivouac of those unknown Tzigani whose daughter she was; she seemed to breathe again the air of that country she had seen but once, when upon a mournful pilgrimage; and, in the presence of that poor bargeman's wife, with her skin tanned by the sun, she thought of her dead, her cherished dead, Tisza.

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Tisza! To the gipsy had doubtless been given the name of the river on the banks of which she had been born. They called the mother Tisza, in Hungary, as in Paris they called the daughter the Tzigana. And Marsa was proud of her nickname; she loved these Tzigani, whose blood flowed in her veins; sons of India, perhaps, who had descended to the valley of the Danube, and who for centuries had lived free in the open air, electing their chiefs, and having a king appointed by the Palatine—a king, who commanding beggars, bore, nevertheless, the name of Magnificent; indestructible tribes, itinerant republics, musicians playing the old airs of their nation, despite the Turkish sabre and the Austrian police; agents of patriotism and liberty, guardians of the old Hungarian honor.

These poor people, passing their lives upon the river as the Tzigani lived in the fields and hedges, seemed to Marsa like the very spectres of her race. More than the musicians with embroidered vests did the poor prisoners of the solitary barge recall to her the great proscribed family of her ancestors.

She called to the children playing upon the sunbeaten deck: “Come here, and hold up your aprons!”

They obeyed, spreading out their little tattered garments. “Catch these!” she cried.

They could not believe their eyes. From the steamer she threw down to them mandarins, grapes, ripe figs, yellow apricots, and great velvety peaches; a rain of dainties which would have surprised a gourmand: the poor little things, delighted and afraid at the same time, wondered if the lady, who gave them such beautiful fruit, was a fairy.

The mother then rose; and, coming toward Marsa to thank her, her sunburnt skin glowing a deeper red, the poor woman, with tears in her tired eyes, and a wan smile upon her pale lips, touched, surprised, happy in the pleasure of her children, murmured, faltering and confused:

“Ah! Madame! Madame! how good you are! You are too good, Madame!”

“We must share what we have!” said Marsa, with a smile. “See how happy the children are!”

“Very happy, Madame. They are not accustomed to such things. Say ‘Thank you,’ to the beautiful lady. Say ‘Thank you,’ Jean; you are the oldest. Say like this: ‘Thank-you-Ma-dame.’”

“Thank-you-Ma-dame” faltered the boy, raising to Marsa big, timid eyes, which did not understand why anybody should either wish him ill or do him a kindness. And other low, sweet little voices repeated, like a refrain: “Thank-you-Ma-dame.”

The two men, in astonishment, came and stood behind the children, and gazed silently at Marsa.

“And your baby, Madame?” said the Tzigana, looking at the sleeping infant, that still pressed its rosy lips to the mother’s breast. “How pretty it is! Will you permit me to offer it its baptismal dress?”

“Its baptismal dress?” repeated the mother.

“Oh, Madame!” ejaculated the father, twisting his cap between his fingers.

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"Or a cloak, just as you please," added Marsa.

The poor people on the barge made no reply, but looked at one another in bewilderment.

"Is it a little girl?" asked the Tzigana.

"No, Madame, no," responded the mother. "A boy."

"Come here, jean," said Marsa to the oldest child. "Yes, come here, my little man."

Jean came forward, glancing askance at his mother, as if to know whether he should obey.

"Here, jean," said the young girl, "this is for your baby brother."

And into the little joined hands of the boy, Marsa let fall a purse, through whose meshes shone yellow pieces of gold.

The people of the barge thought they were dreaming, and stood open-mouthed in amazement, while Jean cried out:

"Mamma, see, mamma! Mamma! Mamma!"

Then the younger bargeman said to Marsa:

"Madame, no, no! we can not accept. It is too much. You are too good. Give it back, Jean."

"It is true, Madame," faltered his wife. "It is impossible. It is too much."

"You will cause me great pain if you refuse to accept it," said Marsa. "Chance has brought us together for a moment, and I am superstitious. I would like to have the little children pray that those I love—that the one I love may be happy." And she turned her eyes upon Prince Andras, who had returned to the deck, and was coming toward her.

The lock was now opened.

"All aboard!" shouted the captain of the steamer.

The poor woman upon the barge tried to reach the hand of Marsa to kiss it.

"May you be happy, Madame, and thank you with all our hearts for your goodness to both big and little."

The two bargemen bowed low in great emotion, and the whole bevy of little ones blew kisses to the beautiful lady in the black dress, whom the steamer was already bearing away.

“At least tell us your name, Madame,” cried the father. “Your name, that we may never forget you.”

A lovely smile appeared on Marsa’s lips, and, in almost melancholy accents, she said:

“My name!” Then, after a pause, proudly: “The Tzigana!”

The musicians, as she spoke, suddenly struck up one of the Hungarian airs. Then, as in a flying vision, the poor bargemen saw the steamer move farther and farther away, a long plume of smoke waving behind it.

Jacquemin, hearing one of those odd airs, which in Hungary start all feet moving and keeping time to the music, exclaimed:

“A quadrille! Let us dance a quadrille! An Hungarian quadrille!”

The poor people on the barge listened to the music, gradually growing fainter and fainter; and they would have believed that they had been dreaming, if the purse had not been there, a fortune for them, and the fruit which the children were eating. The mother, without understanding, repeated that mysterious name: “The Tzigana.”

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And Marsa also gazed after them, her ears caressed by the czardas of the musicians. The big barge disappeared in the distance in a luminous haze; but the Tzigana could still vaguely perceive the little beings perched upon the shoulders of the men, and waving, in sign of farewell, pieces of white cloth which their mother had given them.

A happy torpor stole over Marsa; and, while the guests of the Baroness Dinati, the Japanese Yamada, the English heiresses, the embassy attaches, all these Parisian foreigners, led by Jacquemin, the director of the gayety, were organizing a ballroom on the deck, and asking the Tzigani for polkas of Fahrbach and waltzes of Strauss, the young girl heard the voice of Andras murmur low in her ear:

“Ah! how I love you! And do you love me, Marsa?”

“I am happy,” she answered, without moving, and half closing her eyes, “and, if it were necessary for me to give my life for you, I would give it gladly.”

In the stern of the boat, Michel Menko watched, without seeing them, perhaps, the fields, the houses of Pecq, the villas of Saint-Germain, the long terrace below heavy masses of trees, the great plain beside Paris with Mont Valerien rising in its midst, the two towers of the Trocadero, whose gilded dome sparkled in the sun, and the bluish-black cloud which hung over the city like a thick fog.

The boat advanced very slowly, as if Prince Andras had given the order to delay as much as possible the arrival at Maisons-Lafitte, where the whole fete would end for him, as Marsa was to land there. Already, upon the horizon could be perceived the old mill, with its broad, slated roof. The steeple of Sartrouville loomed up above the red roofs of the houses and the poplars which fringe the bank of the river. A pale blue light, like a thin mist, enveloped the distant landscape.

“The dream is over,” murmured Marsa.

“A far more beautiful one will soon begin,” said Andras, “and that one will be the realization of what I have waited for all my life and never found—love.”

Marsa turned to the Prince with a look full of passionate admiration and devotion, which told him how thoroughly his love was returned.

The quadrille had ended, and a waltz was beginning. The little Japanese, with his eternal smile, like the bronze figures of his country, was dancing with a pre-raphaelite English girl.

“How well you dance,” she said.

“If we only had some favors,” replied the Japanese, showing his teeth in a grin, “I would lead the cotillon.”

The boat stopped at last at Maisons-Lafitte. The great trees of the park formed a heavy mass, amid which the roof of the villa was just discernible.

“What a pity it is all over,” cried the Baroness, who was ruddy as a cherry with the exercise of dancing. “Let us have another; but Maisons-Lafitte is too near. We will go to Rouen the next time; or rather, I invite you all to a day fete in Paris, a game of polo, a lunch, a garden party, whatever you like. I will arrange the programme with Yamada and Jacquemin.”

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"Willingly," responded the Japanese, with a low bow. "To collaborate with Monsieur Jacquemin will be very amusing."

As Marsa Laszlo was leaving the boat, Michel Menko stood close to the gangway, doubtless on purpose to speak to her; and, in the confusion of landing, without any one hearing him, he breathed in her ear these brief words:

"At your house this evening. I must see you."

She gave him an icy glance. Michel Menko's eyes were at once full of tears and flames.

"I demand it!" he said, firmly.

The Tzigana made no reply; but, going to Andras Zilah, she took his arm; while Michel, as if nothing had happened, raised his hat.

General Vogotzine, with flaming face, followed his niece, muttering, as he wiped the perspiration unsteadily from his face:

"Fine day! Fine day! By Jove! But the sun was hot, though! Ah, and the wines were good!"

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

A man's life belongs to his duty, and not to his happiness
All defeats have their geneses
Foreigners are more Parisian than the Parisians themselves
One of those beings who die, as they have lived, children
Playing checkers, that mimic warfare of old men
Superstition which forbids one to proclaim his happiness
The Hungarian was created on horseback
There were too many discussions, and not enough action
Would not be astonished at anything
You suffer? Is fate so just as that

PRINCE ZILAH

By JULES CLARETIE

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XII



A DARK PAGE

As Marsa departed with Vogotzine in the carriage which had been waiting for them on the bank, she waved her hand to Zilah with a passionate gesture, implying an infinity of trouble, sadness, and love. The Prince then returned to his guests, and the boat, which Marsa watched through the window of the carriage, departed, bearing away the dream, as she had said to Andras. During the drive home she did not say a word. By her side the General grumbled sleepily of the sun, which, the Tokay aiding, had affected his head. But, when Marsa was alone in her chamber, the cry which was wrung from her breast was a cry of sorrow, of despairing anger:

“Ah, when I think—when I think that I am envied!”

She regretted having allowed Andras to depart without having told him on the spot, the secret of her life. She would not see him again until the next day, and she felt as if she could never live through the long, dull hours. She stood at the window, wrapped in thought, gazing mechanically before her, and still hearing the voice of Michel Menko hissing like a snake in her ear. What was it this man had said? She did not dare to believe it. “I demand it!” He had said: “I demand it!” Perhaps some one standing near had heard it. “I demand it!”

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Evening came. Below the window the great masses of the chestnut-trees and the lofty crests of the poplars waved in the breeze like forest plumes, their peaks touched by the sun setting in a sky of tender blue, while the shadowy twilight crept over the park where, through the branches, patches of yellow light, like golden and copper vapors, still gave evidence of the god of day.

Marsa, her heart full of a melancholy which the twilight increased, repeated over and over again, with shudders of rage and disgust, those three words which Michel Menko had hurled at her like a threat: "I demand it!" Suddenly she heard in the garden the baying of dogs, and she saw, held in check by a domestic, Duna and Bundas, bounding through the masses of flowers toward the gate, where a man appeared, whom Marsa, leaning over the balcony, recognized at once.

"The wretch!" she exclaimed between her clenched teeth. It was Menko.

He must have debarked before reaching Paris, and have come to Maisons-Lafitte in haste.

Marsa's only thought, in the first moment of anger, was to refuse to see him. "I can not," she thought, "I will not!" Then suddenly her mind changed. It was braver and more worthy of her to meet the danger face to face. She rang, and said to the domestic who answered the bell: "Show Count Menko into the little salon."

"We shall see what he will dare," muttered the Tzigana, glancing at the mirror as if to see whether she appeared to tremble before danger and an enemy.

The little salon into which the young Count was introduced was in the left wing of the villa; and it was Marsa's favorite room, because it was so quiet there. She had furnished it with rare taste, in half Byzantine and half Hindoo fashion—a long divan running along the wall, covered with gray silk striped with garnet; Persian rugs cast here and there at random; paintings by Petenkofen—Hungarian farms and battle-scenes, sentinels lost in the snow; two consoles loaded with books, reviews, and bric-a-brac; and a round table with Egyptian incrustations, covered with an India shawl, upon which were fine bronzes of Lanceray, and little jewelled daggers.

This salon communicated with a much larger one, where General Vogotzine usually took his siesta, and which Marsa abandoned to him, preferring the little room, the windows of which, framed in ivy, looked out upon the garden, with the forest in the distance.

Michel Menko was well acquainted with this little salon, where he had more than once seen Marsa seated at the piano playing her favorite airs. He remembered it all so well, and, nervously twisting his moustache, he longed for her to make her appearance. He

listened for the frou-frou of Marsa's skirts on the other side of the lowered portiere which hung between the two rooms; but he heard no sound.

The General had shaken hands with Michel, as he passed through the large salon, saying, in his thick voice:

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"Have you come to see Marsa? You have had enough of that water-party, then? It was very pretty; but the sun was devilish hot. My head is burning now; but it serves me right for not remaining quiet at home."

Then he raised his heavy person from the armchair he had been sitting in, and went out into the garden, saying: "I prefer to smoke in the open air; it is stifling in here." Marsa, who saw Vogotzine pass out, let him go, only too willing to have him at a distance during her interview with Michel Menko; and then she boldly entered the little salon, where the Count, who had heard her approach, was standing erect as if expecting some attack.

Marsa closed the door behind her; and, before speaking a word, the two faced each other, as if measuring the degree of hardihood each possessed. The Tzigana, opening fire first, said, bravely and without preamble:

"Well, you wished to see me. Here I am! What do you want of me?"

"To ask you frankly whether it is true, Marsa, that you are about to marry Prince Zilah."

She tried to laugh; but her laugh broke nervously off. She said, however, ironically:

"Oh! is it for that that you are here?"

"Yes."

"It was perfectly useless, then, for you to take the trouble: you ask me a thing which you know well, which all the world knows, which all the world must have told you, since you had the audacity to be present at that fete to-day."

"That is true," said Michel, coldly; "but I only learned it by chance. I wished to hear it from your own lips."

"Do I owe you any account of my conduct?" asked Marsa, with crushing hauteur.

He was silent a moment, strode across the room, laid his hat down upon the little table, and suddenly becoming humble, not in attitude, but in voice, said:

"Listen, Marsa: you are a hundred times right to hate me. I have deceived you, lied to you. I have conducted myself in a manner unworthy of you, unworthy of myself. But to atone for my fault—my crime, if you will—I am ready to do anything you order, to be your miserable slave, in order to obtain the pardon which I have come to ask of you, and which I will ask on my knees, if you command me to do so."

The Tzigana frowned.

"I have nothing to pardon you, nothing to command you," she said with an air more wearied than stern, humiliating, and disdainful. "I only ask you to leave me in peace, and never appear again in my life."

"So! I see that you do not understand me," said Michel, with sudden brusqueness.

"No, I acknowledge it, not in the least."

"When I asked you whether you were to marry Prince Andras, didn't you understand that I asked you also another thing: Will you marry me, me—Michel Menko?"

"You!" cried the Tzigana.

And there was in this cry, in this "You!" ejaculated with a rapid movement of recoil-amazement, fright, scorn, and anger.

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"You!" she said again. And Michel Menko felt in this word a mass of bitter rancor and stifled hatred which suddenly burst its bonds.

"Yes, me!" he said, braving the insult of Marsa's cry and look. "Me, who love you, and whom you have loved!"

"Ah, don't dare to say that!" she cried, drawing close to the little table where the daggers rested amid the objects of art. "Don't be vile enough to speak to me of a past of which nothing remains to me but disgust! Let not one word which recalls it to me mount to your lips, not one, you understand, or I will kill you like the coward you are!"

"Do so, Marsa!" he cried with wild, mad passion. "I should die by your hand, and you would not marry that man!"

Afraid of herself, wresting her eyes from the glittering daggers, she threw herself upon the divan, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, and watched, with the look of a tigress, Michel, who said to her now, in a voice which trembled with the tension of his feelings: "You must know well, Marsa, that death is not the thing that can frighten a man like me! What does frighten me is that, having lost you once, I may lose you forever; to know that another will be your husband, will love you, will receive your kisses. The very idea that that is possible drives me insane. I feel myself capable of any deed of madness to prevent it. Marsa! Marsa! You did love me once!"

"I love honor, truth, justice," said Marsa, sternly and implacably. "I thought I loved you; but I never did."

"You did not love me?" he said.

This cruel recalling of the past, which was the remorse of her life, was like touching her flesh with a red-hot iron.

"No, no, no! I did not love you! I repeat, I thought I loved you. What did I know of life when I met you? I was suffering, ill; I thought myself dying, and I never heard a word of pity fall from any other lips than yours. I thought you were a man of honor. You were only a wretch. You deceived me; you represented yourself to me as free—and you were married. Weakly—oh, I could kill myself at the very thought!—I listened to you! I took for love the trite phrases you had used to dozens of other women; half by violence, half by ruse, you became my lover. I do not know when—I do not know how. I try to forget that horrible dream; and when, deluded by you, thinking that what I felt for you was love, for I did think so, I imagined that I had given myself for life to a man worthy of the deepest devotion, ready for all sacrifices for me, as I felt myself to be for him; when you had taken me, body and soul, I learn by what? by a trifling conversation, by a chance, in a crowded ballroom—that, this Michel Menko, whose name I was to bear, who was to be my husband; this Count Menko, this man of honor, the one in whom I

believed blindly, was married! Married at Vienna, and had already given away the name on which he traded! Oh, it is hideous!" And the Tzigana, whose whole body was shuddering with horror, recoiled instinctively to the edge of the divan as at the approach of some detested contact.

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Michel, his face pale and convulsed, had listened to her with bowed head.

"All that you say is the truth, Marsa; but I will give my life, my whole life, to expiate that lie!"

"There are infamies which are never effaced. There is no pardon for him who has no excuse."

"No excuse? Yes, Marsa; I have one! I have one: I loved you!"

"And because you loved me, was it necessary for you to betray me, lie to me, ruin me?"

"What could I do? I did not love the woman I had married; you dawned on me like a beautiful vision; I wished, hoping I know not what impossible future, to be near you, to make you love me, and I did not dare to confess that I was not free. If I lied to you, it was because I trembled at not being able to surround you with my devotion; it was because I was afraid to lose your love, knowing that the adoration I had for you would never die till my heart was cold and dead! Upon all that is most sacred, I swear this to you! I swear it!"

He then recalled to her, while she sat rigid and motionless with an expression of contempt and disdain upon her beautiful, proud lips, their first meetings; that evening at Lady Brolway's, in Pau, where he had met her for the first time; their conversation; the ineffaceable impression produced upon him by her beauty; that winter season; the walks they had taken together beneath the trees, which not a breath of wind stirred; their excursions in the purple and gold valleys, with the Pyrenees in the distance crowned with eternal snow. Did she not remember their long talks upon the terrace, the evenings which felt like spring, and that day when she had been nearly killed by a runaway horse, and he had seized the animal by the bridle and saved her life? Yes, he had loved her, loved her well; and it was because, possessing her love, he feared, like a second Adam, to see himself driven out of paradise, that he had hidden from Marsa the truth. If she had questioned one of the Hungarians or Viennese, who were living at Pau, she could doubtless have known that Count Menko, the first secretary of the embassy of Austria-Hungary at Paris, had married the heiress of one of the richest families of Prague; a pretty but unintelligent girl, not understanding at all the character of her husband; detesting Vienna and Paris, and gradually exacting from Menko that he should live at Prague, near her family, whose ancient ideas and prejudices and inordinate love of money displeased the young Hungarian. He was left free to act as he pleased; his wife would willingly give up a part of her dowry to regain her independence. It was only just, she said insolently, that, having been mistaken as to the tastes of the man she had married for reasons of convenience rather than of inclination, she should pay for her stupidity. Pay! The word made the blood mount to Menko's face. If he had not been rich, as he was, he would have hewn stone to gain his daily bread rather than touch a penny of her money. He shook off the yoke the obstinate

daughter of the Bohemian gentleman would have imposed upon him, and departed, brusquely breaking a union in which both husband and wife so terribly perceived their error.

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Marsa might have known of all this if she had, for a moment, doubted Menko's word. But how was she to suspect that the young Count was capable of a lie or of concealing such a secret? Besides, she knew hardly any one at Pau, as her physicians had forbidden her any excitement; at the foot of the Pyrenees, she lived, as at Maisons-Lafitte, an almost solitary life; and Michel Menko had been during that winter, which he now recalled to Marsa, speaking of it as of a lost Eden, her sole companion, the only guest of the house she inhabited with Vogotzine in the neighborhood of the castle.

Poor Marsa, enthusiastic, inexperienced, her heart enamored with chivalrous audacity, intrepid courage, all the many virtues which were those of Hungary herself; Marsa, her mind imbued from her infancy with the almost fantastic recitals of the war of independence, and later, with her readings and reflections; Marsa, full of the stories of the heroic past-must necessarily have been the dupe of the first being who, coming into her life, was the personal representative of the bravery and charm of her race. So, when she encountered one day Michel Menko, she was invincibly attracted toward him by something proud, brave, and chivalrous, which was characteristic of the manly beauty of the young Hungarian. She was then twenty, very ignorant of life, her great Oriental eyes seeing nothing of stern reality; but, with all her gentleness, there was a species of Muscovite firmness which was betrayed in the contour of her red lips. It was in vain that sorrow had early made her a woman; Marsa remained ignorant of the world, without any other guide than Vogotzine; suffering and languid, she was fatally at the mercy of the first lie which should caress her ear and stir her heart. From the first, therefore, she had loved Michel; she had, as she herself said, believed that she loved him with a love which would never end, a very ingenuous love, having neither the silliness of a girl who has just left the convent, nor the knowledge of a Parisienne whom the theatre and the newspapers have instructed in all things. Michel, then, could give to this virgin and pliable mind whatever bent he chose; and Marsa, pure as the snow and brave as her own favorite heroes, became his without resistance, being incapable of divining a treachery or fearing a lie. Michel Menko, moreover, loved her madly; and he thought only of winning and keeping the love of this incomparable maiden, exquisite in her combined gentleness and pride. The folly of love mounted to his brain like intoxication, and communicated itself to the poor girl who believed in him as if he were the living faith; and, in the madness of his passion, Michel, without being a coward, committed a cowardly action.

No: a coward he certainly was not. He was one of those nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair, going to all extremes, at times foolishly gay, and at others as grave and melancholy as Hamlet. There were days when Menko did not value his life at a penny, and when he asked himself seriously if suicide were not the simplest means to reach the end; and again, at the least ray of sunshine, he became sanguine and hopeful to excess. Of undoubted courage, he would have faced the muzzle of a loaded cannon out of mere bravado, at the same time wondering, with a sarcastic smile upon his lips, 'Cui bono'?

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He sometimes called heroism a trick; and yet, in everyday life, he had not much regard for tricksters. Excessively fond of movement, activity, and excitement, he yet counted among his happiest days those spent in long meditations and inactive dreams. He was a strange combination of faults and good qualities, without egregious vices, but all his virtues capable of being annihilated by passion, anger, jealousy, or grief. With such a nature, everything was possible: the sublimity of devotion, or a fall into the lowest infamy. He often said, in self-analysis: "I am afraid of myself." In short, his strength was like a house built upon sand; all, in a day, might crumble.

"If I had to choose the man I should prefer to be," he said once, "I would be Prince Andras Zilah, because he knows neither my useless discouragements, apropos of everything and nothing, nor my childish delights, nor my hesitations, nor my confidence, which at times approaches folly as my misanthropy approaches injustice; and because, in my opinion, the supreme virtue in a man is firmness."

The Zilahs were connected by blood with the Menkos, and Prince Andras was very fond of this young man, who promised to Hungary one of those diplomats capable of wielding at once the pen and the sword, and who in case of war, before drawing up a protocol, would have dictated its terms, sabre in hand. Michel indeed stood high with his chief in the embassy, and he was very much sought after in society. Before the day he met Marsa, he had, to tell the truth, only experienced the most trivial love-affairs.

He did not speak of his wife at Pau any more than he did on the boulevards. She lived far away, in the old city of Prague, and troubled Michel no more than if she had never existed. Perhaps he had forgotten, really forgotten, with that faculty of forgetfulness which belongs to the imaginative, that he was married, when he encountered Marsa, the candid, pure-hearted girl, who did not reflect nor calculate, but simply believed that she had met a man of honor.

So, what sudden revolt, humiliation, and hatred did the poor child feel when she learned that the man in whom she had believed as in a god had deceived her, lied to her! He was married. He had treated her as the lowest of women; perhaps he had never even loved her! The very thought made her long to kill herself, or him, or both. She, unhappy, miserable woman, was ruined, ruined forever!

She had certainly never stopped to think where the love she had for Michel would lead her. She thought of nothing except that Michel was hers, and she was his, and she believed that their love would last forever. She did not think that she had long to live, and her existence seemed to her only a breath which any moment might cease. Why had she not died before she knew that Menko had lied?

All deception seemed hideous to Marsa Laszlo, and this hideousness she had discovered in the man to whom she had given herself, believing in the eternity as well as in the loyalty of his love.

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It was at a ball, at the English embassy, after her return from Pau, that, while smiling and happy, she overheard between two Viennese, strangers to her, this short dialogue, every word of which was like a knife in her heart: "What a charming fellow that Menko is!" "Yes; is his wife ugly or a humpback? or is he jealous as Othello? She is never seen." "His wife! Is he married?" "Yes: he married a Blavka, the daughter of Angel Blavka, of Prague. Didn't you know it?"

Married!

Marsa felt her head reel, and the sudden glance she cast at the speakers silenced, almost terrified them. Half insane, she reached home, she never knew how. The next day Michel Menko presented himself at her apartments in the hotel where she was living; she ordered him out of her presence, not allowing him to offer any excuse or explanation.

"You are married, and you are a coward!"

He threw himself at her knees, and implored her to listen to him.

"Go! Go!"

"But our love, Marsa? For I love you, and you love me."

"I hate and scorn you. My love is dead. You have killed it. All is over. Go! And let me never know that there exists a Michel Menko in the world! Never! Never! Never!"

He felt his own cowardice and shame, and he disappeared, not daring again to see the woman whose love haunted him, and who shut herself away from the world more obstinately than ever. She left Paris, and in the solitude of Maisons-Lafitte lived the life of a recluse, while Michel tried in vain to forget the bitterness of his loss. The Tzigana hoped that she was going to die, and bear away with her forever the secret of her betrayal. But no; science had been mistaken; the poor girl was destined to live. In spite of her sorrow and anguish, her beauty blossomed in the shade, and she seemed each day to grow more lovely, while her heart became more sad, and her despair more poignant.

Then death, which would not take Marsa, came to another, and gave Menko an opportunity to repair and efface all. He learned that his wife had died suddenly at Prague, of a malady of the heart. This death, which freed him, produced a strange effect upon him, not unmingled with remorse. Poor woman! She had worthily borne his name, after all. Unintelligent, cold, and wrapped up in her money, she had never understood him; but, perhaps, if he had been more patient, things might have gone better between them.

But no; Marsa was his one, his never-to-be-forgotten love. As soon as he heard of his freedom, he wrote her a letter, telling her that he was able now to dispose of his future as he would, imploring her to pardon him, offering her not his love, since she repelled it, but his name, which was her right—a debt of honor which he wished her to acquit with the devotion of his life. Marsa answered simply with these words: “I will never bear the name of a man I despise.”

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The wound made in her heart by Menko's lie was incurable; the Tzigana would never forgive. He tried to see her again, confident that, if he should be face to face with her, he could find words to awaken the past and make it live again; but she obstinately refused to see him, and, as she did not go into society, he never met her. Then he cast himself, with a sort of frenzy, into the dissipation of Paris, trying to forget, to forget at any cost: failing in this, he resigned his position at the embassy, and went away to seek adventure, going to fight in the Balkans against the Russians, only to return weary and bored as he had departed, always invincibly and eternally haunted by the image of Marsa, an image sad as a lost love, and grave as remorse.

CHAPTER XIII

"My letters or myself"

It was that past, that terrible past, which Michel Menko had dared to come and speak of to the Tzigana. At first, she had grown crimson with anger, as if at an insult; now, by a sudden opposite sentiment, as she listened to him recalling those days, she felt an impression of deadly pain as if an old wound had been reopened. Was it true that all this had ever existed? Was it possible, even?

The man who had been her lover was speaking to her; he was speaking to her of his love; and, if the terrible agony of memory had not burned in her heart, she would have wondered whether this man before her, this sort of stranger, had ever even touched her hand.

She waited, with the idle curiosity of a spectator who had no share in the drama, for the end of Menko's odious argument: "I lied because I loved you!"

He returned again and again, in the belief that women easily forgive the ill-doing of which they are the cause, to that specious plea, and Marsa asked herself, in amazement, what aberration had possession of this man that he should even pretend to excuse his infamy thus.

"And is that," she said at last, "all that you have to say to me? According to you, the thief has only to cry 'What could I do? I loved that money, and so I stole it.' Ah," rising abruptly, "this interview has lasted too long! Good-evening!"

She walked steadily toward the door; but Michel, hastening round the other side of the table, barred her exit, speaking in a suppliant tone, in which, however, there was a hidden threat:

"Marsa! Marsa, I implore you, do not marry Prince Andras! Do not marry him if you do not wish some horrible tragedy to happen to you and me!"

“Really?” she retorted. “Do I understand that it is you who now threaten to kill me?”

“I do not threaten; I entreat, Marsa. But you know all that there is in me at times of madness and folly. I am almost insane: you know it well. Have pity upon me! I love you as no woman was ever loved before; I live only in you; and, if you should give yourself to another—”

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"Ah!" she said, interrupting him with a haughty gesture, "you speak to me as if you had a right to dictate my actions. I have given you my forgetfulness after giving you my love. That is enough, I think. Leave me!"

"Marsa!"

"I have hoped for a long time that I was forever delivered from your presence. I commanded you to disappear. Why have you returned?"

"Because, after I saw you one evening at Baroness Dinati's (do you remember? you spoke to the Prince for the first time that evening), I learned, in London, of this marriage. If I have consented to live away from you previously, it was because, although you were no longer mine, you at least were no one else's; but I will not—pardon me, I can not—endure the thought that your beauty, your grace, will be another's. Think of the self-restraint I have placed upon myself! Although living in Paris, I have not tried to see you again, Marsa, since you drove me from your presence; it was by chance that I met you at the Baroness's; but now—"

"It is another woman you have before you. A woman who ignores that she has listened to your supplications, yielded to your prayers. It is a woman who has forgotten you, who does not even know that a wretch has abused her ignorance and her confidence, and who loves—who loves as one loves for the first time, with a pure and holy devotion, the man whose name she is to bear."

"That man I respect as honor itself. Had it been another, I should already have struck him in the face. But you who accuse me of having lied, are you going to lie to him, to him?"

Marsa became livid, and her eyes, hollow as those of a person sick to death, flamed in the black circles which surrounded them.

"I have no answer to make to one who has no right to question me," she said. "But, should I have to pay with my life for the moment of happiness I should feel in placing my hand in the hand of a hero, I would grasp that moment!"

"Then," cried Menko, "you wish to push me to extremities! And yet I have told you there are certain hours of feverish insanity in which I am capable of committing a crime."

"I do not doubt it," replied the young girl, coldly. "But, in fact, you have already done that. There is no crime lower than that of treachery."

"There is one more terrible," retorted Michel Menko. "I have told you that I loved you. I love you a hundred times more now than ever before. Jealousy, anger, whatever sentiment you choose to call it, makes my blood like fire in my veins! I see you again as you were. I feel your kisses on my lips. I love you madly, passionately! Do you

understand, Marsa? Do you understand?" and he approached with outstretched hands the Tzigana, whose frame was shaken with indignant anger. "Do you understand? I love you still. I was your lover, and I will, I will be so again."

"Ah, miserable coward!" cried the Tzigana, with a rapid glance toward the daggers, before which stood Menko, preventing her from advancing, and regarding her with eyes which burned with reckless passion, wounded self-love, and torturing jealousy. "Yes, coward!" she repeated, "coward, coward to dare to taunt me with an infamous past and speak of a still more infamous future!"

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"I love you!" exclaimed Menko again.

"Go!" she cried, crushing him with look and gesture. "Go! I order you out of my presence, lackey! Go!"

All the spirit of the daughters of the puszta, the violent pride of her Hungarian blood, flashed from her eyes; and Menko, fascinated, gazed at her as if turned to stone, as she stood there magnificent in her anger, superb in her contempt.

"Yes, I will go to-day," he said at last, "but tomorrow night I shall come again, Marsa. As my dearest treasure, I have preserved the key of that gate I opened once to meet you who were waiting for me in the shadow of the trees. Have you forgotten that, also? You say you have forgotten all."

And as he spoke, she saw again the long alley behind the villa, ending in a small gate which, one evening after the return from Pau, Michel opened, and came, as he said, to meet her waiting for him. It was true. Yes, it was true. Menko did not lie this time! She had waited for him there, two years before, unhappy girl that she was! All that hideous love she had believed lay buried in Pau as in a tomb.

"Listen, Marsa," continued Menko, suddenly recovering, by a strong effort of the will, his coolness, "I must see you once again, have one more opportunity to plead my cause. The letters you wrote to me, those dear letters which I have covered with my kisses and blistered with my tears, those letters which I have kept despite your prayers and your commands, those letters which have been my only consolation—I will bring them to you to-morrow night. Do you understand me?"

Her great eyes fixed, and her lips trembling horribly, Marsa made no reply.

"Do you understand me, Marsa?" he repeated, imploring and threatening at once.

"Yes," she murmured at last.

She paused a moment; then a broken, feverish laugh burst from her lips, and she continued, with stinging irony:

"Either my letters or myself! It is a bargain pure and simple! Such a proposition has been made once before—it is historical—you probably remember it. In that case, the woman killed herself. I shall act otherwise, believe me!"

There was in her icy tones a threat, which gave pleasure to Michel Menko. He vaguely divined a danger. "You mean?" he asked.

"I mean, you must never again appear before me. You must go to London, to America; I don't care where. You must be dead to the one you have cowardly betrayed. You must

burn or keep those letters, it little matters to me which; but you must still be honorable enough not to use them as a weapon against me. This interview, which wearies more than it angers me, must be the last. You must leave me to my sorrows or my joys, without imagining that you could ever have anything in common with a woman who despises you. You have crossed the threshold of this house for the last time. Or, if not—Ah! if not—I swear to you that I have energy enough and resolution enough to defend myself alone, and alone to punish you! In your turn, you understand me, I imagine?”

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"Certainly," said Michel. "But you are too imprudent, Marsa. I am not a man to make recoil by speaking of danger. Through the gate, or over the wall if the gate is barricaded, I shall come to you again, and you will have to listen to me."

The lip of the Tzigana curled disdainfully.

"I shall not even change the lock of that gate, and besides, the large gate of the garden remains open these summer nights. You see that you have only to come. But I warn you neither to unlock the one nor to pass through the other. It is not I whom you will find at the rendezvous."

"Still, I am sure that it would be you, blarsa, if I should tell you that to-morrow evening I shall be under the window of the pavilion at the end of the garden, and that you must meet me there to receive from my hand your letters, all your letters, which I shall bring you."

"Do you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"Certain? Why?"

"Because you will reflect."

"I have had time to reflect. Give me another reason."

"Another reason is that you can not afford to leave such proofs in my hands. I assure you that it would be folly to make of a man like me, who would willingly die for you, an open and implacable enemy."

"I understand. A man like you would die willingly for a woman, but he insults and threatens her, like the vilest of men, with a punishment more cruel than death itself. Well! it matters little to me. I shall not be in the pavilion where you have spoken to me of your love, and I will have it torn down and the debris of it burned within three days. I shall not await you. I shall never see you again. I do not fear you. And I leave you the right of doing with those letters what you please!"

Then, surveying him from head to foot, as if to measure the degree of audacity to which he could attain, "Adieu!" she said.

"Au revoir!" he rejoined coldly, giving to the salutation an emphasis full of hidden meaning.

The Tzigana stretched out her hand, and pulled a silken bellcord.

A servant appeared.

"Show this gentleman out," she said, very quietly.

CHAPTER XIV

"Have I the right to lie?"

Then the Tzigana's romance, in which she had put all her faith and her belief, had ended, like a bad dream, she said to herself: "My life is over!"

What remained to her? Expiation? Forgetfulness?

She thought of the cloister and the life of prayer of those blue sisters she saw under the trees of Maisons-Lafitte. She lived in the solitude of her villa, remaining there during the winter in a melancholy tete-a-tete with old Vogotzine, who was always more or less under the effect of liquor. Then, as death would not take her, she gradually began to go into Parisian society, slowly forgetting the past, and the folly

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which she had taken for love little by little faded mistily away. It was like a recovery from an illness, or the disappearance of a nightmare in the dawn of morning. Now, Marsa Laszlo, who, two years before, had longed for annihilation and death, occasionally thought the little Baroness Dinati right when she said, in her laughing voice: "What are you thinking of, my dear child? Is it well for a girl of your age to bury herself voluntarily and avoid society?" She was then twenty-four: in three or four years she had aged mentally ten; but her beautiful oval face had remained unchanged, with the purity of outline of a Byzantine Madonna.

Then—life has its awakenings—she met Prince Andras: all her admirations as a girl, her worship of patriotism and heroism, flamed forth anew; her heart, which she had thought dead, throbbed, as it had never throbbed before, at the sound of the voice of this man, truly loyal, strong and gentle, and who was (she knew it well, the unhappy girl!) the being for whom she was created, the ideal of her dreams. She loved him silently, but with a deep and eternal passion; she loved him without saying to herself that she no longer had any right to love. Did she even think of her past? Does one longer think of the storm when the wind has driven off the heavy, tear-laden clouds, and the thunder has died away in the distance? It seemed to her now that she had never had but one name in her heart, and upon her lips—Zilah.

And then this man, this hero, her hero, asked her hand, and said to her, "I love you."

Andras loved her! With what a terrible contraction of the heart did she put to herself the formidable question: "Have I the right to lie? Shall I have the courage to confess?"

She held in her grasp the most perfect happiness a woman could hope for, the dream of her whole life; and, because a worthless scoundrel had deceived her, because there were, in her past, hours which she remembered only to curse, effaced hours, hours which appeared to her now never to have existed, was she obliged to ruin her life, to break her heart, and, herself the victim, to pay for the lie uttered by a coward? Was it right? Was it just? Was she to be forever bound to that past, like a corpse to its grave? What! She had no longer the right to love? no longer the right to live?

She adored Andras; she would have given her life for him. And he also loved her; she was the first woman who had ever touched his heart. He had evidently felt himself isolated, with his old chivalrous ideas, in a world devoted to the worship of low things, tangible successes, and profitable realities. He was, so to speak, a living anachronism in the midst of a society which had faith in nothing except victorious brutalities, and which marched on, crushing, beneath its iron-shod heels, the hopes and visions of the enthusiastic. He recalled those evenings after a battle when, in the woods reddened by the setting sun, his father and Varhely said to him: "Let us remain to the last, and protect the retreat!" And it seemed to him that, amid the bestialities of the moment and

the vulgarities of the century, he still protected the retreat of misunderstood virtues and generous enthusiasms; and it pleased him to be the rear guard of chivalry in defeat.

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He shut himself up obstinately in his isolation, like Marsa in her solitude; and he did not consider himself ridiculously absurd or foolishly romantic, when he remembered that his countrymen, the Hungarians, were the only people, perhaps, who, in the abasement of all Europe before the brutality of triumph and omnipotent pessimism, had preserved their traditions of idealism, chivalry, and faith in the old honor; the Hungarian nationality was also the only one which had conquered its conquerors by its virtues, its persistence in its hopes, its courage, its contempt of all baseness, its extraordinary heroism, and had finally imposed its law upon Austria, bearing away the old empire as on the croup of its horse toward the vast plains of liberty. The ideal would, therefore, have its moments of victory: an entire people proved it in history.

“Let this world boast,” said Andras, “of the delights of its villainy, and grovel in all that is low and base. Life is not worth living unless the air one breathes is pure and free! Man is not the brother of swine!”

And these same ideas, this same faith, this same dreamy nature and longing for all that is generous and brave, he suddenly found again in the heart of Marsa. She represented to him a new and happy existence. Yes, he thought, she would render him happy; she would understand him, aid him, surround him with the fondest love that man could desire. And she, also, thinking of him, felt herself capable of any sacrifice. Who could tell? Perhaps the day would come when it would be necessary to fight again; then she would follow him, and interpose her breast between him and the balls. What happiness to die in saving him! But, no, no! To live loving him, making him happy, was her duty now; and was it necessary to renounce this delight because hated kisses had once soiled her lips? No, she could not! And yet—and yet, strict honor whispered to Marsa, that she should say No to the Prince; she had no right to his love.

But, if she should reject Andras, he would die, Varhely had said it. She would then slay two beings, Andras and herself, with a single word. She! She did not count! But he! And yet she must speak. But why speak? Was it really true that she had ever loved another? Who was it? The one whom she worshipped with all her heart, with all the fibres of her being, was Andras! Oh, to be free to love him! Marsa's sole hope and thought were now to win, some day, forgiveness for having said nothing by the most absolute devotion that man had ever encountered. Thinking continually these same thoughts, always putting off taking a decision till the morrow, fearing to break both his heart and hers, the Tzigana let the time slip by until the day came when the fete in celebration of her betrothal was to take place. And on that very day Michel Menko appeared before her, not abashed, but threatening. Her dream of happiness ended in this reality—Menko saying: “You have been mine; you shall be mine again, or you are lost!”

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Lost! And how?

With cold resolution, Marsa Laszlo asked herself this question, terrible as a question of life or death:

“What would the Prince do, if, after I became his wife, he should learn the truth?”

“What would he do? He would kill me,” thought the Tzigana. “He would kill me. So much the better!” It was a sort of a bargain which she proposed to herself, and which her overwhelming love dictated.

“To be his wife, and with my life to pay for that moment of happiness! If I should speak now, he would fly from me, I should never see him again—and I love him. Well, I sacrifice what remains to me of existence to be happy for one short hour!” She grew to think that she had a right thus to give her life for her love, to belong to Andras, to be the wife of that hero if only for a day, and to die then, to die saying to him: “I was unworthy of you, but I loved you; here, strike!” Or rather to say nothing, to be loved, to take opium or digitalis, and to fall asleep with this last supremely happy thought: “I am his wife, and he loves me!” What power in the world could prevent her from realizing her dream? Would she resemble Michel in lying thus? No; since she would immediately sacrifice herself without hesitation, with joy, for the honor of her husband.

“Yes, my life against his love. I shall be his wife and die!”

She did not think that, in sacrificing her life, she would condemn Zilah to death. Or rather, with one of those subterfuges by which we voluntarily deceive ourselves, she thought: “He will be consoled for my death, if he ever learns what I was.” But why should he ever learn it? She would take care to die so that it should be thought an accident.

Marsa’s resolve was taken. She had contracted a debt, and she would pay it with her blood. Michel now mattered little to her, let him do what he would. The young man’s threat: “To-morrow night!” returned to her mind without affecting her in the least. The contemptuous curl of her lip seemed silently to brave Michel Menko.

In all this there was a different manifestation of her double nature: in her love for Andras and her longing to become his wife, the blood of the Tzigana, her mother, spoke; Prince Tcheretteff, the Russian, on the other hand, revived in her silent, cold bravado.

She lay down to rest, still feverish from the struggle, and worn out, slept till morning, to awaken calm, languid, but almost happy.

She passed the whole of the following day in the garden, wondering at times if the appearance of Menko and his tomorrow were not a dream, a nightmare. Tomorrow? That was to-day.

“Yes, yes, he will come! He is quite capable of coming,” she murmured.

She despised him enough to believe that he would dare, this time, to keep his word.

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Lying back in a low wicker chair, beneath a large oak, whose trunk was wreathed with ivy, she read or thought the hours away. A Russian belt, enamelled with gold and silver, held together her trailing white robes of India muslin, trimmed with Valenciennes, and a narrow scarlet ribbon encircled her throat like a line of blood. The sunlight, filtering through the leaves, flickered upon her dress and clear, dark cheeks, while, near by, a bush of yellow roses flung its fragrance upon the air. The only sound in the garden was the gentle rustle of the trees, which recalled to her the distant murmur of the sea. Gradually she entirely forgot Michel, and thought only of the happy moments of the previous day, of the boat floating down the Seine past the silvery willows on the banks of the sparkling water, of the good people on the barge calling out to her, "Be happy! be happy!" and the little children throwing smiling kisses to her.

A gentle languor enveloped the warm, sunny garden. Old Sol poured his golden light down upon the emerald turf, the leafy trees, the brilliant flowerbeds and the white walls of the villa. Under the green arch of the trees, where luminous insects, white and flame-colored butterflies, aimlessly chased one another, Marsa half slumbered in a sort of voluptuous oblivion, a happy calm, in that species of nirvana which the open air of summer brings. She felt herself far away from the entire world in that corner of verdure, and abandoned herself to childish hopes and dreams, in profound enjoyment of the beautiful day.

The Baroness Dinati came during the afternoon to see Marsa; she fluttered out into the garden, dressed in a clinging gown of some light, fluffy material, with a red umbrella over her head; and upon her tiny feet, of all things in the world, ebony sabots, bearing her monogram in silver upon the instep. It was a short visit, made up of the chatter and gossip of Paris. Little Jacquemin's article upon Prince Zilah's nautical fete had created a furore. That little Jacquemin was a charming fellow; Marsa knew him. No! Really? What! she didn't know Jacquemin of 'L'Actualite'? Oh! but she must invite him to the wedding, he would write about it, he wrote about everything; he was very well informed, was Jacquemin, on every subject, even on the fashions.

"Look! It was he who told me that these sabots were to be worn. The miserable things nearly madame break my neck when I entered the carriage; but they are something new. They attract attention. Everybody says, What are they? And when one has pretty feet, not too large, you know," *etc.*, *etc.*

She rattled on, moistening her pretty red lips with a lemonade, and nibbling a cake, and then hastily departed just as Prince Andras's carriage stopped before the gate. The Baroness waved her hand to him with a gay smile, crying out:

"I will not take even a minute of your time. You have to-day something pleasanter to do than to occupy yourself with poor, insignificant me!"

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Marsa experienced the greatest delight in seeing Andras, and listening to the low, tender accents of his voice; she felt herself to be loved and protected. She gave herself up to boundless hopes—she, who had before her, perhaps, only a few days of life. She felt perfectly happy near Andras; and it seemed to her that to-day his manner was tenderer, the tones of his voice more caressing, than usual.

“I was right to believe in chimeras,” he said, “since all that I longed for at twenty years is realized to-day. Very often, dear Marsa, when I used to feel sad and discouraged, I wondered whether my life lay behind me. But I was longing for you, that was all. I knew instinctively that there existed an exquisite woman, born for me, my wife—my wife! and I waited for you.”

He took her hands, and gazed upon her face with a look of infinite tenderness.

“And suppose that you had not found me?” she asked.

“I should have continued to drag out a weary existence. Ask Varhely what I have told him of my life.”

Marsa felt her heart sink within her; but she forced herself to smile. All that Varhely had said to her returned to her mind. Yes, Zilah had staked his very existence upon her love. To drag aside the veil from his illusion would be like tearing away the bandages from a wound. Decidedly, the resolution she had taken was the best one—to say nothing, but, in the black silence of suicide, which would be at once a deliverance and a punishment, to disappear, leaving to Zilah only a memory.

But why not die now? Ah! why? why? To this eternal question Marsa made reply, that, for deceiving him by becoming his wife, she would pay with her life. A kiss, then death. In deciding to act a lie, she condemned herself. She only sought to give to her death the appearance of an accident, not wishing to leave to Andras the double memory of a treachery and a crime.

She listened to the Prince as he spoke of the future, of all the happiness of their common existence. She listened as if her resolution to die had not been taken, and as if Zilah was promising her, not a minute, but an eternity, of joy.

General Vogotzine and Marsa accompanied the Prince to the station, he having come to Maisons by the railway. The Tzigana's Danish hounds went with them, bounding about Andras, and licking his hands as he caressed them.

“They already know the master,” laughed Vogotzine. “I have rarely seen such gentle animals,” remarked the Prince.

“Gentle? That depends!” said Marsa.

After separating from the Prince, she returned, silent and abstracted, with Vogotzine. She saw Andras depart with a mournful sadness, and a sudden longing to have him stay—to protect her, to defend her, to be there if Michel should come.

It was already growing dark when they reached home. Marsa ate but little at dinner, and left Vogotzine alone to finish his wine.

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Later, the General came, as usual, to bid his niece goodnight. He found Marsa lying upon the divan in the little salon.

"Don't you feel well? What is the matter?"

"Nothing."

"I feel a little tired, and I was going to bed. You don't care to have me keep you company, do you, my dear?"

Sometimes he was affectionate to her, and sometimes he addressed her with timid respect; but Marsa never appeared to notice the difference.

"I prefer to remain alone," she answered.

The General shrugged his shoulders, bent over, took Marsa's delicate hand in his, and kissed it as he would have kissed that of a queen.

Left alone, Marsa lay there motionless for more than an hour. Then she started suddenly, hearing the clock strike eleven, and rose at once.

The domestics had closed the house. She went out by a back door which was used by the servants, the key of which was in the lock.

She crossed the garden, beneath the dark shadows of the trees, with a slow, mechanical movement, like that of a somnambulist, and proceeded to the kennel, where the great Danish hounds and the colossus of the Himalayas were baying, and rattling their chains.

"Peace, Ortog! Silence, Duna!"

At the sound of her voice, the noise ceased as by enchantment.

She pushed open the door of the kennel, entered, and caressed the heads of the dogs, as they placed their paws upon her shoulders. Then she unfastened their chains, and in a clear, vibrating voice, said to them:

"Go!"

She saw them bound out, run over the lawn, and dash into the bushes, appearing and disappearing like great, fantastic shadows, in the pale moonlight. Then, slowly, and with the Muscovite indifference which her father, Prince Tcheretteff, might have displayed when ordering a spy or a traitor to be shot, she retraced her steps to the house, where all seemed to sleep, murmuring, with cold irony, in a sort of impersonal affirmation, as if she were thinking not of herself, but of another:

“Now, I hope that Prince Zilah’s fiancée is well guarded!”

CHAPTER XV

“As clings the leaf unto the tree”

Michel Menko was alone in the little house he had hired in Paris, in the Rue d’Aumale. He had ordered his coachman to have his coupe in readiness for the evening. “Take Trilby,” he said. “He is a better horse than Jack, and we have a long distance to go; and take some coverings for yourself, Pierre. Until this evening, I am at home to no one.”

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The summer day passed very slowly for him in the suspense of waiting. He opened and read the letters of which he had spoken to Marsa the evening before; they always affected him like a poison, to which he returned again and again with a morbid desire for fresh suffering—love-letters, the exchange of vows now borne away as by a whirlwind, but which revived in Michel's mind happy hours, the only hours of his life in which he had really lived, perhaps. These letters, dated from Pau, burned him like a live coal as he read them. They still retained a subtle perfume, a fugitive aroma, which had survived their love, and which brought Marsa vividly before his eyes. Then, his heart bursting with jealousy and rage, he threw the package into the drawer from which he had taken it, and mechanically picked up a volume of De Musset, opening to some page which recalled his own suffering. Casting this aside, he took up another book, and his eyes fell upon the passionate verses of the soldier-poet, Petoefi, addressed to his Etelka:

Thou lovest me not? What matters it?
My soul is linked to thine,
As clings the leaf unto the tree:
Cold winter comes; it falls; let be!
So I for thee will pine. My fate pursues me to the tomb.
Thou fliest? Even in its gloom
Thou art not free.
What follows in thy steps? Thy shade?
Ah, no! my soul in pain, sweet maid,
E'er watches thee.

"My soul is linked to thine, as clings the leaf unto the tree!" Michel repeated the lines with a sort of defiance in his look, and longed impatiently and nervously for the day to end.

A rapid flush of anger mounted to his face as his valet entered with a card upon a salver, and he exclaimed, harshly:

"Did not Pierre give you my orders that I would receive no one?"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur; but Monsieur Labanoff insisted so strongly—"

"Labanoff?" repeated Michel.

"Monsieur Labanoff, who leaves Paris this evening, and desires to see Monsieur before his departure."

The name of Labanoff recalled to Michel an old friend whom he had met in all parts of Europe, and whom he had not seen for a long time. He liked him exceedingly for a sort of odd pessimism of aggressive philosophy, a species of mysticism mingled with

bitterness, which Labanoff took no pains to conceal. The young Hungarian had, perhaps, among the men of his own age, no other friend in the world than this Russian with odd ideas, whose enigmatical smile puzzled and interested him.

He looked at the clock. Labanoff's visit might make the time pass until dinner.

"Admit Monsieur Labanoff!"

In a few moments Labanoff entered. He was a tall, thin young man, with a complexion the color of wax, flashing eyes, and a little pointed mustache. His hair, black and curly, was brushed straight up from his forehead. He had the air of a soldier in his long, closely buttoned frock-coat.

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It was many months since these two men had met; but they had been long bound together by a powerful sympathy, born of quiet talks and confidences, in which each had told the other of similar sufferings. A long deferred secret hope troubled Labanoff as the memory of Marsa devoured Menko; and they had many times exchanged dismal theories upon the world, life, men, and laws. Their common bitterness united them. And Michel received Labanoff, despite his resolution to receive no one, because he was certain that he should find in him the same suffering as that expressed by De Musset and Petoefi.

Labanoff, to-day, appeared to him more enigmatical and gloomy than ever. From the lips of the Russian fell only words of almost tragical mystery.

Menko made him sit down by his side upon a divan, and he noticed that an extraordinary fever seemed to burn in the blue eyes of his friend.

"I learned that you had returned from London," said Labanoff; "and, as I was leaving Paris, I wished to see you before my departure. It is possible that we may never see each other again."

"Why?"

"I am going to St. Petersburg on pressing business."

"Have you finished your studies in Paris?"

"Oh! I had already received my medical diploma when I came here. I have been living in Paris only to be more at my ease to pursue—a project which interests me."

"A project?"

Menko asked the question mechanically, feeling very little curiosity to know Labanoff's secret; but the Russian's face wore a strange, ironical smile as he answered:

"I have nothing to say on that subject, even to the man for whom I have the most regard."

His brilliant eyes seemed to see strange visions before them. He remained silent for a moment, and then rose with an abrupt movement.

"There," he said, "that is all I had to tell you, my dear Menko. Now, 'au revoir', or rather, good-by; for, as I said before, I shall probably never see you again."

"And why, pray?"

“Oh! I don’t know; it is an idea of mine. And then, my beloved Russia is such a strange country. Death comes quickly there.”

He had still upon his lips that inexplicable smile, jesting and sad at once.

Menko grasped the long, white hand extended to him.

“My dear Labanoff, it is not difficult to guess that you are going on some dangerous errand.” Smiling: “I will not do you the injustice to believe you a nihilist.”

Labanoff’s blue eyes flashed.

“No,” he said, “no, I am not a nihilist. Annihilation is absurd; but liberty is a fine thing!”

He stopped short, as if he feared that he had already said too much.

“Adieu, my dear Menko.”

The Hungarian detained him with a gesture, saying, with a tremble in his voice:

“Labanoff! You have found me when a crisis in my life is also impending. I am about, like yourself, to commit a great folly; a different one from yours, no doubt. However, I have no right to tell you that you are about to commit some folly.”

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"No," calmly replied the Russian, very pale, but still smiling, "it is not a folly."

"But it is a danger?" queried Menko.

Labanoff made no reply.

"I do not know either," said Michel, "how my affair will end. But, since chance has brought us together today, face to face—"

"It was not chance, but my own firm resolution to see you again before my departure."

"I know what your friendship for me is, and it is for that reason that I ask you to tell me frankly where you will be in a month."

"In a month?" repeated Labanoff.

"Give me the route you are going to take? Shall you be a fixture at St. Petersburg?"

"Not immediately," responded the Russian, slowly, his gaze riveted upon Menko. "In a month I shall still be at Warsaw. At St. Petersburg the month after."

"Thanks. I only ask you to let me know, in some way, where you are."

"Why?"

"Because, I should like to join you."

"You!"

"It is only a fancy," said Menko, with an attempt at a laugh. "I am bored with life—you know it; I find it a nuisance. If we did not spur it like an old, musty horse, it would give us the same idiotic round of days. I do not know—I do not wish to know—why you are going to Russia, and what this final farewell of which you have just spoken signifies; I simply guess that you are off on some adventure, and it is possible that I may ask you to allow me to share it."

"Why?" said Labanoff, coldly. "You are not a Russian."

Menko smiled, and, placing his hands upon the thin shoulders of his friend, he said:

"Those words reveal many things. It is well that they were not said before an agent of police."

"Yes," responded Labanoff, firmly. "But I am not in the habit of recklessly uttering my thoughts; I know that I am speaking now to Count Menko."

“And Count Menko will be delighted, my dear Labanoff, if you will let him know where, in Poland or Russia, he must go, soon, to obtain news of you. Fear nothing: neither there nor here will I question you. But I shall be curious to know what has become of you, and you know that I have enough friendship for you to be uneasy about you. Besides, I long to be on the move; Paris, London, the world, in short, bores me, bores me, bores me!”

“The fact is, it is stupid, egotistical and cowardly,” responded Labanoff.

He again held out to Menko his nervous hand, burning, like his blue eyes, with fever.

“Farewell!” he said.

“No, no, 'au revoir'!”

“‘Au revoir’ be it then. I will let you know what has become of me.”

“And where you are?”

“And where I am.”

“And do not be astonished if I join you some fine morning.”

“Nothing ever astonishes me,” said the Russian. “Nothing!”

And in that word nothing were expressed profound disgust with life and fierce contempt of death.

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Menko warmly grasped his friend's thin and emaciated hand; and, the last farewell spoken to the fanatic departing for some tragical adventure, the Hungarian became more sombre and troubled than before, and Labanoff's appearance seemed like a doubtful apparition. He returned to his longing to see the end of the most anxious day of his life.

At last, late in the evening, Michel entered his coupe, and was driven away-down the Rue d'Aumale, through the Rue Pigalle and the Rue de Douai, to the rondpoint of the Place Clichy, the two lanterns casting their clear light into the obscurity. The coupe then took the road to Maisons-Lafitte, crossing the plain and skirting wheat-fields and vineyards, with the towering silhouette of Mont Valerien on the left, and on the right, sharply defined against the sky, a long line of hills, dotted with woods and villas, and with little villages nestling at their base, all plunged in a mysterious shadow.

Michel, with absent eyes, gazed at all this, as Trilby rapidly trotted on. He was thinking of what lay before him, of the folly he was about to commit, as he had said to Labanoff. It was a folly; and yet, who could tell? Might not Marsa have reflected? Might she not; alarmed at his threats, be now awaiting him? Her exquisite face, like a lily, rose before him; an overwhelming desire to annihilate time and space took possession of him, and he longed to be standing, key in hand, before the little gate in the garden wall.

He was well acquainted with the great park of Maisons-Lafitte, with the white villas nestling among the trees. On one side Prince Tchereteff's house looked out upon an almost desert tract of land, on which a racecourse had been mapped out; and on the other extended with the stables and servants' quarters to the forest, the wall of the Avenue Lafitte bounding the garden. In front of the villa was a broad lawn, ending in a low wall with carved gates, allowing, through the branches of the oaks and chestnuts, a view of the hills of Corneilles.

After crossing the bridge of Sartrouville, Michel ordered his coachman to drive to the corner of the Avenue Corneille, where he alighted in the shadow of a clump of trees.

"You will wait here, Pierre," he said, "and don't stir till I return."

He walked past the sleeping houses, under the mysterious alleys of the trees, until he reached the broad avenue which, cutting the park in two, ran from the station to the forest. The alley that he was seeking descended between two rows of tall, thick trees, forming an arch overhead, making it deliciously cool and shady in the daytime, but now looking like a deep hole, black as a tunnel. Pushing his way through the trees and bushes, and brushing aside the branches of the acacias, the leaves of which fell in showers about him, Michel reached an old wall, the white stones of which were overgrown with ivy. Behind the wall the wind rustled amid the pines and oaks like the vague murmur of a coming storm. And there, at the end of the narrow path, half hidden by the ivy, was the little gate he was seeking. He cautiously brushed aside the leaves

and felt for the keyhole; but, just as he was about to insert the key, which burned in his feverish fingers, he stopped short.

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Was Marsa awaiting him? Would she not call for help, drive him forth, treat him like a thief?

Suppose the gate was barred from within? He looked at the wall, and saw that by clinging to the ivy he could reach the top. He had not come here to hesitate. No, a hundred times no!

Besides, Marsa was certainly there, trembling, fearful, cursing him perhaps, but still there.

"No," he murmured aloud in the silence, "were even death behind that gate, I would not recoil."

CHAPTER XVI

"It is A man they are devouring!"

Michel Menko was right. The beautiful Tzigana was awaiting him.

She stood at her window, like a spectre in her white dress, her hands clutching the sill, and her eyes striving to pierce the darkness which enveloped everything, and opened beneath her like a black gulf. With heart oppressed with fear, she started at the least sound.

All she could see below in the garden were the branches defined against the sky; a single star shining through the leaves of a poplar, like a diamond in a woman's tresses; and under the window the black stretch of the lawn crossed by a band of a lighter shade, which was the sand of the path. The only sound to be heard was the faint tinkle of the water falling into the fountain.

Her glance, shifting as her thoughts, wandered vaguely over the trees, the open spaces which seemed like masses of heavy clouds, and the sky set with constellations. She listened with distended ears, and a shudder shook her whole body as she heard suddenly the distant barking of a dog.

The dog perceived some one. Was it Menko?

No: the sound, a howling rather than a barking, came from a long distance, from Sartrouville, beyond the Seine.

"It is not Duna or Bundas," she murmured, "nor Ortog. What folly to remain here at the window! Menko will not come. Heaven grant that he does not come!"

And she sighed a happy sigh as if relieved of a terrible weight.

Suddenly, with a quick movement, she started violently back, as if some frightful apparition had risen up before her.

Hoarse bayings, quite different from the distant barking of a moment before, rent the air, and were repeated more and more violently below there in the darkness. This time it was indeed the great Danish hounds and the shaggy colossus of the Himalayas, which were precipitating themselves upon some prey.

“Great God! He is there, then! He is there!” whispered Marsa, paralyzed with horror.

There was something gruesome in the cries of the dogs, By the continued repetition of the savage noises, sharp, irritated, frightful snarls and yelps, Marsa divined some horrible struggle in the darkness, of a man against the beasts. Then all her terror seemed to mount to her lips in a cry of pity, which was instantly repressed. She steadied herself against the window, striving, with all her strength, to reason herself into calmness.

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"It was his own wish," she thought.

Did she not know, then, what she was doing when, wishing to place a living guard between herself and danger, she had descended to the kennel and unloosed the ferocious animals, which, recognizing her voice, had bounded about her and licked her hands with many manifestations of joy? She had ascended again to her chamber and extinguished the light, around which fluttered the moths, beating the opal shade with their downy wings; and, in the darkness, drinking in the nightair at the open window, she had waited, saying to herself that Michel Menko would not come; but, if he did come, it was the will of fate that he should fall a victim to the devoted dogs which guarded her.

Why should she pity him?

She hated him, this Michel. He had threatened her, and she had defended herself, that was all. Ortog's teeth were made for thieves and intruders. No pity! No, no—no pity for such a coward, since he had dared—

But yet, as the ferocious bayings of the dogs below became redoubled in their fury, she imagined, in terror, a crunching of bones and a tearing of flesh; and, as her imagination conjured up before her Michel fighting, in hideous agony, against the bites of the dogs, she shuddered; she was afraid, and again a stifled cry burst forth from her lips. A sort of insanity took possession of her. She tried to cry out for mercy as if the animals could hear her; she sought the door of her chamber, groping along the wall with her hands outspread before her, in order to descend the staircase and rush out into the garden; but her limbs gave way beneath her, and she sank an inert mass upon the carpet in an agony of fear and horror.

"My God! My God! It is a man they are devouring;" and her voice died away in a smothered call for help.

Then she suddenly raised her head, as if moved by an electric shock.

There was no more noise! Nothing! The black night had all at once returned to its great, mysterious silence. Marsa experienced a sensation of seeing a pall stretched over a dead body. And in the darkness there seemed to float large spots of blood.

"Ah! the unhappy man!" she faltered.

Then, again, the voices of the dogs broke forth, rapid, angry, still frightfully threatening. The animals appeared now to be running, and their bayings became more and more distant.

What had happened?

One would have said that they were dragging away their prey, tearing it with hideous crimson fangs.

CHAPTER XVII

Marsa's guardians.

Was Michel Menko indeed dead? We left him just as he was turning the key in the little gate in the wall. He walked in boldly, and followed a path leading to an open space where was the pavilion he had spoken of to Marsa. He looked to see whether the windows of the pavilion were lighted, or whether there were a line of light under the door. No: the delicate tracery of the pagoda-like structure showed dimly against the sky; but there was no sign of life. Perhaps, however, Marsa was there in the darkness.

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He would glide under the window and call. Then, hearing him and frightened at so much audacity, she would descend.

He advanced a few steps toward the pavilion; but, all at once, in the part of the garden which seemed lightest, upon the broad gravel walk, he perceived odd, creeping shadows, which the moon, emerging from a cloud, showed to be dogs, enormous dogs, with their ears erect, which, with abound and a low, deep growl, made a dash toward him with outspread limbs—a dash terrible as the leap of a tiger.

A quick thought illumined Michel's brain like a flash of electricity: "Ah! this is Marsa's answer!" He had just time to mutter, with raging irony:

"I was right, she was waiting for me!"

Then, before the onslaught of the dogs, he recoiled, clasping his hands upon his breast and boldly thrusting out his elbows to ward off their ferocious attacks. With a sudden tightening of the muscles he repulsed the Danish hounds, which rolled over writhing on the ground, and then, with formidable baying, returned more furiously still to the charge.

Michel Menko had no weapon.

With a knife he could have defended himself, and slit the bellies of the maddened animals; but he had nothing! Was he to be forced, then, to fly, pursued like a fox or a deer?

Suppose the servants, roused by the noise of the dogs, should come in their turn, and seize him as a thief? At all events, that would be comparative safety; at least, they would rescue him from these monsters. But no: nothing stirred in the silent, impassive house.

The hounds, erect upon their hind legs, rushed again at Michel, who, overturning them with blows from his feet, and striking them violently in the jaws, now staggered back, Ortog having leaped at his throat. By a rapid movement of recoil, the young man managed to avoid being strangled; but the terrible teeth of the dog, tearing his coat and shirt into shreds, buried themselves deep in the flesh of his shoulder.

The steel-like muscles and sinewy strength of the Hungarian now stood him in good stead. He must either free himself, or perish there in the hideous carnage of a quarry. He seized with both hands, in a viselike grip, Ortog's enormous neck, and, at the same time, with a desperate jerk, shook free his shoulder, leaving strips of his flesh between the jaws of the animal, whose hot, reeking breath struck him full in the face. With wild, staring eyes, and summoning up, in an instinct of despair, all his strength and courage, he buried his fingers in Ortog's neck, and drove his nails through the skin of the colossus, which struck and beat with his paws against the young man's breast. The

dog's tongue hung out of his mouth, under the suffocating pressure of the hands of the human being struggling for his life. As he fought thus against Ortog, the Hungarian gradually retreated, the two hounds leaping about him, now driven off by kicks (Duna's jaw was broken), and now, with roars of rage and fiery eyes, again attacking their human prey.

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One of them, Bundas, his teeth buried in Michel's left thigh, shook him, trying to throw him to the ground. A slip, and all would be over; if he should fall upon the gravel, the man would be torn to pieces and crunched like a deer caught by the hounds.

A terrible pain nearly made Michel faint—Bundas had let go his hold, stripping off a long tongue of flesh; but, in a moment, it had the same effect upon him as that of the knife of a surgeon opening a vein, and the weakness passed away. The unfortunate man still clutched, as in a death-grip, Ortog's shaggy neck, and he perceived that the struggles of the dog were no longer of the same terrible violence; the eyes of the ferocious brute were rolled back in his head until they looked like two large balls of gleaming ivory. Michel threw the heavy mass furiously from him, and the dog, suffocated, almost dead, fell upon the ground with a dull, heavy sound.

Menko had now to deal only with the Danish hounds, which were rendered more furious than ever by the smell of blood. One of them, displaying his broken teeth in a hideous, snarling grin, hesitated a little to renew the onslaught, ready, as he was, to spring at his enemy's throat at the first false step; but the other, Bundas, with open mouth, still sprang at Michel, who repelled, with his left arm, the attacks of the bloody jaws. Suddenly a hollow cry burst from his lips like a death-rattle, forced from him as the dog buried his fangs in his forearm, until they nearly met. It seemed to him that the end had now come.

Each second took away more and more of his strength. The tremendous tension of muscles and nerves, which had been necessary in the battle with Ortog, and the blood he had lost, his whole left side being gashed as with cuts from a knife, weakened him. He calculated, that, unless he could reach the little gate before the other dog should make up his mind to leap upon him, he was lost, irredeemably lost.

Bundas did not let go his hold, but twisting himself around Michel's body, he clung with his teeth to the young man's lacerated arm; the other, Duna, bayed horribly, ready to spring at any moment.

Michel gathered together all the strength that remained to him, and ran rapidly backward, carrying with him the furious beast, which was crushing the very bones of his arm.

He reached the end of the walk, and the gate was there before him. Groping in the darkness with his free hand, he found the key, turned it, and the gate flew open. Fate evidently did not wish him to perish.

Then, in the same way as he had shaken off Ortog, whom he could now hear growling and stumbling over the gravel a little way off, Michel freed his arm from Bundas, forcing his fingers and nails into the animal's ears; and the moment he had thrown the brute to

the ground, he dashed through the gate, and slammed it to behind him, just as the two dogs together were preparing to leap again upon him.

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Then, leaning against the gate, and steadying himself, so as not to fall, he stood there weak and faint, while the dogs, on the other side of the wooden partition which now separated him from death—and what a death! erect upon their hind legs, like rampant, heraldic animals, tried to break through, cracking, in their gory jaws, long strips of wood torn from the barrier which kept them from their human prey.

Michel never knew how long he remained there, listening to the hideous growling of his bloodthirsty enemies. At last the thought came to him that he must go; but how was he to drag himself to the place where Pierre was waiting for him? It was so far! so far! He would faint twenty times before reaching there. Was he about to fail now after all he had gone through?

His left leg was frightfully painful; but he thought he could manage to walk with it. His left shoulder and arm, however, at the least movement, caused him atrocious agony, as if the bones had been crushed by the wheel of some machine. He sought for his handkerchief, and enveloped his bleeding arm in it, tying the ends of it with his teeth. Then he tottered to a woodpile near by, and, taking one of the long sticks, he managed with its aid to drag himself along the alley, while through the branches the moon looked calmly down upon him.

He was worn out, and his head seemed swimming in a vast void, when he reached the end of the alley, and saw, a short way off down the avenue, the arch of the old bridge near which the coupe had stopped. One effort more, a few steps, and he was there! He was afraid now of falling unconscious, and remaining there in a dying condition, without his coachman even suspecting that he was so near him.

“Courage!” he murmured. “On! On!”

Two clear red lights appeared—the lanterns of the coup. “Pierre!” cried Michel in the darkness, “Pierre!” But he felt that his feeble voice would not reach the coachman, who was doubtless asleep on his box. Once more he gathered together his strength, called again, and advanced a little, saying to himself that a step or two more perhaps meant safety. Then, all at once, he fell prostrate upon his side, unable to proceed farther; and his voice, weaker and weaker, gradually failed him.

Fortunately, the coachman had heard him cry, and realized that something had happened. He jumped from his box, ran to his master, lifted him up, and carried him to the carriage. As the light of the lamps fell on the torn and bloody garments of the Count, whose pallid and haggard face was that of a dead man, Pierre uttered a cry of fright.

“Great heavens! Where have you been?” he exclaimed. “You have been attacked?”

“The coup—place me in the coup.”

“But there are doctors here. I will go—”

“No—do nothing. Make no noise. Take me to Paris—I do not wish any one to know—To Paris—at once,” and he lost consciousness.

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Pierre, with some brandy he luckily had with him, bathed his master's temples, and forced a few drops between his lips; and, when the Count had recovered, he whipped up his horse and galloped to Paris, growling, with a shrug of the shoulders:

"There must have been a woman in this. Curse the women! They make all the trouble in the world."

It was daybreak when the coup reached Paris.

Pierre heard, as they passed the barrier, a laborer say to his mate

"That's a fine turnout. I wish I was in the place of the one who is riding inside!"

"So do I!" returned the other.

And Pierre thought, philosophically: "Poor fools! If they only knew!"

CHAPTER XVIII

"There is no need of accusing anyone."

At the first streak of daylight, Marsa descended, trembling, to the garden, and approached the little gate, wondering what horror would meet her eyes.

Rose-colored clouds, like delicate, silky flakes of wool, floated across the blue sky; the paling crescent of the moon, resembling a bent thread of silver wire, seemed about to fade mistily away; and, toward the east, in the splendor of the rising sun, the branches of the trees stood out against a background of burnished gold as in a Byzantine painting. The dewy calm and freshness of the early morning enveloped everything as in a bath of purity and youth.

But Marsa shuddered as she thought that perhaps this beautiful day was dawning upon a dead body. She stopped abruptly as she saw the gardener, with very pale face, come running toward her.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, something terrible has happened! Last night the dogs barked and barked; but they bark so often at the moon and the shadows, that no one got up to see what was the matter."

"Well—well?" gasped Marsa, her hand involuntarily seeking her heart.

"Well, there was a thief here last night, or several of them, for poor Ortog is half strangled; but the rascals did not get away scot free. The one who came through the

little path to the pavilion was badly bitten; his tracks can be followed in blood for a long distance a very long distance.”

“Then,” asked Marsa, quickly, “he escaped? He is not dead?”

“No, certainly not. He got away.”

“Ah! Thank heaven for that!” cried the Tzigana, her mind relieved of a heavy weight.

“Mademoiselle is too good,” said the gardener. “When a man enters, like that, another person’s place, he exposes himself to be chased like a rabbit, or to be made mincemeat of for the dogs. He must have had big muscles to choke Ortog, the poor beast!—not to mention that Duna’s teeth are broken. But the scoundrel got his share, too; for he left big splashes of blood upon the gravel.”

“Blood!”

“The most curious thing is that the little gate, to which there is no key, is unlocked. They came in and went out there. If that idiot of a Saboureau, whom General Vogotzine discharged—and rightly too, Mademoiselle—were not dead, I should say that he was at the bottom of all this.”

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"There is no need of accusing anyone," said Marsa, turning away.

The gardener returned to the neighborhood of the pavilion, and, examining the red stains upon the ground, he said: "All the same, this did not happen by itself. I am going to inform the police!"

CHAPTER XIX

"A beautiful dream"

It was the eve of the marriage-day of Prince Andras Zilah and Mademoiselle Marsa Laszlo, and Marsa sat alone in her chamber, where the white robes she was to wear next day were spread out on the bed; alone for the last time—to-morrow she would be another's.

The fiery Tzigana, who felt in her heart, implacable as it was to evil and falsehood, all capabilities of devotion and truth, was condemned to lie, or to lose the love of Prince Andras, which was her very life. There was no other alternative. No, no: since she had met this man, superior to all others, since he loved her and she loved him, she would take an hour of his life and pay for that hour with her own. She had no doubt but that an avowal would forever ruin her in Andras's eyes. No, again and forever no: it was much better to take the love which fate offered her in exchange for her life.

And, as she threw herself back in her chair with an expression of unchangeable determination in her dark, gazelle-like eyes, there suddenly came into her mind the memory of a day long ago, when, driving along the road from Maisons-Lafitte to Saint-Germain, she had met some wandering gipsies, two men and a woman, with copper-colored skins and black eyes, in which burned, like a live coal, the passionate melancholy of the race. The woman, a sort of long spear in her hand, was driving some little shaggy ponies, like those which range about the plains of Hungary. Bound like parcels upon the backs of these ponies were four or five little children, clothed in rags, and covered with the dust of the road. The woman, tall, dark and faded, a sort of turban upon her head, held out her hand toward Marsa's carriage with a graceful gesture and a broad smile—the supplicating smile of those who beg. A muscular young fellow, his crisp hair covered with a red fez, her brother—the woman was old, or perhaps she was less so than she seemed, for poverty brings wrinkles—walked by her side behind the sturdy little ponies. Farther along, another man waited for them at a corner of the road near a laundry, the employees of which regarded him with alarm, because, at the end of a rope, the gipsy held a small gray bear. As she passed by them, Marsa involuntarily exclaimed, in the language of her mother "Be szomorú!" (How sad it is!) The man, at her words, raised his head, and a flash of joy passed over his face, which showed, or Marsa thought so (who knows? perhaps she was mistaken), a love for his forsaken country. Well, now, she did not know why, the remembrance of these poor beings returned to

her, and she said to herself that her ancestors, humble and insignificant as these unfortunates in the dust and dirt of the highway, would have been astonished and incredulous if any one had told them that some day a girl born of their blood would wed a Zilah, one of the chiefs of that Hungary whose obscure and unknown minstrels they were! Ah! what an impossible dream it seemed, and yet it was realized now.

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At all events, a man's death did not lie between her and Zilah. Michel Menko, after lying at death's door, was cured of his wounds. She knew this from Baroness Dinati, who attributed Michel's illness to a sword wound secretly received for some woman. This was the rumor in Paris. The young Count had, in fact, closed his doors to every one; and no one but his physician had been admitted. What woman could it be? The little Baroness could not imagine.

Marsa thought again, with a shudder, of the night when the dogs howled; but, to tell the truth, she had no remorse. She had simply defended herself! The inquiry begun by the police had ended in no definite result. At Maisons-Lafitte, people thought that the Russian house had been attacked by some thieves who had been in the habit of entering unoccupied houses and rifling them of their contents. They had even arrested an old vagabond, and accused him of the attempted robbery at General Vogotzine's; but the old man had answered: "I do not even know the house." But was not this Menko a hundred times more culpable than a thief? It was more and worse than money or silver that he had dared to come for: it was to impose his love upon a woman whose heart he had well-nigh broken. Against such an attack all weapons were allowable, even Ortog's teeth. The dogs of the Tzigana had known how to defend her; and it was what she had expected from her comrades.

Had Michel Menko died, Marsa would have said, with the fatalism of the Orient: "It was his own will!" She was grateful, however, to fate, for having punished the wretch by letting him live. Then she thought no more of him except to execrate him for having poisoned her happiness, and condemned her either to a silence as culpable as a lie, or to an avowal as cruel as a suicide.

The night passed and the day came at last, when it was necessary for Marsa to become the wife of Prince Andras, or to confess to him her guilt. She wished that she had told him all, now that she had not the courage to do so. She had accustomed herself to the idea that a woman is not necessarily condemned to love no more because she has encountered a coward who has abused her love. She was in an atmosphere of illusion and chimera; what was passing about her did not even seem to exist. Her maids dressed her, and placed upon her dark hair the bridal veil: she half closed her eyes and murmured:

"It is a beautiful dream."

A dream, and yet a reality, consoling as a ray of light after a hideous nightmare. Those things which were false, impossible, a lie, a phantasmagoria born of a fever, were Michel Menko, the past years, the kisses of long ago, the threats of yesterday, the bayings of the infuriated dogs at that shadow which did not exist.

General Vogotzine, in a handsome uniform, half suffocated in his high vest, and with a row of crosses upon his breast—the military cross of St. George, with its red and black

ribbon; the cross of St. Anne, with its red ribbon; all possible crosses—was the first to knock at his niece's door, his sabre trailing upon the floor.

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"Who is it?" said Marsa.

"I, Vogotzine."

And, permission being given him, he entered the room.

The old soldier walked about his niece, pulling his moustache, as if he were conducting an inspection. He found Marsa charming. Pale as her white robe, with Tizsa's opal agraffe at her side, ready to clasp the bouquet of flowers held by one of her maids, she had never been so exquisitely beautiful; and Vogotzine, who was rather a poor hand at turning a compliment, compared her to a marble statue.

"How gallant you are this morning, General," she said, her heart bursting with emotion.

She waved away, with a brusque gesture, the orange-flowers which her maid was about to attach to her corsage.

"No," she said. "Not that! Roses."

"But, Mademoiselle—"

"Roses," repeated Marsa. "And for my hair white rosebuds also."

At this, the old General risked another speech.

"Do you think orange-blossoms are too vulgar, Marsa? By Jove! They don't grow in the ditches, though!"

And he laughed loudly at what he considered wit. But a frowning glance from the Tzigana cut short his hilarity; and, with a mechanical movement, he drew himself up in a military manner, as if the Czar were passing by.

"I will leave you to finish dressing, my dear," he said, after a moment.

He already felt stifled in the uniform, which he was no longer accustomed to wear, and he went out in the garden to breathe freer. While waiting there for Zilah, he ordered some cherry cordial, muttering, as he drank it:

"It is beautiful August weather. They will have a fine day; but I shall suffocate!"

The avenue was already filled with people. The marriage had been much discussed, both in the fashionable colony which inhabited the park and in the village forming the democratic part of the place; even from Sartrouville and Mesnil, people had come to see the Tzigana pass in her bridal robes.

“What is all that noise?” demanded Vogotzine of the liveried footman.

“That noise, General? The inhabitants of Maisons who have come to see the wedding procession.”

“Really? Ah! really? Well, they haven’t bad taste. They will see a pretty woman and a handsome uniform.” And the General swelled out his breast as he used to do in the great parades of the time of Nicholas, and the reviews in the camp of Tsarskoe-Selo.

Outside the garden, behind the chestnut-trees which hid the avenue, there was a sudden sound of the rolling of wheels, and the gay cracking of whips.

“Ah!” cried the General, “It is Zilah!”

And, rapidly swallowing a last glass of the cordial, he wiped his moustache, and advanced to meet Prince Andras, who was descending from his carriage.

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Accompanying the Prince were Yanski Varhely, and an Italian friend of Zilah's, Angelo Valla, a former minister of the Republic of Venice, in the time of Manin. Andras Zilah, proud and happy, appeared to have hardly passed his thirtieth year; a ray of youth animated his clear eyes. He leaped lightly out upon the gravel, which cracked joyously beneath his feet; and, as he advanced through the aromatic garden, to the villa where Marsa awaited him, he said to himself that no man in the world was happier than he.

Vogotzine met him, and, after shaking his hand, asked him why on earth he had not put on his national Magyar costume, which the Hungarians wore with such graceful carelessness.

"Look at me, my dear Prince! I am in full battle array!"

Andras was in haste to see Marsa. He smiled politely at the General's remark, and asked him where his niece was.

"She is putting on her uniform," replied Vogotzine, with a loud laugh which made his sabre rattle.

Most of the invited guests were to go directly to the church of Maisons. Only the intimate friends came first to the house, Baroness Dinati, first of all, accompanied by Paul Jacquemin, who took his eternal notes, complimenting both Andras and the General, the latter especially eager to detain as many as possible to the lunch after the ceremony. Vogotzine, doubtless, wished to show himself in all the eclat of his majestic appetite.

Very pretty, in her Louis Seize gown of pink brocade, and a Rembrandt hat with a long white feather (Jacquemin, who remained below, had already written down the description in his note-book), the little Baroness entered Marsa's room like a whirlwind, embracing the young girl, and going into ecstasy over her beauty.

"Ah! how charming you are, my dear child! You are the ideal of a bride! You ought to be painted as you are! And what good taste to wear roses, and not orange-flowers, which are so common, and only good for shopgirls. Turn around! You are simply exquisite."

Marsa, paler than her garments, looked at herself in the glass, happy in the knowledge of her beauty, since she was about to be his, and yet contemplating the tall, white figure as if it were not her own image.

She had often felt this impression of a twofold being, in those dreams where one seems to be viewing the life of another, or to be the disinterested spectator of one's own existence.

It seemed to her that it was not she who was to be married, or that suddenly the awakening would come.

"The Prince is below," said the Baroness Dinati.

"Ah!" said Marsa.

She started with a sort of involuntary terror, as this very name of Prince was at once that of a husband and that of a judge. But when, superb in the white draperies, which surrounded her like a cloud of purity, her long train trailing behind her, she descended the stairs, her little feet peeping in and out like two white doves, and appeared at the door of the little salon where Andras was waiting, she felt herself enveloped in an atmosphere of love. The Prince advanced to meet her, his face luminous with happiness; and, taking the young girl's hands, he kissed the long lashes which rested upon her cheek, saying, as he contemplated the white vision of beauty before him:

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“How lovely you are, my Marsa! And how I love you!”

The Prince spoke these words in a tone, and with a look, which touched the deepest depths of Marsa’s heart.

Then they exchanged those words, full of emotion, which, in their eternal triteness, are like music in the ears of those who love. Every one had withdrawn to the garden, to leave them alone in this last, furtive, happy minute, which is never found again, and which, on the threshold of the unknown, possesses a joy, sad as a last farewell, yet full of hope as the rising of the sun.

He told her how ardently he loved her, and how grateful he was to her for having consented, in her youth and beauty, to become the wife of a quasi-exile, who still kept, despite his efforts, something of the melancholy of the past.

And she, with an outburst of gratitude, devotion, and love, in which all the passion of her nature and her race vibrated, said, in a voice which trembled with unshed tears:

“Do not say that I give you my life. It is you who make of a girl of the steppes a proud and honored wife, who asks herself why all this happiness has come to her.” Then, nestling close to Andras, and resting her dark head upon his shoulder, she continued: “We have a proverb, you remember, which says, Life is a tempest. I have repeated it very often with bitter sadness. But now, that wicked proverb is effaced by the refrain of our old song, Life is a chalet of pearls.”

And the Tzigana, lost in the dream which was now a tangible reality, saying nothing, but gazing with her beautiful eyes, now moist, into the face of Andras, remained encircled in his arms, while he smiled and whispered, again and again, “I love you!”

All the rest of the world had ceased to exist for these two beings, absorbed in each other.

CHAPTER XX

THE BRIDAL DAY

The little Baroness ran into the room, laughing, and telling them how late it was; and Andras and Marsa, awakened to reality, followed her to the hall, where Varhely, Vogotzine, Angelo Valla, Paul Jacquemin and other guests were assembled as a sort of guard of honor to the bride and groom.

Andras and the Baroness, with Varhely, immediately entered the Prince’s carriage; Vogotzine taking his place in the coupe with Marsa. Then there was a gay crackling of the gravel, a flash of wheels in the sunlight, a rapid, joyous departure. Clustered

beneath the trees in the ordinarily quiet avenues of Maisons, the crowd watched the cortege; and old Vogotzine good-humoredly displayed his epaulettes and crosses for the admiration of the people who love uniforms.

As she descended from the carriage, Marsa cast a superstitious glance at the facade of the church, a humble facade, with a Gothic porch and cheap stained-glass windows, some of which were broken; and above a plaster tower covered with ivy and surmounted with a roughly carved cross. She entered the church almost trembling, thinking again how strange was this fate which united, before a village altar, a Tzigana and a Magyar. She walked up the aisle, seeing nothing, but hearing about her murmurs of admiration, and knelt down beside Andras, upon a velvet cushion, near which burned a tall candle, in a white candlestick.

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The little church, dimly lighted save where the priest stood, was hushed to silence, and Marsa felt penetrated with deep emotion. She had really drunk of the cup of oblivion; she was another woman, or rather a young girl, with all a young girl's purity and ignorance of evil. It seemed to her that the hated past was a bad dream; one of those unhealthy hallucinations which fly away at the dawn of day.

She saw, in the luminous enclosure of the altar, the priest in his white stole, and the choir boys in their snowy surplices. The waxen candles looked like stars against the white hangings of the chancel; and above the altar, a sweet-faced Madonna looked down with sad eyes upon the man and woman kneeling before her. Through the parti-colored windows, crossed with broad bands of red, the branches of the lindens swayed in the wind, and the fluttering tendrils of the ivy cast strange, flickering shadows of blue, violet, and almost sinister scarlet upon the guests seated in the nave.

Outside, in the square in front of the church, the crowd waited the end of the ceremony. Shopgirls from the Rue de l'Eglise, and laundresses from the Rue de Paris, curiously contemplated the equipages, with their stamping horses, and the coachmen, erect upon their boxes, motionless, and looking neither to the right nor the left. Through the open door of the church, at the end of the old oak arches, could be seen Marsa's white, kneeling figure, and beside her Prince Zilah, whose blond head, as he stood gazing down upon his bride, towered above the rest of the party.

The music of the organ, now tremulous and low, now strong and deep, caused a profound silence to fall upon the square; but, as the last note died away, there was a great scrambling for places to see the procession come out.

Above the mass of heads, the leaves of the old lindens rustled with a murmur which recalled that of the sea; and now and then a blossom of a yellowish white would flutter down, which the girls disputed, holding up their hands and saying:

"The one who catches it will have a husband before the year is out!"

A poor old blind man, cowering upon the steps of the sanctuary, was murmuring a monotonous prayer, like the plaint of a night bird.

Yanski Varhely regarded the scene with curiosity, as he waited for the end of the ceremony. Somewhat oppressed by the heavy atmosphere of the little church, and being a Huguenot besides, the old soldier had come out into the open air, and bared his head to the fresh breeze under the lindens.

His rugged figure had at first a little awed the crowd; but they soon began to rattle on again like a brook over the stones.



Varhely cast, from time to time, a glance into the interior of the church. Baroness Dinati was now taking up the collection for the poor, holding the long pole of the alms-box in her little, dimpled hands, and bowing with a pretty smile as the coins rattled into the receptacle.

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Varhely, after a casual examination of the ruins of an old castle which formed one side of the square, was about to return to the church, when a domestic in livery pushed his way through the crowd, and raising himself upon his toes, peered into the church as if seeking some one. After a moment the man approached Yanski, and, taking off his hat, asked, respectfully:

“Is it to Monsieur Varhely that I have the honor to speak?”

“Yes,” replied Yanski, a little surprised.

“I have a package for Prince Andras Zilah: would Monsieur have the kindness to take charge of it, and give it to the Prince? I beg Monsieur’s pardon; but it is very important, and I am obliged to go away at once. I should have brought it to Maisons yesterday.”

As he spoke, the servant drew from an inside pocket a little package carefully wrapped, and sealed with red sealing-wax.

“Monsieur will excuse me,” he said again, “but it is very important.”

“What is it?” asked Varhely, rather brusquely. “Who sent it?”

“Count Michel Menko.”

Varhely knew very well (as also did Andras), that Michel had been seriously ill; otherwise, he would have been astonished at the young man’s absence from the wedding of the Prince.

He thought Michel had probably sent a wedding present, and he took the little package, twisting it mechanically in his hands. As he did so, he gave a slight start of surprise; it seemed as if the package contained letters.

He looked at the superscription. The name of Prince Andras Zilah was traced in clear, firm handwriting, and, in the left-hand corner, Michel Menko had written, in Hungarian characters: “Very important! With the expression of my excuses and my sorrow.” And below, the signature “Menko Mihaly.”

The domestic was still standing there, hat in hand. “Monsieur will be good enough to pardon me,” he said; “but, in the midst of this crowd, I could not perhaps reach his Excellency, and the Count’s commands were so imperative that—”

“Very well,” interrupted Varhely. “I will myself give this to the Prince immediately.”

The domestic bowed, uttered his thanks, and left Varhely vaguely uneasy at this mysterious package which had been brought there, and which Menko had addressed to the Prince.



With the expression of his excuses and his sorrow! Michel doubtless meant that he was sorry not to be able to join Andras's friends—he who was one of the most intimate of them, and whom the Prince called “my child.” Yes, it was evidently that. But why this sealed package? and what did it contain? Yanski turned it over and over between his fingers, which itched to break the wrapper, and find out what was within.

He wondered if there were really any necessity to give it to the Prince. But why should he not? What folly to think that any disagreeable news could come from Michel Menko! The young man, unable to come himself to Maisons, had sent his congratulations to the Prince, and Zilah would be glad to receive them from his friend. That was all. There was no possible trouble in all this, but only one pleasure the more to Andras.

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And Varhely could not help smiling at the nervous feeling a letter received under odd circumstances or an unexpected despatch sometimes causes. The envelope alone, of some letters, sends a magnetic thrill through one and makes one tremble. The rough soldier was not accustomed to such weaknesses, and he blamed himself as being childish, for having felt that instinctive fear which was now dissipated.

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned toward the church.

From the interior came the sound of the organ, mingled with the murmur of the guests as they rose, ready to depart. The wedding march from the *Midsummer Night's Dream* pealed forth majestically as the newly-married pair walked slowly down the aisle. Marsa smiled happily at this music of Mendelssohn, which she had played so often, and which was now singing for her the chant of happy love. She saw the sunshine streaming through the open doorway, and, dazzled by this light from without, her eyes fixed upon the luminous portal, she no longer perceived the dim shadows of the church.

Murmurs of admiration greeted her as she appeared upon the threshold, beaming with happiness. The crowd, which made way for her, gazed upon her with fascinated eyes. The door of Andras's carriage was open; Marsa entered it, and Andras, with a smile of deep, profound content, seated himself beside her, whispering tenderly in the Tzigana's ear as the carriage drove off:

"Ah! how I love you! my beloved, my adored Marsa! How I love you, and how happy I am!"

CHAPTER XXI

"The Tzigana is the most loved of all!"

The chimes rang forth a merry peal, and Mendelssohn's music still thundered its triumphal accents, as the marriage guests left the church.

"It is a beautiful wedding, really a great success! The bride, the decorations, the good peasants and the pretty girls—everything is simply perfect. If I ever marry again," laughed the Baroness, "I shall be married in the country."

"You have only to name the day, Baroness," said old Vogotzine, inspired to a little gallantry.

And Jacquemin, with a smile, exclaimed, in Russian:

"What a charming speech, General, and so original! I will make a note of it."



The carriages rolled away toward Marsa's house through the broad avenues, turning rapidly around the fountains of the park, whose jets of water laughed as they fell and threw showers of spray over the masses of flowers. Before the church, the children disputed for the money and bonbons Prince Andras had ordered to be distributed. In Marsa's large drawing-rooms, where glass and silver sparkled upon the snowy cloth, servants in livery awaited the return of the wedding-party. In a moment there was an assault, General Vogotzine leading the column. All appetites were excited by the drive in the fresh air, and the guests did honor to the pates, salads, and cold chicken, accompanied by Leoville, which Jacquemin tasted and pronounced drinkable.

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The little Baroness was ubiquitous, laughing, chattering, enjoying herself to her heart's content, and telling every one that she was to leave that very evening for Trouville, with trunks, and trunks, and trunks—a host of them! But then, it was race-week, you know!

With her eyeglasses perched upon her little nose, she stopped before a statuette, a picture, no matter what, exclaiming, merrily:

“Oh, how pretty that is! How pretty it is! It is a Tanagra! How queer those Tanagras are. They prove that love existed in antiquity, don't they, Varhely? Oh! I forgot; what do you know about love?”

At last, with a glass of champagne in her hand, she paused before a portrait of Marsa, a strange, powerful picture, the work of an artist who knew how to put soul into his painting.

“Ah! this is superb! Who painted it, Marsa?”

“Zichy,” replied Marsa.

“Ah, yes, Zichy! I am no longer astonished. By the way, there is another Hungarian artist who paints very well. I have heard of him. He is an old man; I don't exactly remember his name, something like Barabas.”

“Nicolas de Baratras,” said Varhely.

“Yes, that's it. It seems he is a master. But your Zichy pleases me infinitely. He has caught your eyes and expression wonderfully; it is exactly like you, Princess. I should like to have my portrait painted by him. His first name is Michel, is it not?”

She examined the signature, peering through her eyeglass, close to the canvas.

“Yes, I knew it was. Michel Zichy!”

This name of “Michel!” suddenly pronounced, sped like an arrow through Marsa's heart. She closed her eyes as if to shut out some hateful vision, and abruptly quitted the Baroness, who proceeded to analyze Zichy's portrait as she did the pictures in the salon on varnishing day. Marsa went toward other friends, answering their flatteries with smiles, and forcing herself to talk and forget.

Andras, in the midst of the crowd where Vogotzine's loud laugh alternated with the little cries of the Baroness, felt a complex sentiment: he wished his friends to enjoy themselves and yet he longed to be alone with Marsa, and to take her away. They were to go first to his hotel in Paris; and then to some obscure corner, probably to the villa of Sainte-Adresse, until September, when they were going to Venice, and from there to Rome for the winter.

It seemed to the Prince that all these people were taking away from him a part of his life. Marsa belonged to them, as she went from one to another, replying to the compliments which desperately resembled one another, from those of Angelo Valla, which were spoken in Italian, to those of little Yamada, the Parisianized Japanese. Andras now longed for the solitude of the preceding days; and Baroness Dinati, shaking her finger at him, said: "My dear Prince, you are longing to see us go, I know you are. Oh! don't say you are not! I am sure of it, and I can understand it. We had no lunch at my marriage. The Baron simply carried me off at the door of the church. Carried me off! How romantic that sounds! It suggests an elopement with a coach and four! Have no fear, though; leave it to me, I will disperse your guests!"

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She flew away before Zilah could answer; and, murmuring a word in the ears of her friends, tapping with her little hand upon the shoulders of the obstinate, she gradually cleared the rooms, and the sound of the departing carriages was soon heard, as they rolled down the avenue.

Andras and Marsa were left almost alone; Varhely still remaining, and the little Baroness, who ran up, all rosy and out of breath, to the Prince, and said, gayly, in her laughing voice:

“Well! What do you say to that? all vanished like smoke, even Jacquemin, who has gone back by train. The game of descampativos, which Marie Antoinette loved to play at Trianon, must have been a little like this. Aren’t you going to thank me? Ah! you ingrate!”

She ran and embraced Marsa, pressing her cherry lips to the Tzigana’s pale face, and then rapidly disappeared in a mock flight, with a gay little laugh and a tremendous rustle of petticoats.

Of all his friends, Varhely was the one of whom Andras was fondest; but they had not been able to exchange a single word since the morning. Yanski had been right to remain till the last: it was his hand which the Prince wished to press before his departure, as if Varhely had been his relative, and the sole surviving one.

“Now,” he said to him, “you have no longer only a brother, my dear Varhely; you have also a sister who loves and respects you as I love and respect you myself.”

Yanski’s stern face worked convulsively with an emotion he tried to conceal beneath an apparent roughness.

“You are right to love me a little,” he said, brusquely, “because I am very fond of you—of both of you,” nodding his head toward Marsa. “But no respect, please. That makes me out too old.”

The Tzigana, taking Vogotzine’s arm, led him gently toward the door, a little alarmed at the purple hue of the General’s cheeks and forehead. “Come, take a little fresh air,” she said to the old soldier, who regarded her with round, expressionless eyes.

As they disappeared in the garden, Varhely drew from his pocket the little package given to him by Menko’s valet.

“Here is something from another friend! It was brought to me at the door of the church.”

“Ah! I thought that Menko would send me some word of congratulation,” said Andras, after he had read upon the envelope the young Count’s signature. “Thanks, my dear Varhely.”

“Now,” said Yanski, “may happiness attend you, Andras! I hope that you will let me hear from you soon.”

Zilah took the hand which Varhely extended, and clasped it warmly in both his own.

Upon the steps Varhely found Marsa, who, in her turn, shook his hand.

“Au revoir, Count.”

“Au revoir, Princess.”

She smiled at Andras, who accompanied Varhely, and who held in his hand the package with the seals unbroken.

“Princess!” she said. “That is a title by which every one has been calling me for the last hour; but it gives me the greatest pleasure to hear it spoken by you, my dear Varhely. But, Princess or not, I shall always be for you the Tzigana, who will play for you, whenever you wish it, the airs of her country—of our country—!”

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There was, in the manner in which she spoke these simple words, a gentle grace which evoked in the mind of the old patriot memories of the past and the fatherland.

“The Tzigana is the most charming of all! The Tzigana is the most loved of all!” he said, in Hungarian, repeating a refrain of a Magyar song.

With a quick, almost military gesture, he saluted Andras and Marsa as they stood at the top of the steps, the sun casting upon them dancing reflections through the leaves of the trees.

The Prince and Princess responded with a wave of the hand; and General Vogotzine, who was seated under the shade of a chestnut-tree, with his coat unbuttoned and his collar open, tried in vain to rise to his feet and salute the departure of the last guest.

CHAPTER XXII

A DREAM SHATTERED

They were alone at last; free to exchange those eternal vows which they had just taken before the altar and sealed with a long, silent pressure when their hands were united; alone with their love, the devoted love they had read so long in each other's eyes, and which had burned, in the church, beneath Marsa's lowered lids, when the Prince had placed upon her finger the nuptial ring.

This moment of happiness and solitude after all the noise and excitement was indeed a blessed one!

Andras had placed upon the piano of the salon Michel Menko's package, and, seated upon the divan, he held both Marsa's hands in his, as she stood before him.

“My best wishes, Princess!” he said. “Princess! Princess Zilah! That name never sounded so sweet in my ears before! My wife! My dear and cherished wife!” As she listened to the music of the voice she loved, Marsa said to herself, that sweet indeed was life, which, after so many trials, still had in reserve for her such joys. And so deep was her happiness, that she wished everything could end now in a beautiful dream which should have no awakening.

“We will depart for Paris whenever you like,” said the Prince.

“Yes,” she exclaimed, sinking to his feet, and throwing her arms about his neck as he bent over her, “let us leave this house; take me away, take me away, and let a new life begin for me, the life I have longed for with you and your love!”

There was something like terror in her words, and in the way she clung to this man who was her hero. When she said "Let us leave this house," she thought, with a shudder, of all her cruel suffering, of all that she hated and which had weighed upon her like a nightmare. She thirsted for a different air, where no phantom of the past could pursue her, where she should feel free, where her life should belong entirely to him.

"I will go and take off this gown," she murmured, rising, "and we will run away like two eloping lovers."

"Take off that gown? Why? It would be such a pity! You are so lovely as you are!"

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"Well," said Marsa, glancing down upon him with an almost mutinous smile, which lent a peculiar charm to her beauty, "I will not change this white gown, then; a mantle thrown over it will do. And you will take your wife in her bridal dress to Paris, my Prince, my hero—my husband!"

He rose, threw his arms about her, and, holding her close to his heart, pressed one long, silent kiss upon the exquisite lips of his beautiful Tzigana.

She gently disengaged herself from his embrace, with a shivering sigh; and, going slowly toward the door, she turned, and threw him a kiss, saying:

"I will come back soon, my Andras!"

And, although wishing to go for her mantle, nevertheless she still stood there, with her eyes fixed upon the Prince and her mouth sweetly tremulous with a passion of feeling, as if she could not tear herself away.

The piano upon which Andras had cast the package given him by Varhely was there between them; and the Prince advanced a step or two, leaning his hand upon the ebony cover. As Marsa approached for a last embrace before disappearing on her errand, her glance fell mechanically upon the small package sealed with red wax; and, as she read, in the handwriting she knew so well, the address of the Prince and the signature of Michel Menko, she raised her eyes violently to the face of Prince Zilah, as if to see if this were not a trap; if, in placing this envelope within her view, he were not trying to prove her. There was in her look fright, sudden, instinctive fright, a fright which turned her very lips to ashes; and she recoiled, her eyes returning fascinated to the package, while Andras, surprised at the unexpected expression of the Tzigana's convulsed features, exclaimed, in alarm:

"What is it, Marsa? What is the matter?"

"I—I"

She tried to smile.

"Nothing—I do not know! I—"

She made a desperate effort to look him in the face; but she could not remove her eyes from that sealed package bearing the name Menko.

Ah! that Michel! She had forgotten him! Miserable wretch! He returned, he threatened her, he was about to avenge himself: she was sure of it!

That paper contained something horrible. What could Michel Menko have to say to Prince Andras, writing him at such an hour, except to tell him that the wretched woman he had married was branded with infamy?

She shuddered from head to foot, steadying herself against the piano, her lips trembling nervously.

“I assure you, Marsa—” began the Prince, taking her hands. “Your hands are cold. Are you ill?”

His eyes followed the direction of Marsa’s, which were still riveted upon the piano with a dumb look of unutterable agony.

He instantly seized the sealed package, and, holding it up, exclaimed:

“One would think that it was this which troubled you!”

“O Prince! I swear to you!—”

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“Prince?”

He repeated in amazement this title which she suddenly gave him; she, who called him Andras, as he called her Marsa. Prince? He also, in his turn, felt a singular sensation of fright, wondering what that package contained, and if Marsa's fate and his own were not connected with some unknown thing within it.

“Let us see,” he said, abruptly breaking the seals, “what this is.”

Rapidly, and as if impelled, despite herself, Marsa caught the wrist of her husband in her icy hand, and, terrified, supplicating, she cried, in a wild, broken voice:

“No, no, I implore you! No! Do not read it! Do not read it!”

He contemplated her coldly, and, forcing himself to be calm, asked:

“What does this parcel of Michel Menko's contain?”

“I do not know,” gasped Marsa. “But do not read it! In the name of the Virgin” (the sacred adjuration of the Hungarians occurring to her mind, in the midst of her agony), “do not read it!”

“But you must be aware, Princess,” returned Andras, “that you are taking the very means to force me to read it.”

She shivered and moaned, there was such a change in the way Andras pronounced this word, which he had spoken a moment before in tones so loving and caressing—Princess.

Now the word threatened her.

“Listen! I am about to tell you: I wished—Ah! My God! My God! Unhappy woman that I am! Do not read, do not read!”

Andras, who had turned very pale, gently removed her grasp from the package, and said, very slowly and gravely, but with a tenderness in which hope still appeared:

“Come, Marsa, let us see; what do you wish me to think? Why do you wish me not to read these letters? for letters they doubtless are. What have letters sent me by Count Menko to do with you? You do not wish me to read them?”

He paused a moment, and then, while Marsa's eyes implored him with the mute prayer of a person condemned to death by the executioner, he repeated:



"You do not wish me to read them? Well, so be it; I will not read them, but upon one condition: you must swear to me, understand, swear to me, that your name is not traced in these letters, and that Michel Menko has nothing in common with the Princess Zilah."

She listened, she heard him; but Andras wondered whether she understood, she stood so still and motionless, as if stupefied by the shock of a moral tempest.

"There is, I am certain," he continued in the same calm, slow voice, "there is within this envelope some lie, some plot. I will not even know what it is. I will not ask you a single question, and I will throw these letters, unread, into the fire; but swear to me, that, whatever this Menko, or any other, may write to me, whatever any one may say, is an infamy and a calumny. Swear that, Marsa."

"Swear it, swear again? Swear always, then? Oath upon oath? Ah! it is too much!" she cried, her torpor suddenly breaking into an explosion of sobs and cries. "No! not another lie, not one! Monsieur, I am a wretch, a miserable woman! Strike me! Lash me, as I lash my dogs! I have deceived you! Despise me! Hate me! I am unworthy even of pity! The man whose letters you hold revenges himself, and stabs me, has been—my lover!"

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“Michel!”

“The most cowardly, the vilest being in the world! If he hated me, he might have killed me; he might have torn off my veil just now, and struck me across the lips. But to do this, to do this! To attack you, you, you! Ah! miserable dog; fit only to be stoned to death! Judas! Liar and coward! Would to heaven I had planted a knife in his heart!”

“Ah! My God!” murmured the Prince, as if stabbed himself.

At this cry of bitter agony from Andras Zilah, Marsa's imprecations ceased; and she threw herself madly at his feet; while he stood erect and pale—her judge.

She lay there, a mass of white satin and lace, her loosened hair falling upon the carpet, where the pale bridal flowers withered beneath her husband's heel; and Zilah, motionless, his glance wandering from the prostrate woman to the package of letters which burned his fingers, seemed ready to strike, with these proofs of her infamy, the distracted Tzigana, a wolf to threaten, a slave to supplicate.

Suddenly he leaned over, seized her by the wrists, and raised her almost roughly.

“Do you know,” he said, in low, quivering tones, “that the lowest of women is less culpable than you? Ten times, a hundred times, less culpable! Do you know that I have the right to kill you?”

“Ah! that, yes! Do it! do it! do it!” she cried, with the smile of a mad woman.

He pushed her slowly from him.

“Why have you committed this infamy? It was not for my fortune; you are rich.”

Marsa moaned, humiliated to the dust by this cold contempt. She would have preferred brutal anger; anything, to this.

“Ah! your fortune!” she said, finding a last excuse for herself out of the depth of her humiliation, which had now become eternal; “it was not that, nor your name, nor your title that I wished: it was your love!”

The heart of the Prince seemed wrung in a vise as this word fell from those lips, once adored, nay, still adored, soiled as they were.

“My love!”

“Yes, your love, your love alone! I would have confessed all, been your mistress, your slave, your thing, if I—I had not feared to lose you, to see myself abased in the eyes of you, whom I adored! I was afraid, afraid of seeing you fly from me—yes, that was my



crime! It is infamous, ah! I know it; but I thought only of keeping you, you alone; you, my admiration, my hero, my life, my god! I deserve to be punished; yes, yes, I deserve it—But those letters—those letters which you would have cast into the fire if I had not revealed the secret of my life—you told me so yourself—I might have sworn what you asked, and you would have believed me—I might have done so; but no, it would have been too vile, too cowardly! Ah! kill me! That is what I deserve, that is what—”

“Where are you going?” she cried, interrupting herself, her eyes dilated with fear, as she saw that Zilah, without answering, was moving toward the door.

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She forgot that she no longer had the right to question; she only felt, that, once gone, she would never see him again. Ah! a thousand times a blow with a knife rather than that! Was this the way the day, which began so brightly, was to end?

“Where are you going?”

“What does that matter to you?”

“True! I beg your pardon. At least—at least, Monsieur, one word, I implore. What are your commands? What do you wish me to do? There must be laws to punish those who have done what I have done! Shall I accuse myself, give myself up to justice? Ah! speak to me! speak to me!”

“Live with Michel Menko, if he is still alive after I have met him!” responded Andras, in hard, metallic tones, waving back the unhappy woman who threw herself on her knees, her arms outstretched toward him.

The door closed behind him. For a moment she gazed after him with haggard eyes: and then, dragging herself, her bridal robes trailing behind her, to the door, she tried to call after him, to detain the man whom she adored, and who was flying from her; but her voice failed her, and, with one wild, inarticulate cry, she fell forward on her face, with a horrible realization of the immense void which filled the house, this morning gay and joyous, now silent as a tomb.

And while the Prince, in the carriage which bore him away, read the letters in which Marsa spoke of her love for another, and that other the man whom he called “my child;” while he paused in this agonizing reading to ask himself if it were true, if such a sudden annihilation of his happiness were possible, if so many misfortunes could happen in such a few hours; while he watched the houses and trees revolve slowly by him, and feared that he was going mad—Marsa’s servants ate the remnants of the lunch, and drank what was left of the champagne to the health of the Prince and Princess Zilah.

CHAPTER XXIII

“The world holds but one fair maiden”

Paris, whose everyday gossip has usually the keenness and eagerness of the tattle of small villages, preserves at times, upon certain serious subjects, a silence which might be believed to be generous. Whether it is from ignorance or from respect, at all events it has little to say. There are vague suspicions of the truth, surmises are made, but nothing is affirmed; and this sort of abdication of public malignity is the most complete homage that can be rendered either to character or talent.

The circle of foreigners in Paris, that contrasted society which circled and chattered in the salon of the Baroness Dinati, could not, of necessity, be ignorant that the Princess Zilah, since the wedding which had attracted to Maisons-Lafitte a large part of the fashionable world, had not left her house, while Prince Andras had returned to Paris alone.

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There were low-spoken rumors of all sorts. It was said that Marsa had been attacked by an hereditary nervous malady; and in proof of this were cited the visits made at Maisons-Lafitte by Dr. Fargeas, the famous physician of Salpetriere, who had been summoned in consultation with Dr. Villandry. These two men, both celebrated in their profession, had been called in by Vogotzine, upon the advice of Yanski Varhely, who was more Parisian and better informed than the General.

Vogotzine was dreadfully uneasy, and his brain seemed ready to burst with the responsibility thrust upon him. Since the terrible day of the marriage—Vogotzine shrugged his shoulders in anger and amazement when he uttered this word marriage—Marsa had not recovered from a sort of frightened stupor; and the General, terrified at his niece's condition, was really afraid of going insane himself.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he said, "all this is deplorably sad."

After the terrible overthrow of all her hopes, Marsa was seized with a fever, and she lay upon her bed in a frightful delirium, which entirely took away the little sense poor old Vogotzine had left. Understanding nothing of the reason of Zilah's disappearance, the General listened in childish alarm to Marsa, wildly imploring mercy and pity of some invisible person. The unhappy old man would have faced a battalion of honveds or a charge of bashi-bazouks rather than remain there in the solitary house, with the delirious girl whose sobs and despairing appeals made the tears stream down the face of this soldier, whose brain was now weakened by drink, but who had once contemplated with a dry eye, whole ditches full of corpses, which some priest, dressed in mourning, blessed in one mass.

Vogotzine hastened to Paris, and questioned Andras; but the Prince answered him in a way that permitted of no further conversation upon the subject.

"My personal affairs concern myself alone."

The General had not energy enough to demand an explanation; and he bowed, saying that it was certainly not his business to interfere; but he noticed that Zilah turned very pale when he told him that it would be a miracle if Marsa recovered from the fever.

"It is pitiful!" he said.

Zilah cast a strange look at him, severe and yet terrified.

Vogotzine said no more; but he went at once to Dr. Fargeas, and asked him to come as soon as possible to Maisons-Lafitte.

The doctor's coupe in a few hours stopped before the gate through which so short a time ago the gay marriage cortege had passed, and Vogotzine ushered him into the little salon from which Marsa had once driven Menko.

Then the General sent for Mademoiselle—or, rather, Madame, as he corrected himself with a shrug of his shoulders. But suddenly he became very serious as he saw upon the threshold Marsa, whose fever had temporarily left her, and who could now manage to drag herself along, pale and wan, leaning upon the arm of her maid.

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Dr. Fargeas cast a keen glance at the girl, whose eyes, burning with inward fire, alone seemed to be living.

“Madame,” said the doctor, quietly, when the General had made a sign to his niece to listen to the stranger, “General Vogotzine has told me that you were suffering. I am a physician. Will you do me the honor and the kindness to answer my questions?”

“Yes,” said the General, “do, my dear Marsa, to please me.”

She stood erect, not a muscle of her face moving; and, without replying, she looked steadily into the doctor’s eyes. In her turn, she was studying him. It was like a defiance before a duel.

Then she said suddenly, turning to Vogotzine:

“Why have you brought a physician? I am not ill.”

Her voice was clear, but low and sad, and it was an evident effort for her to speak.

“No, you are not ill, my dear child; but I don’t know—I don’t understand—you make me a little uneasy, a very little. You know if I, your old uncle, worried you even a little, you would not feel just right about it, would you now?”

With which rather incoherent speech, he tried to force a smile; but Marsa, taking no notice of him, turned slowly to the doctor, who had not removed his eyes from her face.

“Well,” she said, dryly, “what do you want? What do you wish to ask me? What shall I tell you? Who requested you to come here?”

Vogotzine made a sign to the maid to leave the room.

“I told you, I have come at the General’s request,” said Fargeas, with a wave of his hand toward Vogotzine.

Marsa only replied: “Ah!” But it seemed to the doctor that there was a world of disappointment and despair expressed in this one ejaculation.

Then she suddenly became rigid, and lapsed into one of those stupors which had succeeded the days of delirium, and had frightened Vogotzine so much.

“There! There! Look at her!” exclaimed the old man.

Fargeas, without listening to the General, approached Marsa, and placed her in a chair near the window. He looked in her eyes, and placed his hand upon her burning forehead; but Marsa made no movement.

“Are you in pain?” he asked, gently.

The young girl, who a moment before had asked questions and still seemed interested a little in life, stirred uneasily, and murmured, in an odd, singing voice:

“I do not know!”

“Did you sleep last night?”

“I do not know!”

“How old are you?” asked Fargeas, to test her mental condition.

“I do not know!”

The physician’s eyes sought those of the General. Vogotzine, his face crimson, stood by the chair, his little, round eyes blinking with emotion at each of these mournful, musical responses.

“What is your name?” asked the doctor, slowly.

She raised her dark, sad eyes, and seemed to be seeking what to reply; then, wearily letting her head fall backward, she answered, as before:

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"I do not know!"

Vogotzine, who had become purple, seized the doctor's arm convulsively.

"She no longer knows even her own name!"

"It will be only temporary, I hope," said the doctor. "But in her present state, she needs the closest care and attention."

"I have never seen her like this before, never since—since the first day," exclaimed the General, in alarm and excitement. "She tried to kill herself then; but afterward she seemed more reasonable, as you saw just now. When she asked you who sent you, I thought Ah! at last she is interested in something. But now it is worse than ever. Oh! this is lively for me, devilish lively!"

Fargeas took between his thumb and finger the delicate skin of the Tzigana, and pinched her on the neck, below the ear. Marsa did not stir.

"There is no feeling here," said the doctor; "I could prick it with a pin without causing any sensation of pain." Then, again placing his hand upon Marsa's forehead, he tried to rouse some memory in the dormant brain:

"Come, Madame, some one is waiting for you. Your uncle—your uncle wishes you to play for him upon the piano! Your uncle! The piano!"

"The World holds but One Fair Maiden!" hummed Vogotzine, trying to give, in his husky voice, the melody of the song the Tzigana was so fond of.

Mechanically, Marsa repeated, as if spelling the word: "The piano! piano!" and then, in peculiar, melodious accents, she again uttered her mournful: "I do not know!"

This time old Vogotzine felt as if he were strangling; and the doctor, full of pity, gazed sadly down at the exquisitely beautiful girl, with her haggard, dark eyes, and her waxen skin, sitting there like a marble statue of despair.

"Give her some bouillon," said Fargeas. "She will probably refuse it in her present condition; but try. She can be cured," he added; "but she must be taken away from her present surroundings. Solitude is necessary, not this here, but—"

"But?" asked Vogotzine, as the doctor paused.

"But, perhaps, that of an asylum. Poor woman!" turning again to Marsa, who had not stirred. "How beautiful she is!"



The doctor, greatly touched, despite his professional indifference, left the villa, the General accompanying him to the gate. It was decided that he should return the next day with Villandry and arrange for the transportation of the invalid to Dr. Sims's establishment at Vaugirard. In a new place her stupor might disappear, and her mind be roused from its torpor; but a constant surveillance was necessary. Some pretext must be found to induce Marsa to enter a carriage; but once at Vaugirard, the doctor gave the General his word that she should be watched and taken care of with the utmost devotion.

Vogotzine felt the blood throb in his temples as he listened to the doctor's decision. The establishment at Vaugirard! His niece, the daughter of Prince Tcheretteff, and the wife of Prince Zilah, in an insane asylum!

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But he himself had not the right to dispose of Marsa's liberty; the consent of the Prince was necessary. It was in vain for Andras to refuse to have his life disturbed; it was absolutely necessary to find out from him what should be done with Marsa, who was his wife and Princess Zilah.

The General also felt that he was incapable of understanding anything, ignorant as he was of the reasons of the rupture, of Zilah's anger against the Tzigana, and of the young girl's terrible stupor; and, as he drank his cherry cordial or his brandy, wondered if he too were insane, as he repeated, like his niece:

"I do not know! I do not know!"

He felt obliged, however, to go and tell the Prince of the opinion of the illustrious physician of Salpetriere.

Then he asked Zilah:

"What is your decision?"

"General," replied Andras, "whatever you choose to do is right. But, once for all, remember that I wish henceforth to live alone, entirely alone, and speak to me neither of the future nor of the past, which is cruel, nor of the present, which is hopeless. I have determined——"

"What?"

"To live hereafter an absolutely selfish life!"

"That will change you," returned the General, in amazement.

"And will console me," added Andras.

ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

Life is a tempest
Nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair
No answer to make to one who has no right to question me
Nothing ever astonishes me
Poverty brings wrinkles

PRINCE ZILAH

By JULES CLARETIE

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XXIV

A LITTLE PARISIAN ROMANCE

The very evening of the day when the package of letters had killed in Andras all happiness and all faith, the Hungarian prince presented himself in the Rue d'Aumale, to seek Michel Menko.

Menko! That boy whom he had loved almost as a brother, that man for whom he had hoped a glorious future, Michel, Michel Menko, had betrayed him, and struck him with the perfidy of a coward. Yes, at the door of the church, when it was too late, or rather, at a time when the blow would be surer and the wound more deadly—then Menko had said to him: “My dear Prince, the woman whom you love, the woman whom you have married, has been my mistress. Here, read, see how she loved me!”

Had Michel been before him, Andras would have seized the young man by the throat, and strangled him on the spot; but, when he reached the Rue d'Aumale, he did not find Menko.

“The Count left town yesterday,” said the servant, in answer to his question.

“Yesterday! Where has he gone?”

“The Count must have taken the steamer to-day at Havre for New York. The Count did not tell us exactly where he was going, however, but to America, somewhere. We only know, the coachman Pierre, and myself, that the Count will not return again to Paris. We are still in his service, however, and are to await his orders.”

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Hesitating a little, the servant added:

“Have I not the honor to speak to Prince Zilah?”

“Why?” asked Andras.

The valet replied with a humble but very sincere air:

“Because, if Monseigneur should hear from the Count, and there is any question of the package which I took to Maisons-Lafitte this morning for Monseigneur—”

“Well?” said Andras.

“Monseigneur would greatly oblige me if he would not let the Count know that I did not fulfil his orders last evening.”

“Last evening? What do you mean? Explain yourself!” said the Prince, sternly.

“When he left yesterday, the Count expressly ordered me to take the package to Monseigneur that very evening. I beg Monseigneur’s pardon; but I had an invitation to a wedding, and I did not carry out the Count’s instructions until this morning. But, as Monseigneur was not at home, I took the train to Maisons-Lafitte. I hope that I did not arrive too late. The Count was very particular about it, and I should be very sorry if my negligence has done any harm.”

Andras listened, gazing intently upon the face of the servant, who was a little discountenanced by this silent inquisition.

“So Count Menko wished the package to be delivered to me yesterday?”

“I beg Monseigneur not to tell the Count that he was not obeyed.”

“Yesterday?” repeated Andras.

“Yes, yesterday, Monseigneur. The Count departed, thinking it would be done; and, indeed, he had a right to think so. I am very careful, Monseigneur, very careful; and if Monseigneur should some day have need of a—”

The Prince stopped the valet with a gesture. It was repugnant to Andras to have this man mixed up in a secret of his life; and such a secret! But the domestic was evidently ignorant what a commission Menko had confided to him: in his eyes, the package, containing such letters, was like any other package. Andras was persuaded of this by the attitude of the man, humiliated at having failed in his duty.



A word more exchanged with the valet, and Andras would have felt humiliated himself. But he had gained from the conversation the idea that Menko had not wished to insult him in his happiness, but to reveal all to him before the ceremony had yet been celebrated. It was as atrocious, but not so cowardly. Menko had wished to attack Marsa, rather than Andras; this was visible in the express commands given to his valet. And upon what a trifle had it depended, whether the name of Zilah should be borne by this woman! Upon what? Upon a servant's feast! Life is full of strange chances. The hands of that low-born valet had held for hours his happiness and his honor—his honor, Andras Zilah's—the honor of all his race!

The Prince returned to his hotel, which he had left that morning thinking that he would soon bring there the woman he then adored, but whom he now despised and hated. Oh! he would know where Menko had gone; him he could punish; as for Marsa, she was now dead to him.

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But where, in the whirlpool of the New World, would this Michel Menko disappear? and how could he find him?

The days passed; and Zilah had acquired almost the certainty that Menko had not embarked at Havre. Perhaps he had not quitted Europe. He might, some day or another, in spite of what the valet had said, reappear in Paris; and then—

Meanwhile, the Prince led the life of a man wounded to the heart; seeking solitude, and shutting himself in his hotel, in the Rue Balzac, like a wolf in his den; receiving no one but Varhely, and sometimes treating even old Yanski coldly; then, suddenly emerging from his retirement, and trying to take up his life again; appearing at the meetings of the Hungarian aid society, of which he was president; showing himself at the races, at the theatre, or even at Baroness Dinati's; longing to break the dull monotony of his now ruined life; and, with a sort of bravado, looking society and opinion full in the face, as if to surprise a smile or a sneer at his expense, and punish it.

He had, however, no right to complain of the sentiment which was felt for him, for every one respected and admired him. At first, it is true, society, and in particular that society of Parisian foreigners in which Prince Andras mingled, had tried to find out why he had broken so suddenly with the woman he had certainly married for love. Public curiosity, aroused and excited, had sought to divine the secret of the romance. "If it does not get into the newspapers," they said, "it will be fortunate." And society was even astonished that the journals had not already discovered the key to this Parisian mystery.

But society, after all as fickle as it is curious (one of its little vices chasing away the other), turned suddenly to another subject; forgot the rupture of Marsa and Andras, and saw in Zilah only a superior being, whose lofty soul forced respect from the frivolous set accustomed to laugh at everything.

A lofty soul, yes, but a soul in torment. Varhely alone, among them all, knew anything of the suffering which Andras endured. He was no longer the same man. His handsome face, with its kindly eyes and grave smile, was now constantly overshadowed. He spoke less, and thought more. On the subject of his sadness and his grief, Andras never uttered a word to any one, not even to his old friend; and Yanski, silent from the day when he had been an unconscious messenger of ill, had not once made any allusion to the past.

Although he knew nothing, Varhely had, nevertheless, guessed everything, and at once. The blow was too direct and too cruelly simple for the old Hungarian not to have immediately exclaimed, with rage:

"Those were love-letters, and I gave them to him! Idiot that I was! I held those letters in my hand; I might have destroyed them, or crammed them one by one down Menko's throat! But who could have suspected such an infamy? Menko! A man of honor! Ah,

yes; what does honor amount to when there is a woman in question? Imbecile! And it is irreparable now, irreparable!"

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Varhely also was anxious to know where Menko had gone. They did not know at the Austro-Hungarian embassy. It was a complete disappearance, perhaps a suicide. If the old Hungarian had met the young man, he would at least have gotten rid of part of his bile. But the angry thought that he, Varhely, had been associated in a vile revenge which had touched Andras, was, for the old soldier, a constant cause for ill-humor with himself, and a thing which, in a measure, poisoned his life.

Varhely had long been a misanthrope himself; but he tried to struggle against his own temperament when he saw Andras wrapping himself up in bitterness and gloomy thoughts.

Little by little, Zilah allowed himself to sink into that state where not only everything becomes indifferent to us, but where we long for another suffering, further pain, that we may utter more bitter cries, more irritated complaints against fate. It seems then that everything is dark about us, and our endless night is traversed by morbid visions, and peopled with phantoms. The sick man—for the one who suffers such torture is sick—would willingly seek a new sorrow, like those wounded men who, seized with frenzy, open their wounds themselves, and irritate them with the point of a knife. Then, misanthropy and disgust of life assume a phase in which pain is not without a certain charm. There is a species of voluptuousness in this appetite for suffering, and the sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony.

With Zilah, this sad state was due to a sort of insurrection of his loyalty against the many infamies to be met with in this world, which he had believed to be only too full of virtues.

He now considered himself an idiot, a fool, for having all his life adored chimeras, and followed, as children do passing music, the fanfares of poetic chivalry. Yes, faith, enthusiasm, love, were so many cheats, so many lies. All beings who, like himself, were worshippers of the ideal, all dreamers of better things, all lovers of love, were inevitably doomed to deception, treason, and the stupid ironies of fate. And, full of anger against himself, his pessimism of to-day sneering at his confidence of yesterday, he abandoned himself with delight to his bitterness, and he took keen joy in repeating to himself that the secret of happiness in this life was to believe in nothing except treachery, and to defend oneself against men as against wolves.

Very rarely, his real frank, true nature would come to the fore, and he would say:

“After all, are the cowardice of one man, and the lie of one woman, to be considered the crime of entire humanity?”

Why should he curse, he would think, other beings than Marsa and Menko? He had no right to hate any one else; he had no enemy that he knew of, and he was honored in Paris, his new country.

No enemy? No, not one. And yet, one morning, with his letters, his valet brought him a journal addressed to “Prince Zilah,” and, on unfolding it, Andras’s attention was attracted to two paragraphs in the column headed “Echoes of Paris,” which were marked with a red-lead pencil.

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It was a number of 'L'Actualite', sent through the post by an unknown hand, and the red marks were evidently intended to point out to the Prince something of interest to himself.

Andras received few journals. A sudden desire seized him, as if he had a presentiment of what it contained, to cast this one into the fire without reading it. For a moment he held it in his fingers ready to throw it into the grate. Then a few words read by accident invincibly prevented him.

He read, at first with poignant sorrow, and then with a dull rage, the two paragraphs, one of which followed the other in the paper.

"A sad piece of news has come to our ears," ran the first paragraph, "a piece of news which has afflicted all the foreign colony of Paris, and especially the Hungarians. The lovely and charming Princess Z., whose beauty was recently crowned with a glorious coronet, has been taken, after a consultation of the princes of science (there are princes in all grades), to the establishment of Dr. Sims, at Vaugirard, the rival of the celebrated asylum of Dr. Luys, at Ivry. Together with the numerous friends of Prince A. Z., we hope that the sudden malady of the Princess Z. will be of short duration."

So Marsa was now the patient, almost the prisoner, of Dr. Sims! The orders of Dr. Fargeas had been executed. She was in an insane asylum, and Andras, despite himself, felt filled with pity as he thought of it.

But the red mark surrounded both this first "Echo of Paris," and the one which followed it; and Zilah, impelled now by eager curiosity, proceeded with his reading.

But he uttered a cry of rage when he saw, printed at full length, given over to common curiosity, to the eagerness of the public for scandal, and to the malignity of blockheads, a direct allusion to his marriage—worse than that, the very history of his marriage placed in an outrageous manner next to the paragraph in which his name was almost openly written. The editor of the society journal passed directly from the information in regard to the illness of Princess Z. to an allegorical tale in which Andras saw the secret of his life and the wounds of his heart laid bare.

A little Parisian romance

Like most of the Parisian romances of to-day, the little romance in question is an exotic one. Paris belongs to foreigners. When the Parisians, whose names appear in the chronicles of fashion, are not Americans, Russians, Roumanians, Portuguese, English, Chinese, or Hungarians, they do not count; they are no longer Parisians. The Parisians of the day are Parisians of the Prater, of the Newski Perspective or of Fifth Avenue; they are no longer pureblooded Parisians. Within ten years from now the boulevards will be

situated in Chicago, and one will go to pass his evenings at the Eden Theatre of Pekin. So, this is the latest Parisian romance:

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Once upon a time there was in Paris a great lord, a Moldavian, or a Wallachian, or a Moldo-Wallachian (in a word, a Parisian—a Parisian of the Danube, if you like), who fell in love with a young Greek, or Turk, or Armenian (also of Paris), as dark-browed as the night, as beautiful as the day. The great lord was of a certain age, that is, an uncertain age. The beautiful Athenian or Georgian, or Circassian, was young. The great lord was generally considered to be imprudent. But what is to be done when one loves? Marry or don't marry, says Rabelais or Moliere. Perhaps they both said it. Well, at all events, the great lord married. It appears, if well-informed people are to be believed, that the great Wallachian lord and the beautiful Georgian did not pass two hours after their marriage beneath the same roof. The very day of their wedding, quietly, and without scandal, they separated, and the reason of this rupture has for a long time puzzled Parisian high-life. It was remarked, however, that the separation of the newly-married pair was coincident with the disappearance of a very fashionable attache who, some years ago, was often seen riding in the Bois, and who was then considered to be the most graceful waltzer of the Viennese, or Muscovite, or Castilian colony of Paris. We might, if we were indiscreet, construct a whole drama with these three people for our *dramatis personae*; but we wish to prove that reporters (different in this from women) sometimes know how to keep a secret. For those ladies who are, perhaps, still interested in the silky moustaches of the fugitive ex-diplomat, we can add, however, that he was seen at Brussels a short time ago. He passed through there like a shooting star. Some one who saw him noticed that he was rather pale, and that he seemed to be still suffering from the wounds received not long ago. As for the beautiful Georgian, they say she is in despair at the departure of her husband, the great Wallachian lord, who, in spite of his ill-luck, is really a Prince Charming.

Andras Zilah turned rapidly to the signature of this article. The "Echoes of Paris" were signed Puck. Puck? Who was this Puck? How could an unknown, an anonymous writer, a retailer of scandals, be possessed of his secret? For Andras believed that his suffering was a secret; he had never had an idea that any one could expose it to the curiosity of the crowd, as this editor of *L'Actualite* had done. He felt an increased rage against the invisible Michel Menko, who had disappeared after his infamy; and it seemed to him that this Puck, this unknown journalist, was an accomplice or a friend of

Michel Menko, and that, behind the pseudonym of the writer, he perceived the handsome face, twisted moustache and haughty smile of the young Count.

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"After all," he said to himself, "we shall soon find out. Monsieur Puck must be less difficult to unearth than Michel Menko."

He rang for his valet, and was about to go out, when Yanski Varhely was announced.

The old Hungarian looked troubled, and his brows were contracted in a frown. He could not repress a movement of anger when he perceived, upon the Prince's table, the marked number of *L'Actualite*.

Varhely, when he had an afternoon to get rid of, usually went to the Palais-Royal. He had lived for twenty years not far from there, in a little apartment near Saint-Roch. Drinking in the fresh air, under the striped awning of the Cafe de la Rotunde, he read the journals, one after the other, or watched the sparrows fly about and peck up the grains in the sand. Children ran here and there, playing at ball; and, above the noise of the promenaders, arose the music of the brass band.

It was chiefly the political news he sought for in the French or foreign journals. He ran through them all with his nose in the sheets, which he held straight out by the wooden file, like a flag. With a rapid glance, he fell straight upon the Hungarian names which interested him—Deak sometimes, sometimes Andrassy; and from a German paper he passed to an English, Spanish, or Italian one, making, as he said, a tour of Europe, acquainted as he was with almost all European languages.

An hour before he appeared at the Prince's house, he was seated in the shade of the trees, scanning '*L'Actualite*', when he suddenly uttered an oath of anger (an Hungarian '*teremtete!*') as he came across the two paragraphs alluding to Prince Andras.

Varhely read the lines over twice, to convince himself that he was not mistaken, and that it was Prince Zilah who was designated with the skilfully veiled innuendo of an expert journalist. There was no chance for doubt; the indistinct nationality of the great lord spoken of thinly veiled the Magyar characteristics of Andras, and the paragraph which preceded the "Little Parisian Romance" was very skilfully arranged to let the public guess the name of the hero of the adventure, while giving to the anecdote related the piquancy of the anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers.

Then Varhely had only one idea.

"Andras must not know of this article. He scarcely ever reads the journals; but some one may have sent this paper to him."

And the old misanthrope hurried to the Prince's hotel, thinking this: that there always exist people ready to forward paragraphs of this kind.

When he perceived '*L'Actualite*' upon the Prince's table, he saw that his surmise was only too correct, and he was furious with himself for arriving too late.

“Where are you going?” he asked Andras, who was putting on his gloves.

The Prince took up the marked paper, folded it slowly, and replied:

“I am going out.”

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"Have you read that paper?"

"The marked part of it, yes."

"You know that that sheet is never read, it has no circulation whatever, it lives from its advertisements. There is no use in taking any notice of it."

"If there were question only of myself, I should not take any notice of it. But they have mixed up in this scandal the name of the woman to whom I have given my name. I wish to know who did it, and why he did it."

"Oh! for nothing, for fun! Because this Monsieur—how does he sign himself?—Puck had nothing else to write about."

"It is certainly absurd," remarked Zilah, "to imagine that a man can live in the ideal. At every step the reality splashes you with mud."

As he spoke, he moved toward the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Varhely again.

"To the office of this journal."

"Do not commit such an imprudence. The article, which has made no stir as yet, will be read and talked of by all Paris if you take any notice of it, and it will be immediately commented upon by the correspondents of the Austrian and Hungarian journals."

"That matters little to me!" said the Prince, resolutely. "Those people will only do what their trade obliges them to. But, before everything, I am resolved to do my duty. That is my part in this matter."

"Then I will accompany you."

"No," replied Andras, "I ask you not to do that; but it is probable that to-morrow I shall request you to serve as my second."

"A duel?"

"Exactly."

"With Monsieur—Puck?"

"With whoever insults me. The name is perfectly immaterial. But since he escapes me and she is irresponsible—and punished—I regard as an accomplice of their infamy any man who makes allusion to it with either tongue or pen. And, my dear Varhely, I wish to

act alone. Don't be angry; I know that in your hands my honor would be as faithfully guarded as in my own."

"Without any doubt," said Varhely, in an odd tone, pulling his rough moustache, "and I hope to prove it to you some day."

CHAPTER XXV

The home of "Puck"

Prince Zilah did not observe at all the marked significance old Yanski gave to this last speech. He shook Varhely's hand, entered a cab, and, casting a glance at the journal in his hands, he ordered the coachman to drive to the office of 'L'Actualite', Rue Halevy, near the Opera.

The society journal, whose aim was represented by its title, had its quarters on the third floor in that semi-English section where bars, excursion agencies, steamboat offices, and manufacturers of travelling-bags give to the streets a sort of Britannic aspect. The office of 'L'Actualite' had only recently been established there. Prince Zilch read the number of the room upon a brass sign and went up.

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In the outer office there were only two or three clerks at work behind the grating. None of these had the right to reveal the names hidden under pseudonyms; they did not even know them. Zilch perceived, through an open door, the reporters' room, furnished with a long table covered with pens, ink, and pads of white paper. This room was empty; the journal was made up in the evening, and the reporters were absent.

"Is there any one who can answer me?" asked the Prince.

"Probably the secretary can," replied a clerk. "Have you a card, Monsieur? or, if you will write your name upon a bit of paper, it will do."

Andras did so; the clerk opened a door in the corridor and disappeared. After a minute or two he reappeared, and said to the Prince:

"If you will follow me, Monsieur Fremin will see you."

Andras found himself in the presence of a pleasant-looking middle-aged man, who was writing at a modest desk when the Hungarian entered, and who bowed politely, motioning him to be seated.

As Zilch sat down upon the sofa, there appeared upon the threshold of a door, opposite the one by which he had entered, a small, dark, elegantly dressed young man, whom Andras vaguely remembered to have seen somewhere, he could not tell where. The newcomer was irreproachable in his appearance, with his clothes built in the latest fashion, snowy linen, pale gray gloves, silver-headed cane, and a single eyeglass, dangling from a silken cord.

He bowed to Zilch, and, going up to the secretary, he said, rapidly:

"Well! since Tourillon is away, I will report the Enghien races. I am going there now. Enghien isn't highly diverting, though. The swells and the pretty women so rarely go there; they don't affect Enghien any more. But duty before everything, eh, Fremin?"

"You will have to hurry," said Fremin, looking at his watch, "or you will miss your train."

"Oh! I have a carriage below."

He clapped his confrere on the shoulder, bowed again to Zilah, and hurried away, while Fremin, turning to the Prince, said:

"I am at your service, Monsieur," and waited for him to open the conversation.

Zilah drew from his pocket the copy of *L'Actualite*, and said, very quietly:

"I should like to know, Monsieur, who is meant in this article here."

And, folding the paper, with the passage which concerned him uppermost, he handed it to the secretary.

Fremin glanced at the article.

“Yes, I have seen this paragraph,” he said; “but I am entirely ignorant to whom it alludes. I am not even certain that it is not a fabrication, invented out of whole cloth.”

“Ah!” said Zilah. “The author of the article would know, I suppose?”

“It is highly probable,” replied Fremin, with a smile.

“Will you tell me, then, the name of the person who wrote this?”

“Isn’t the article signed?”

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"It is signed Puck. That is not a name."

"A pseudonym is a name in literature," said Fremin. "I am of the opinion, however, that one has always the right to demand to see a face which is covered by a mask. But the person who makes this demand should be personally interested. Does this story, to which you have called my attention, concern you, Monsieur?"

"Suppose, Monsieur," answered Zilah, a little disconcerted, for he perceived that he had to do with a courteous, well-bred man, "suppose that the man who is mentioned, or rather insulted, here, were my best friend. I wish to demand an explanation of the person who wrote this article, and to know, also, if it was really a journalist who composed those lines."

"You mean?—"

"I mean that there may be people interested in having such an article published, and I wish to know who they are."

"You are perfectly justified, Monsieur; but only one person can tell you that—the writer of the article."

"It is for that reason, Monsieur, that I desire to know his name."

"He does not conceal it," said Fremin. "The pseudonym is only designed as a stimulant to curiosity; but Puck is a corporeal being."

"I am glad to hear it," said Zilah. "Now, will you be kind enough to give me his name?"

"Paul Jacquemin."

Zilah knew the name well, having seen it at the end of a report of his river fete; but he hardly thought Jacquemin could be so well informed. Since he had lived in France, the Hungarian exile had not been accustomed to regard Paris as a sort of gossiping village, where everything is found out, talked over, and commented upon with eager curiosity, and where every one's aim is to appear to have the best and most correct information.

"I must ask you now, Monsieur, where Monsieur Paul Jacquemin lives?"

"Rue Rochechouart, at the corner of the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne."

"Thank you, Monsieur," said Andras, rising, the object of his call having been accomplished.

"One moment," said Fremin, "if you intend to go at once to Monsieur Jacquemin's house, you will not find him at home just now."

“Why not?”

“Because you saw him here a few minutes ago, and he is now on his way to Enghien.”

“Indeed!” said the Prince. “Very well, I will wait.”

He bade farewell to Fremin, who accompanied him to the door; and, when seated in his carriage, he read again the paragraph of Puck—that Puck, who, in the course of the same article, referred many times to the brilliancy of “our colleague Jacquemin,” and complacently cited the witticisms of “our clever friend Jacquemin.”

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Zilah remembered this Jacquemin now. It was he whom he had seen taking notes upon the parapet of the quay, and afterward at the wedding, where he had been brought by the Baroness Dinati. It was Jacquemin who was such a favorite with the little Baroness; who was one of the licensed distributors of celebrity and quasi-celebrity for all those who live upon gossip and for gossip-great ladies who love to see their names in print, and actresses wild over a new role; who was one of the chroniclers of fashion, received everywhere, flattered, caressed, petted; whom the Prince had just seen, very elegant with his stick and eyeglass, and his careless, disdainful air; and who had said, like a man accustomed to every magnificence, fatigued with luxury, blase with pleasure, and caring only for what is truly pschutt (to use the latest slang): "Pretty women so rarely go there!"

Zilah thought that, as the Baroness had a particular predilection for Jacquemin, it was perhaps she, who, in her gay chatter, had related the story to the reporter, and who, without knowing it probably, assuredly without wishing it, had furnished an article for 'L'Actualite'. In all honor, Jacquemin was really the spoiled child of the Baroness, the director of the entertainments at her house. With a little more conceit, Jacquemin, who was by no means lacking in that quality, however, might have believed that the pretty little woman was in love with him. The truth is, the Baroness Dinati was only in love with the reporter's articles, those society articles in which he never forgot her, but paid, with a string of printed compliments, for his champagne and truffles.

"And yet," thought Zilah, "no, upon reflection, I am certain that the Baroness had nothing to do with this outrage. Neither with intention nor through imprudence would she have given any of these details to this man."

Now that the Prince knew his real name, he might have sent to Monsieur Puck, Varhely, and another of his friends. Jacquemin would then give an explanation; for of reparation Zilah thought little. And yet, full of anger, and not having Menko before him, he longed to punish some one; he wished, that, having been made to suffer so himself, some one should expiate his pain. He would chastise this butterfly reporter, who had dared to interfere with his affairs, and wreak his vengeance upon him as if he were the coward who had fled. And, besides, who knew, after all, if this Jacquemin were not the confidant of Menko? Varhely would not have recognized in the Prince the generous Zilah of former times, full of pity, and ready to forgive an injury.

Andras could not meet Jacquemin that day, unless he waited for him at the office of 'L'Actualite' until the races were over, and he therefore postponed his intended interview until the next day.

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About eleven o'clock in the morning, after a sleepless night, he sought the Rue Rochechouart, and the house Fremin had described to him. It was there: an old weather-beaten house, with a narrow entrance and a corridor, in the middle of which flowed a dirty, foul-smelling stream of water; the room of the concierge looked like a black hole at the foot of the staircase, the balusters and walls of which were wet with moisture and streaked with dirt; a house of poor working-people, many stories high, and built in the time when this quarter of Paris was almost a suburb.

Andras hesitated at first to enter, thinking that he must be mistaken. He thought of little Jacquemin, dainty and neat as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox, and his disdainful remarks upon the races of Enghien, where the swells no longer went. It was not possible that he lived here in this wretched, shabby place.

The concierge replied to the Prince, however, when he asked for Jacquemin: "Yes, Monsieur, on the fifth floor, the door to the right;" and Zilah mounted the dark stairs.

When he reached the fifth floor, he did not yet believe it possible that the Jacquemin who lived there was the one he had seen the day before, the one whom Baroness Dinati petted, "our witty colleague Jacquemin."

He knocked, however, at the door on the right, as he had been directed. No one came to open it; but he could hear within footsteps and indistinct cries. He then perceived that there was a bell-rope, and he pulled it. Immediately he heard some one approaching from within.

He felt a singular sensation of concentrated anger, united to a fear that the Jacquemin he was in search of was not there.

The door opened, and a woman appeared, young, rather pale, with pretty blond hair, somewhat disheveled, and dressed in a black skirt, with a white dressing-sack thrown over her shoulders.

She smiled mechanically as she opened the door, and, as she saw a strange face, she blushed crimson, and pulled her sack together beneath her chin, fastening it with a pin.

"Monsieur Jacquemin?" said Andras, taking off his hat.

"Yes, Monsieur, he lives here," replied the young woman, a little astonished.

"Monsieur Jacquemin, the journalist?" asked Andras.

"Yes, yes, Monsieur," she answered with a proud little smile, which Zilah was not slow to notice. She now opened the door wide, and said, stepping aside to let the visitor pass:



"Will you take the trouble to come in, Monsieur?" She was not accustomed to receive calls (Jacquemin always making his appointments at the office); but, as the stranger might be some one who brought her husband work, as she called it, she was anxious not to let him go away before she knew what his errand was.

"Please come in, Monsieur!"

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The Prince entered, and, crossing the entry in two steps, found himself in a small dining-room opening directly out of the kitchen, where three tiny little children were playing, the youngest, who could not have been more than eighteen months, crawling about on the floor. Upon the ragged oilcloth which covered the table, Zilah noticed two pairs of men's gloves, one gray, the other yellow, and a heap of soiled white cravats. Upon a wooden chair, by the open door of the kitchen, was a tub full of shirts, which the young woman had doubtless been washing when the bell rang.

The cries Zilah had heard came from the children, who were now silent, staring at the tall gentleman, who looked at them in surprise.

The young woman was small and very pretty, but with the pallor of fatigue and overwork; her lips were beautifully chiselled, but almost colorless; and she was so thin that her figure had the frail appearance of an unformed girl.

"Will you sit down, Monsieur?" she asked, timidly, advancing a cane-bottomed chair.

Everything in these poor lodgings was of the most shabby description. In a cracked mirror with a broken frame were stuck cards of invitation, theatre checks, and race tickets admitting to the grand stand. Upon a cheap little table with broken corners was a heap of New Year's cards, bonbon boxes, and novels with soiled edges. Upon the floor, near the children, were some remnants of toys; and the cradle in which the baby slept at night was pushed into a corner with a child's chair, the arms of which were gone.

Zilah was both astonished and pained. He had not expected to encounter this wretched place, the poorly clad children, and the woman's timid smile.

"Is Monsieur Jacquemin at home?" he asked abruptly, desiring to leave at once if the man whom he sought was not there.

"No, Monsieur; but he will not be long away. Sit down, Monsieur, please!"

She entreated so gently, with such an uneasy air at the threatened departure of this man who had doubtless brought some good news for her husband, that the Prince mechanically obeyed, thinking again that there was evidently some mistake, and that it was not, it could not be, here that Jacquemin lived.

"Is it really your husband, Madame, who writes under the signature of Puck in 'L'Actualite'?" he asked. The same proud smile appeared again upon her thin, wan face.

"Yes, Monsieur, yes, it is really he!" she replied. She was so happy whenever any one spoke to her of her Paul. She was in the habit of taking copies of L'Actualite to the concierge, the grocer, and the butcher; and she was so proud to show how well Paul wrote, and what fine connections he had—her Paul, whom she loved so much, and for

whom she sat up late at night when it was necessary to prepare his linen for some great dinner or supper he was invited to.

“Oh! it is indeed he, Monsieur,” she said again, while Zilah watched her and listened in silence. “I don’t like to have him use pseudonyms, as he calls them. It gives me so much pleasure to see his real name, which is mine too, printed in full. Only it seems that it is better sometimes. Puck makes people curious, and they say, Who can it be? He also signed himself Gavroche in the Rabelais, you know, which did not last very long. You are perhaps a journalist also, Monsieur?”

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"No," said Zilah.

"Ah! I thought you were! But, after all, perhaps you are right. It is a hard profession, I sometimes think. You have to be out so late. If you only knew, Monsieur, how poor Paul is forced to work even at night! It tires him so, and then it costs so much. I beg your pardon for leaving those gloves like that before you. I was cleaning them. He does not like cleaned gloves, though; he says it always shows. Well, I am a woman, and I don't notice it. And then I take so much care of all that. It is necessary, and everything costs so dear. You see I—Gustave, don't slap your little sister! you naughty boy!"

And going to the children, her sweet, frank eyes becoming sad at a quarrel between her little ones, she gently took the baby away from the oldest child, who cried, and went into a corner to pout, regarding his mother with the same impudent air which Zilah had perceived in the curl of Jacquemin's lips when the reporter complained of the dearth of pretty women.

"It is certainly very astonishing that he does not come home," continued the young wife, excusing to Zilah the absence of her Paul. "He often breakfasts, however, in the city, at Brebant's. It seems that it is necessary for him to do so. You see, at the restaurant he talks and hears news. He couldn't learn all that he knows here very well, could he? I don't know much of things that must be put in a newspaper."

And she smiled a little sad smile, making even of her humility a pedestal for the husband so deeply loved and admired.

Zilah was beginning to feel ill at ease. He had come with anger, expecting to encounter the little fop whom he had seen, and he found this humble and devoted woman, who spoke of her Paul as if she were speaking of her religion, and who, knowing nothing of the life of her husband, only loving him, sacrificed herself to him in this almost cruel poverty (a strange contrast to the life of luxury Jacquemin led elsewhere), with the holy trust of her unselfish love.

"Do you never accompany your husband anywhere?" asked Andras.

"I? Oh, never!" she replied, with a sort of fright. "He does not wish it—and he is right. You see, Monsieur, when he married me, five years ago, he was not what he is now; he was a railway clerk. I was a working-girl; yes, I was a seamstress. Then it was all right; we used to walk together, and we went to the theatre; he did not know any one. It is different now. You see, if the Baroness Dinati should see me on his arm, she would not bow to him, perhaps."

"You are mistaken, Madame," said the Hungarian, gently. "You are the one who should be bowed to first."



She did not understand, but she felt that a compliment was intended, and she blushed very red, not daring to say any more, and wondering if she had not chatted too much, as Jacquemin reproached her with doing almost every day.

“Does Monsieur Jacquemin go often to the theatre?” asked Andras, after a moment’s pause.

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“Yes; he is obliged to do so.”

“And you?”

“Sometimes. Not to the first nights, of course. One has to dress handsomely for them. But Paul gives me tickets, oh, as many as I want! When the plays are no longer drawing money, I go with the neighbors. But I prefer to stay at home and see to my babies; when I am sitting in the theatre, and they are left in charge of the concierge, I think, Suppose anything should happen to them! And that idea takes away all my pleasure. Still, if Paul stayed here—but he can not; he has his writing to do in the evenings. Poor fellow, he works so hard! Well!” with a sigh, “I don’t think that he will be back to-day. The children will eat his beefsteak, that’s all; it won’t do them any harm.”

As she spoke, she took some pieces of meat from an almost empty cupboard, and placed them on the table, excusing herself for doing so before Zilah.

And he contemplated, with an emotion which every word of the little woman increased, this poor, miserable apartment, where the wife lived, taking care of her children, while the husband, Monsieur Puck or Monsieur Gavroche, paraded at the fancy fairs or at the theatres; figured at the races; tasted the Baroness Dinati’s wines, caring only for Johannisberg with the blue and gold seal of 1862; and gave to Potel and Chabot, in his articles, lessons in gastronomy.

Then Madame Jacquemin, feeling instinctively that she had the sympathy of this sad-faced man who spoke to her in such a gentle voice, related her life to him with the easy confidence which poor people, who never see the great world, possess. She told him, with a tender smile, the entirely Parisian idyl of the love of the working-girl for the little clerk who loved her so much and who married her; and of the excursions they used to take together to Saint-Germain, going third-class, and eating their dinner upon the green grass under the trees, and then enjoying the funny doings of the painted clowns, the illuminations, the music, and the dancing. Oh! they danced and danced and danced, until she was so tired that she slept all the way home with her head on his shoulder, dreaming of the happy day they had had.

“That was the best time of my life, Monsieur. We were no richer than we are now; but we were more free. He was with me more, too: now, he certainly makes me very proud with his beautiful articles; but I don’t see him; I don’t see him any more, and it makes me very sad. Oh! if it were not for that, although we are not millionaires, I should be very happy; yes, entirely, entirely happy.”

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There was, in the simple, gentle resignation of this poor girl, sacrificed without knowing it, such devoted love for the man who, in reality, abandoned her, that Prince Andras felt deeply moved and touched. He thought of the one leading a life of pleasure, and the other a life of fatigue; of this household touching on one side poverty, and, on the other, wealth and fashion; and he divined, from the innocent words of this young wife, the hardships of this home, half deserted by the husband, and the nervousness and peevishness of Jacquemin returning to this poor place after a night at the restaurants or a ball at Baroness Dinati's. He heard the cutting voice of the elegant little man whom his humble wife contemplated with the eyes of a Hindoo adoring an idol; he was present, in imagination, at those tragically sorrowful scenes which the wife bore with her tender smile, poor woman, knowing of the life of her Paul only those duties of luxury which she herself imagined, remaining a seamstress still to sew the buttons on the shirts and gloves of her husband, and absolutely ignorant of all the entertainments where, in an evening, would sometimes be lost, at a game of cards, the whole monthly salary of Monsieur Puck! And Zilah said to himself, that this was, perhaps, the first time that this woman had ever been brought in contact with anything pertaining to her husband's fashionable life—and in what shape?—that of a man who had come to demand satisfaction for an injury, and to say to Jacquemin: "I shall probably kill you, Monsieur!"

And gradually, before the spectacle of this profound love, of this humble and holy devotion of the unselfish martyr with timid, wistful eyes, who leaned over her children, and said to them, sweetly, "Yes, you are hungry, I know, but you shall have papa's beefsteak," while she herself breakfasted off a little coffee and a crust of bread, Andras Zilah felt all his anger die away; and an immense pity filled his breast, as he saw, as in a vision of what the future might have brought forth, a terrible scene in this poor little household: the pale fair-haired wife, already wasted and worn with constant labor, leaning out of the window yonder, or running to the stairs and seeing, covered with blood, wounded, wounded to death perhaps, her Paul, whom he, Andras, had come to provoke to a duel.

Ah! poor woman! Never would he cause her such anguish and sorrow. Between his sword and Jacquemin's impertinent little person, were now this sad-eyed creature, and those poor little children, who played there, forgotten, half deserted, by their father, and who would grow up, Heaven knows how!

"I see that Monsieur Jacquemin will not return," he said, rising hurriedly, "and I will leave you to your breakfast, Madame."

"Oh! you don't trouble me at all, Monsieur. I beg your pardon again for having given my children their breakfast before you."

"Farewell, Madame," said Andras, bowing with the deepest respect.

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"Then, you are really going, Monsieur? Indeed, I am afraid he won't come back. But please tell me what I shall say to him your errand was. If it is some good news, I should be so glad, so glad, to be the first to tell it to him. You are, perhaps, although you say not, the editor of some paper which is about to be started. He spoke to me, the other day, of a new paper. He would like to be a dramatic critic. That is his dream, he says. Is it that, Monsieur?"

"No, Madame; and, to tell you the truth, there is no longer any need for me to see your husband. But I do not regret my visit; on the contrary—I have met a noble woman, and I offer her my deepest respect."

Poor, unhappy girl! She was not used to such words; she blushinglly faltered her thanks, and seemed quite grieved at the departure of this man, from whom she had expected some good luck for her husband.

"The life of Paris has its secrets!" thought Zilah, as he slowly descended the stairs, which he had mounted in such a different frame of mind, so short a time before.

When he reached the lower landing, he looked up, and saw the blond head of the young woman, leaning over above, and the little hands of the children clutching the damp railing.

Then Prince Andras Zilah took off his hat, and again bowed low.

On his way from the Rue Rochechouart to his hotel he thought of the thin, pale face of the Parisian grisette, who would slowly pine away, deceived and disdained by the man whose name she bore. Such a fine name! Puck or Gavroche!

"And she would die rather than soil that name. This Jacquemin has found this pearl of great price, and hid it away under the gutters of Paris! And I—I have encountered—what? A miserable woman who betrayed me! Ah! men and women are decidedly the victims of chance; puppets destined to bruise one another!"

On entering his hotel, he found Yanski Varhely there, with an anxious look upon his rugged old face.

"Well?"

"Well-nothing!"

And Zilah told his friend what he had seen.

"A droll city, this Paris!" he said, in conclusion. "I see that it is necessary to go up into the garrets to know it well."

He took a sheet of paper, sat down, and wrote as follows:

Monsieur:—You have published an article in regard to Prince Andras Zilah, which is an outrage. A devoted friend of the Prince had resolved to make you pay dearly for it; but there is some one who has disarmed him. That some one is the admirable woman who bears so honorably the name which you have given her, and lives so bravely the life you have doomed her to. Madame Jacquemin has redeemed the infamy of Monsieur Puck. But when, in the future, you have to speak of the misfortunes of others, think a little of your own existence, and profit by the moral lesson given you by—*an unknown*.

“Now,” said Zilah, “be so kind, my dear Varhely, as to have this note sent to Monsieur Puck, at the office of ‘L’Actualite’ and ask your domestic to purchase some toys, whatever he likes—here is the money—and take them to Madame Jacquemin, No. 25 Rue Rochechouart. Three toys, because there are three children. The poor little things will have gained so much, at all events, from this occurrence.”

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CHAPTER XXVI

"Am I avenged?"

After this episode, the Prince lived a more solitary existence than before, and troubled himself no further about the outside world. Why should he care, that some penny-aliner had slipped those odious lines into a newspaper? His sorrow was not the publishing of the treachery, it was the treachery itself; and his hourly suffering caused him to long for death to end his torture.

"And yet I must live," he thought, "if to exist with a dagger through one's heart is to live."

Then, to escape from the present, he plunged into the memories of the war, as into a bath of oblivion, a strange oblivion, where he found all his patriotic regrets of other days. He read, with spasmodic eagerness, the books in which Georgei and Klapka, the actors of the drama, presented their excuses, or poured forth their complaints; and it seemed to him that his country would make him forget his love.

In the magnificent picture-gallery, where he spent most of his time, his eyes rested upon the battle-scenes of Matejks, the Polish artist, and the landscapes of Munkacsy, that painter of his own country, who took his name from the town of Munkacs, where tradition says that the Magyars settled when they came from the Orient, ages ago. Then a bitter longing took possession of him to breathe a different air, to fly from Paris, and place a wide distance between himself and Marsa; to take a trip around the world, where new scenes might soften his grief, or, better still, some accident put an end to his life; and, besides, chance might bring him in contact with Menko.

But, just as he was ready to depart, a sort of lassitude overpowered him; he felt the inert sensation of a wounded man who has not the strength to move, and he remained where he was, sadly and bitterly wondering at times if he should not appeal to the courts, dissolve his marriage, and demand back his name from the one who had stolen it.

Appeal to the courts? The idea of doing that was repugnant to him. What! to hear the proud and stainless name of the Zilahs resound, no longer above the clash of sabres and the neighing of furious horses, but within the walls of a courtroom, and in presence of a gaping crowd of sensation seekers? No! silence was better than that; anything was better than publicity and scandal. Divorce! He could obtain that, since Marsa, her mind destroyed, was like one dead. And what would a divorce give him? His freedom? He had it already. But what nothing could give back, was his ruined faith, his shattered hopes, his happiness lost forever.

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At times he had a wild desire to see Marsa again, and vent once more upon her his anger and contempt. When he happened to see the name of Maisons-Lafitte, his body tingled from head to foot, as by an electric shock. Maisons! The sunlit garden, the shaded alleys, the glowing parterres of flowers, the old oaks, the white-walled villa, all appeared before him, brutally distinct, like a lost, or rather poisoned, Eden! And, besides, she, Marsa, was no longer there; and the thought that the woman whom he had so passionately loved, with her exquisite, flower-like face, was shut up among maniacs at Vaugirard, caused him the acutest agony. The asylum which was Marsa's prison was so constantly in his mind that he felt the necessity of flight, in order not to allow his weakness to get the better of him, lest he should attempt to see Marsa again.

"What a coward I am!" he thought.

One evening he announced to Varhely that he was going to the lonely villa of Sainte-Adresse, where they had so many times together watched the sea and talked of their country.

"I am going there to be alone, my dear Yanski," he said, "but to be with you is to be with myself. I hope that you will accompany me."

"Most certainly," replied Varhely.

The Prince took only one domestic, wishing to live as quietly and primitively as possible; but Varhely, really alarmed at the rapid change in the Prince, and the terrible pallor of his face, followed him, hoping at least to distract him and arouse him from his morbidness by talking over with him the great days of the past, and even, if possible, to interest him in the humble lives of the fishermen about him.

Zilah and his friend, therefore, passed long hours upon the terrace of the villa, watching the sun set at their feet, while the grayish-blue sea was enveloped in a luminous mist, and the fading light was reflected upon the red walls and white blinds of the houses, and tinged with glowing purple the distant hills of Ingouville.

This calm, quiet spot gradually produced upon Andras the salutary effect of a bath after a night of feverish excitement. His reflections became less bitter, and, strange to relate, it was rough old Yanski Varhely, who, by his tenderness and thoughtfulness, led his friend to a more resigned frame of mind.

Very often, after nightfall, would Zilah descend with him to the shore below. The sea lay at their feet a plain of silver, and the moonbeams danced over the waves in broken lines of luminous atoms; boats passed to and fro, their red lights flashing like glowworms; and it seemed to Andras and Varhely, as they approached the sea, receding over the wet, gleaming sands, that they were walking upon quicksilver.

As they strolled and talked together here, it seemed to Andras that this grief was, for the moment, carried away by the fresh, salt breeze; and these two men, in a different manner buffeted by fate, resembled two wounded soldiers who mutually aid one another to advance, and not to fall by the way before the combat is over. Yanski made special efforts to rouse in Andras the old memories of his fatherland, and to inspire in him again his love for Hungary.

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"Ah! I used to have so many hopes and dreams for her future," said Andras; "but idealists have no chance in the world of to-day; so now I am a man who expects nothing of life except its ending. And yet I would like to see once again that old stone castle where I grew up, full of hopes! Hopes? Bah! pretty bubbles, that is all!"

One morning they walked along the cliffs, past the low shanties of the fishermen, as far as Havre; and, as they were sauntering through the streets of the city, Varhely grasped the Prince's arm, and pointed to an announcement of a series of concerts to be given at Frascati by a band of Hungarian gipsies.

"There," he said, "you will certainly emerge from your retreat to hear those airs once more."

"Yes," replied Andras, after a moment's hesitation.

That evening found him at the casino; but his wound seemed to open again, and his heart to be grasped as in an iron hand, as he listened to the plaintive cries and moans of the Tzigani music. Had the strings of the bows played these czardas upon his own sinews, laid bare, he would not have trembled more violently. Every note of the well-known airs fell upon his heart like a corrosive tear, and Marsa, in all her dark, tawny beauty, rose before him. The Tzigani played now the waltzes which Marsa used to play; then the slow, sorrowful plaint of the "Song of Plevna;" and then the air of Janos Nemeth's, the heart-breaking melody, to the Prince like the lament of his life: 'The World holds but One Fair Maiden'. And at every note he saw again Marsa, the one love of his existence.

"Let us go!" he said suddenly to Yanski.

But, as they were about to leave the building, they almost ran into a laughing, merry group, led by the little Baroness Dinati, who uttered a cry of delight as she perceived Andras.

"What, you, my dear Prince! Oh, how glad I am to see you!"

And she took his arm, all the clan which accompanied her stopping to greet Prince Zilah.

"We have come from Etretat, and we are going back there immediately. There was a fair at Havre in the Quartier Saint-Francois, and we have eaten up all we could lay our hands on, broken all Aunt Sally's pipes, and purchased all the china horrors and hideous pincushions we could find. They are all over there in the break. We are going to raffle them at Etretat for the poor."

The Prince tried to excuse himself and move on, but the little Baroness held him tight.

“Why don’t you come to Etretat? It is charming there. We don’t do anything but eat and drink and talk scandal—Oh, yes! Yamada sometimes gives us some music. Come here, Yamada!”

The Japanese approached, in obedience to her call, with his eternal grin upon his queer little face.

“My dear Prince,” rattled on the Baroness, “you don’t know, perhaps, that Yamada is the most Parisian of Parisians? Upon my word, these Japanese are the Parisians of Asia! Just fancy what he has been doing at Etretat! He has been writing a French operetta!”

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"Japanese!" corrected Yamada, with an apologetic bow.

"Oh, Japanese! Parisian Japanese, then! At all events, it is very funny, and the title is Little Moo-Moo! There is a scene on board a flower-decked boat! Oh, it is so amusing, so original, so natural! and a delightful song for Little Moo-Moo!"

Then, as Zilah glanced at Varhely, uneasy, and anxious to get away, the Baroness puckered up her rosy lips and sang the stanzas of the Japanese maestro.

Why, sung by Judic or Theo, it would create a furore! All Paris would be singing.

"Oh, by the way," she cried, suddenly interrupting herself, "what have you done to Jacquemin? Yes, my friend Jacquemin?"

"Jacquemin?" repeated Zilah; and he thought of the garret in the Rue Rochechouart, and the gentle, fairhaired woman, who was probably at this very moment leaning over the cribs of her little children—the children of Monsieur Puck, society reporter of 'L'Actualite'

"Yes! Why, Jacquemin has become a savage; oh, indeed! a regular savage! I wanted to bring him to Etretat; but no, he wouldn't come. It seems that he is married. Jacquemin married! Isn't it funny? He didn't seem like a married man! Poor fellow! Well, when I invited him, he refused; and the other day, when I wanted to know the reason, he answered me (that is why I speak to you about it), 'Ask Prince Zilah'! So, tell me now, what have you done to poor Jacquemin?"

"Nothing," said the Prince.

"Oh, yes, you have; you have changed him! He, who used to go everywhere and be so jolly, now hides himself in his den, and is never seen at all. Just see how disagreeable it is! If he had come with us, he would have written an account in 'L'Actualite' of Little Moo-Moo, and Yamada's operetta would already be celebrated."

"So," continued the Baroness, "when I return to Paris, I am going to hunt him up. A reporter has no right to make a bear of himself!"

"Don't disturb him, if he cares for his home now," said Zilah, gravely. "Nothing can compensate for one's own fireside, if one loves and is loved."

At the first words of the Prince, the Baroness suddenly became serious.

"I beg your pardon," she said, dropping his arm and holding out her tiny hand: "please forgive me for having annoyed you. Oh, yes, I see it! I have annoyed you. But be consoled; we are going at once, and then, you know, that if there is a creature who

loves you, respects you, and is devoted to you, it is this little idiot of a Baroness! Goodnight!"

"Good-night'." said Andras, bowing to the Baroness's friends, Yamada and the other Parisian exotics.

Glad to escape, Varhely and the Prince returned home along the seashore. Fragments of the czardas from the illuminated casino reached their ears above the swish of the waves. Andras felt irritated and nervous. Everything recalled to him Marsa, and she seemed to be once more taking possession of his heart, as a vine puts forth fresh tendrils and clings again to the oak after it has been torn away.

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"She also suffers!" he said aloud, after they had walked some distance in silence.

"Fortunately!" growled Varhely; and then, as if he wished to efface his harshness, he added, in a voice which trembled a little: "And for that reason she is, perhaps, not unworthy of pardon."

"Pardon!"

This cry escaped from Zilah in accents of pain which struck Varhely like a knife.

"Pardon before punishing—the other!" exclaimed the Prince, angrily.

The other! Yanski Varhely instinctively clinched his fist, thinking, with rage, of that package of letters which he had held in his hands, and which he might have destroyed if he had known.

It was true: how was pardon possible while Menko lived?

No word more was spoken by either until they reached the villa; then Prince Zilah shook Yanski's hand and retired to his chamber. Lighting his lamp, he took out and read and reread, for the hundredth time perhaps, certain letters—letters not addressed to him—those letters which Varhely had handed him, and with which Michel Menko had practically struck him the day of his marriage.

Andras had kept them, reading them over at times with an eager desire for further suffering, drinking in this species of poison to irritate his mental pain as he would have injected morphine to soothe a physical one. These letters caused him a sensation analogous to that which gives repose to opium-eaters, a cruel shock at first, sharp as the prick of a knife, then, the pain slowly dying away, a heavy stupor.

The whole story was revived in these letters of Marsa to Menko:—all the ignorant, credulous love of the young girl for Michel, then her enthusiasm for love itself, rather than for the object of her love, and then, again—for Menko had reserved nothing, but sent all together—the bitter contempt of Marsa, deceived, for the man who had lied to her.

There were, in these notes, a freshness of sentiment and a youthful credulity which produced the impression of a clear morning in early spring, all the frankness and faith of a mind ignorant of evil and destitute of guile; then, in the later ones, the spontaneous outburst of a heart which believes it has given itself forever, because it thinks it has encountered incorruptible loyalty and undying devotion.

As he read them over, Andras shook with anger against the two who had deceived him; and also, and involuntarily, he felt an undefined, timid pity for the woman who had



trusted and been deceived—a pity he immediately drove away, as if he were afraid of himself, afraid of forgiving.

“What did Varhely mean by speaking to me of pardon?” he thought. “Am I yet avenged?”

It was this constant hope that the day would come when justice would be meted out to Menko’s treachery. The letters proved conclusively that Menko had been Marsa’s lover; but they proved, at the same time, that Michel had taken advantage of her innocence and ignorance, and lied outrageously in representing himself as free, when he was already bound to another woman.

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All night long Andras Zilah sat there, inflicting torture upon himself, and taking a bitter delight in his own suffering; engraving upon his memory every word of love written by Marsa to Michel, as if he felt the need of fresh pain to give new strength to his hatred.

The next morning at breakfast, Varhely astonished him by announcing that he was going away.

"To Paris?"

"No, to Vienna," replied Yanski, who looked somewhat paler than usual.

"What an idea! What are you going to do there, Varhely?"

"Angelo Valla arrived yesterday at Havre. He sent for me to come to his hotel this morning. I have just been there. Valla has given me some information in regard to a matter of interest to myself, which will require my presence at Vienna. So I am going there."

Prince Zilah was intimately acquainted with the Valla of whom Varhely spoke; he had been one of the witnesses of his marriage. Valla was a former minister of Manin; and, since the siege of Venice, he had lived partly in Paris and partly in Florence. He was a man for whom Andras Zilah had the greatest regard.

"When do you go?" asked the Prince of Varhely.

"In an hour. I wish to take the fast mail from Paris this evening."

"Is it so very pressing, then?"

"Very pressing," replied Varhely. "There is another to whose ears the affair may possibly come, and I wish to get the start of him."

"Farewell, then," said Andras, considerably surprised; "come back as soon as you can."

He was astonished at the almost violent pressure of the hand which Varhely gave him, as if he were departing for a very long journey.

"Why didn't Valla come to see me?" he asked. "He is one of the few I am always glad to see."

"He had no time. He had to be away again at once, and he asked me to excuse him to you."

The Prince did not make any further attempt to find out what was the reason of his friend's sudden flight, for Varhely was already descending the steps of the villa.

Andras then felt a profound sensation of loneliness, and he thought again of the woman whom his imagination pictured haggard and wan in the asylum of Vaugirard.

CHAPTER XXVII

"What matters it how much we suffer?"

Two hours after Varhely had gone, a sort of feverish attraction drew Prince Andras to the spot where, the night before, he had listened to the Tzigana airs.

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Again, but alone this time, he drank in the accents of the music of his country, and sought to remember the impression produced upon him when Marsa had played this air or that one, this sad song or that czardas. He saw her again as she stood on the deck of the steamer, watching the children on the barge as they threw her kisses of farewell. More troubled than ever, nervous and suffering, Zilah returned home late in the afternoon, opened the desk where he kept Marsa's letters, and one by one, impelled by some inexplicable sentiment, he burned them, the flame of the candle devouring the paper, whose subtle perfume mounted to his nostrils for the last time like a dying sigh, while the wind carried off, through the window into the infinite, the black dust of those fateful letters, those remnants of dead passion and of love betrayed—and the past was swept away.

The sun was slowly descending in an atmosphere of fire, while toward Havre a silvery mist over the hills and shore heralded the approach of chaste Dian's reign. The reflections of the sunset tinged with red and orange the fishing boats floating over the calm sea, while a long fiery streak marked the water on the horizon, growing narrower and narrower, and changing to orange and then to pale yellow as the disk of the sun gradually disappeared, and the night came on, enveloping the now inactive city, and the man who watched the disappearance of the last fragments of a detested love, of the love of another, of a love which had torn and bruised his heart. And, strange to say, for some inexplicable reason, Prince Andras Zilah now regretted the destruction of those odious letters. It seemed to him, with a singular displacement of his personality, that it was something of himself, since it was something of her, that he had destroyed. He had hushed that voice which said to another, "I love you," but which caused him the same thrill as if she had murmured the words for him. They were letters received by his rival which the wind carried out, an impalpable dust, over the sea; and he felt—such folly is the human heart capable of—the bitter regret of a man who has destroyed a little of his past.

The shadows crept over him at the same time that they crept over the sea.

"What matters it how much we suffer, or how much suffering we cause," he murmured, "when, of all our loves, our hearts, ourselves, there remains, after a short lapse of time—what? That!" And he watched the last atom of burned paper float away in the deepening twilight.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STRICKEN SOUL

His loneliness now weighed heavily upon Andras. His nerves were shaken by the memories which the czardas of the Tzigani musicians had evoked; and it seemed to him that the place was deserted now that they had departed, and Varhely had gone with

them. In the eternal symphony of the sea, the lapping of the waves upon the shingle at the foot of the terrace, one note was now lacking, the resonant note of the czimbalom yonder in the gardens of Frascati. The vibration of the czimbalom was like a call summoning up the image of Marsa, and this image took invincible possession of the Prince, who, with a sort of sorrowful anger which he regarded as hatred, tried in vain to drive it away.

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What was the use of remaining at Sainte-Adresse, when the memories he sought to flee came to find him there, and since Marsa's presence haunted it as if she had lived there by his side?

He quitted Havre, and returned to Paris; but the very evening of his return, in the bustle and movement of the Champs-Elysees, the long avenue dotted with lights, the flaming gas-jets of the cafe concerts, the bursts of music, he found again, as if the Tzigana were continually pursuing him, the same phantom; despite the noise of people and carriages upon the asphalt, the echoes of the "Song of Plevna," played quite near him by some Hungarian orchestra, reached him as upon the seashore at Havre; and he hastened back to his hotel, to shut himself up, to hear nothing, see nothing, and escape from the fantastic, haunting pursuit of this inevitable vision.

He could not sleep; fever burned in his blood. He rose, and tried to read; but before the printed page he saw continually Marsa Laszlo, like the spectre of his happiness.

"How cowardly human nature is!" he exclaimed, hurling away the book. "Is it possible that I love her still? Shall I love her forever?"

And he felt intense self-contempt at the temptation which took possession of him to see once more Maisons-Lafitte, where he had experienced the most terrible grief of his life. What was the use of struggling? He had not forgotten, and he never could forget.

If he had been sincere with himself, he would have confessed that he was impelled by his ever-living, ever-present love toward everything which would recall Marsa to him, and that a violent, almost superhuman effort was necessary not to yield to the temptation.

About a week after the Prince's return to Paris, his valet appeared one day with the card of General Vogotzine. It was on Andras's lips to refuse to see him; but, in reality, the General's visit caused him a delight which he would not acknowledge to himself. He was about to hear of her. He told the valet to admit Vogotzine, hypocritically saying to himself that it was impossible, discourteous, not to receive him.

The old Russian entered, timid and embarrassed, and was not much reassured by Zilah's polite but cold greeting.

The General, who for some extraordinary reason had not had recourse to alcohol to give him courage, took the chair offered him by the Prince. He was a little flushed, not knowing exactly how to begin what he had to say; and, being sober, he was terribly afraid of appearing, like an idiot.

"This is what is the matter," he said, plunging at once in medias res. "Doctor Fargeas, who sent me, might have come himself; but he thought that I, being her uncle, should—"



"You have come to consult me about Marsa," said Andras, unconsciously glad to pronounce her name.

"Yes," began the General, becoming suddenly intimidated, "of—of Marsa. She is very ill—Marsa is. Very ill. Stupor, Fargeas says. She does not say a word—nothing. A regular automaton! It is terrible to see her—terrible—terrible."

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He raised his round, uneasy eyes to Andras, who was striving to appear calm, but whose lips twitched nervously.

"It is impossible to rouse her," continued Vogotzine. "The, doctors can do nothing. There is no hope except in an—an—an experiment."

"An experiment?"

"Yes, exactly, exactly—an experiment. You see he—he wanted to know if—(you must pardon me for what I am about to propose; it is Doctor Fargeas's idea)—You see—if—if—she should see—(I suppose—these are not my words)—if she should see you again at Doctor Sims's establishment—the emotion—the—the—Well, I don't know exactly what Doctor Fargeas does hope; but I have repeated to you his words—I am simply, quite simply, his messenger."

"The doctor," said Andras, calmly, "would like—your niece to see me again?"

"Yes, yes; and speak to you. You see, you are the only one for whom—"

The Prince interrupted the General, who instantly became as mute as if he were in the presence of the Czar.

"It is well. But what Doctor Fargeas asks of me will cause me intense suffering."

Vogotzine did not open his lips.

"See her again? He wishes to revive all my sorrow, then!"

Vogotzine waited, motionless as if on parade.

After a moment or two, Andras saying no more, the General thought that he might speak.

"I understand. I knew very well what your answer would be. I told the doctor so; but he replied, 'It is a question of humanity. The Prince will not refuse.'"

Fargeas must have known Prince Zilah's character well when he used the word humanity. The Prince would not have refused his pity to the lowest of human beings; and so, never mind what his sufferings might be, if his presence could do any good, he must obey the doctor.

"When does Doctor Fargeas wish me to go?"

"Whenever you choose. The doctor is just now at Vaugirard, on a visit to his colleague, and—"

“Do not let us keep him waiting!”

Vogotzine’s eyes brightened.

“Then you consent? You will go?”

He tried to utter some word of thanks, but Andras cut him short, saying:

“I will order the carriage.”

“I have a carriage,” said Vogotzine, joyously. “We can go at once.”

Zilah was silent during the drive; and Vogotzine gazed steadily out of the window, without saying a word, as the Prince showed no desire to converse.

They stopped before a high house, evidently built in the last century, and which was probably formerly a convent. The General descended heavily from the coupe, rang the bell, and stood aside to let Zilah pass before him.

The Prince’s emotion was betrayed in a certain stiffness of demeanor, and in his slow walk, as if every movement cost him an effort. He stroked his moustache mechanically, and glanced about the garden they were crossing, as if he expected to see Marsa at once.

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Dr. Fargeas appeared very much pleased to see the Prince, and he thanked him warmly for having come. A thin, light-haired man, with a pensive look and superb eyes, accompanied Fargeas, and the physician introduced him to the Prince as Dr. Sims.

Dr. Sims shared the opinion of his colleague. Having taken the invalid away, and separated her from every thing that could recall the past, the physicians thought, that, by suddenly confronting her with a person so dear to her as Prince Zilah, the shock and emotion might rouse her from her morbid state.

Fargeas explained to the Prince why he had thought it best to transport the invalid from Maisons-Lafitte to Vaugirard, and he thanked him for having approved of his determination.

Zilah noticed that Fargeas, in speaking of Marsa, gave her no name or title. With his usual tact, the doctor had divined the separation; and he did not call Marsa the Princess, but, in tones full of pity, spoke of her as the invalid.

"She is in the garden," said Dr. Sims, when Fargeas had finished speaking. "Will you see her now?"

"Yes," said the Prince, in a voice that trembled slightly, despite his efforts to control it.

"We will take a look at her first; and then, if you will be so kind, show yourself to her suddenly. It is only an experiment we are making. If she does not recognize you, her condition is graver than I think. If she does recognize you, well, I hope that we shall be able to cure her. Come!"

Dr. Sims motioned the Prince to precede them.

"Shall I accompany you, gentlemen?" asked Vogotzine.

"Certainly, General!"

"You see, I don't like lunatics; they produce a singular effect upon me; they don't interest me at all. But still, after all, she is my niece!"

And he gave a sharp pull to his frock-coat, as he would have tightened his belt before an assault.

They descended a short flight of steps, and found themselves in a large garden, with trees a century old, beneath which were several men and women walking about or sitting in chairs.

A large, new building, one story high, appeared at one end of the garden; in this were the dormitories of Dr. Sims's patients.

“Are those people insane?” asked Zilah, pointing to the peaceful groups.

“Yes,” said Dr. Sims; “it requires a stretch of the imagination to believe it, does it not? You can speak to them as we pass by. All these here are harmless.”

“Shall we cross the garden?”

“Our invalid is below there, in another garden, behind that house.”

As he passed by, Zilah glanced curiously at these poor beings, who bowed, or exchanged a few words with the two physicians. It seemed to him that they had the happy look of people who had reached the desired goal. Vogotzine, coughing nervously, kept close to the Prince and felt very ill at ease. Andras, on the contrary, found great difficulty in realizing that he was really among lunatics.

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“See,” said Dr. Sims, pointing out an old gentleman, dressed in the style of 1840, like an old-fashioned lithograph of a beau of the time of Gavarni, “that man has been more than thirty-five years in the institution. He will not change the cut of his garments, and he is very careful to have his tailor make his clothes in the same style he dressed when he was young. He is very happy. He thinks that he is the enchanter Merlin, and he listens to Vivian, who makes appointments with him under the trees.”

As they passed the old man, his neck imprisoned in a high stock, his surtout cut long and very tight in the waist, and his trousers very full about the hips and very close about the ankles, he bowed politely.

“Good-morning, Doctor Sims! Good-morning, Doctor Fargeas!”

Then, as the director of the establishment approached to speak, he placed a finger upon his lips:

“Hush,” he said. “She is there! Don’t speak, or she will go away.” And he pointed with a sort of passionate veneration to an elm where Vivian was shut up, and whence she would shortly emerge.

“Poor devil!” murmured Vogotzine.

This was not what Zilah thought, however. He wondered if this happy hallucination which had lasted so many years, these eternal love-scenes with Vivian, love-scenes which never grew stale, despite the years and the wrinkles, were not the ideal form of happiness for a being condemned to this earth. This poetical monomaniac lived with his dreams realized, finding, in an asylum of Vaugirard, all the fascinations and chimeras of the Breton land of golden blossoms and pink heather, all the intoxicating, languorous charm of the forest of Broceliande.

“He has within his grasp what Shakespeare was content only to dream of. Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized:”

“Ah!” replied Dr. Fargeas, “but the real never loses its grip. Why does this monomaniac preserve both the garments of his youth, which prevent him from feeling his age, and the dream of his life, which consoles him for his lost reason? Because he is rich. He can pay the tailor who dresses him, the rent of the pavilion he inhabits by himself, and the special servants who serve him. If he were poor, he would suffer.”

“Then,” said Zilah, “the question of bread comes up everywhere, even in insanity.”

“And money is perhaps happiness, since it allows of the purchase of happiness.”

“Oh!” said the Prince, “for me, happiness would be—”

“What?”

“Forgetfulness.”

And he followed with his eyes Vivian’s lover, who now had his ear glued to the trunk of the tree, and was listening to the voice which spoke only to him.

“That man yonder,” said Dr. Sims, indicating a man, still young, who was coming toward them, “is a talented writer whose novels you have doubtless read, and who has lost all idea of his own personality. Once a great reader, he now holds all literature in intense disgust; from having written so much, he has grown to have a perfect horror of words and letters, and he never opens either a book or a newspaper. He drinks in the fresh air, cultivates flowers, and watches the trains pass at the foot of the garden.”

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"Is he happy?" asked Andras.

"Very happy."

"Yes, he has drunk of the waters of Lethe," rejoined the Prince.

"I will not tell you his name," whispered Dr. Sims, as the man, a thin, dark-haired, delicate-featured fellow, approached them; "but, if you should speak to him and chance to mention his name, he would respond 'Ah! yes, I knew him. He was a man of talent, much talent.' There is nothing left to him of his former life."

And Zilah thought again that it was a fortunate lot to be attacked by one of these cerebral maladies where the entire being, with its burden of sorrows, is plunged into the deep, dark gulf of oblivion.

The novelist stopped before the two physicians.

"The mid-day train was three minutes and a half late," he said, quietly: "I mention the fact to you, doctor, that you may have it attended to. It is a very serious thing; for I am in the habit of setting my watch by that train."

"I will see to it," replied Dr. Sims. "By the way, do you want any books?"

In the same quiet tone the other responded:

"What for?"

"To read."

"What is the use of that?"

"Or any newspapers? To know—"

"To know what?" he interrupted, speaking with extreme volubility. "No, indeed! It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing! Do the newspapers announce that there are no more wars, no more poverty, illness, murders, envy, hatred or jealousy? No! The newspapers do not announce that. Then, why should I read the newspapers? Good-day, gentlemen."

The Prince shuddered at the bitter logic of this madman, speaking with the shrill distinctness of the insane. But Vogotzine smiled.

"Why, these idiots have rather good sense, after all," he remarked.

When they reached the end of the garden, Dr. Sims opened a gate which separated the male from the female patients, and Andras perceived several women walking about in the alleys, some of them alone, and some accompanied by attendants. In the distance, separated from the garden by a ditch and a high wall, was the railway.

Zilah caught his breath as he entered the enclosure, where doubtless among the female forms before him was that of the one he had loved. He turned to Dr. Sims with anxious eyes, and asked:

“Is she here?”

“She is here,” replied the doctor.

The Prince hesitated to advance. He had not seen her since the day he had felt tempted to kill her as she lay in her white robes at his feet. He wondered if it were not better to retrace his steps and depart hastily without seeing her.

“This way,” said Fargeas. “We can see through the bushes without being seen, can we not, Sims?”

“Yes, doctor.”

Zilah resigned himself to his fate; and followed the physicians without saying a word; he could hear the panting respiration of Vogotzine trudging along behind him. All at once the Prince felt a sensation as of a heavy hand resting upon his heart. Fargeas had exclaimed:

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"There she is!"

He pointed, through the branches of the lilac-bushes, to two women who were approaching with slow steps, one a light-haired woman in a nurse's dress, and the other in black garments, as if in mourning for her own life, Marsa herself.

Marsa! She was coming toward Zilah; in a moment, he would be able to touch her, if he wished, through the leaves! Even Vogotzine held his breath.

Zilah eagerly questioned Marsa's face, as if to read thereon a secret, to decipher a name—Menko's or his own. Her exquisite, delicate features had the rigidity of marble; her dark eyes were staring straight ahead, like two spots of light, where nothing, nothing was reflected. Zilah shuddered again; she alarmed him.

Alarm and pity! He longed to thrust aside the bushes, and hasten with extended arms toward the pale vision before him. It was as if the moving spectre of his love were passing by. But, with a strong effort of will, he remained motionless where he was.

Old Vogotzine seemed very ill at ease. Dr. Fargeas was very calm; and, after a questioning glance at his colleague, he said distinctly to the Prince:

"Now you must show yourself!"

The physician's order, far from displeasing Zilah, was like music in his ears. He was beginning to doubt, if, after all, Fargeas intended to attempt the experiment. He longed, with keen desire, to speak to Marsa; to know if his look, his breath, like a puff of wind over dying ashes, would not rekindle a spark of life in those dull, glassy eyes.

What was she thinking of, if she thought at all? What memory vacillated to and fro in that vacant brain? The memory of himself, or of—the other? He must know, he must know!

"This way," said Dr. Sims. "We will go to the end of the alley, and meet her face to face."

"Courage!" whispered Fargeas.

Zilah followed; and, in a few steps, they reached the end of the alley, and stood beneath a clump of leafy trees. The Prince saw, coming to him, with a slow but not heavy step, Marsa—no, another Marsa, the spectre or statue of Marsa.

Fargeas made a sign to Vogotzine, and the Russian and the two doctors concealed themselves behind the trees.

Zilah, trembling with emotion, remained alone in the middle of the walk.

The nurse who attended Marsa, had doubtless received instructions from Dr. Sims; for, as she perceived the Prince, she fell back two or three paces, and allowed Marsa to go on alone.

Lost in her stupor, the Tzigana advanced, her dark hair ruffled by the wind; and, still beautiful although so thin, she moved on, without seeing anything, her lips closed as if sealed by death, until she was not three feet from Zilah.

He stood waiting, his blue eyes devouring her with a look, in which there were mingled love, pity, and anger. When the Tzigana reached him, and nearly ran into him in her slow walk, she stopped suddenly, like an automaton. The instinct of an obstacle before her arrested her, and she stood still, neither recoiling nor advancing.

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A few steps away, Dr. Fargeas and Dr. Sims studied her stony look, in which there was as yet neither thought nor vision.

Still enveloped in her stupor, she stood there, her eyes riveted upon Andras. Suddenly, as if an invisible knife had been plunged into her heart, she started back. Her pale marble face became transfigured, and an expression of wild terror swept across her features; shaking with a nervous trembling, she tried to call out, and a shrill cry, which rent the air, burst from her lips, half open, like those of a tragic mask. Her two arms were stretched out with the hands clasped; and, falling upon her knees, she—whose light of reason had been extinguished, who for so many days had only murmured the sad, singing refrain: “I do not know; I do not know!”—faltered, in a voice broken with sobs: “Forgive! Forgive!”

Then her face became livid, and she would have fallen back unconscious if Zilah had not stooped over and caught her in his arms.

Dr. Sims hastened forward, and, aided by the nurse, relieved him of his burden.

Poor Vogotzine was as purple as if he had had a stroke of apoplexy.

“But, gentlemen,” said the Prince, his eyes burning with hot tears, “it will be horrible if we have killed her!”

“No, no,” responded Fargeas; “we have only killed her stupor. Now leave her to us. Am I not right, my dear Sims? She can and must be cured!”

CHAPTER XXIX

“Let the dead past bury its dead”

Prince Andras had heard no news of Varhely for a long time. He only knew that the Count was in Vienna.

Yanski had told the truth when he said that he had been summoned away by his friend, Angelo Valla.

They were very much astonished, at the Austrian ministry of foreign affairs, to see Count Yanski Varhely, who, doubtless, had come from Paris to ask some favor of the minister. The Austrian diplomats smiled as they heard the name of the old soldier of '48 and '49. So, the famous fusion of parties proclaimed in 1875 continued! Every day some sulker of former times rallied to the standard. Here was this Varhely, who, at one time, if he had set foot in Austria-Hungary, would have been speedily cast into the Charles barracks, the jail of political prisoners, now sending in his card to the minister of

the Emperor; and doubtless the minister and the old commander of hussars would, some evening, together pledge the new star of Hungary, in a beaker of rosy Crement!

“These are queer days we live in!” thought the Austrian diplomats.

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The minister, of whom Yanski Varhely demanded an audience, his Excellency Count Josef Ladany, had formerly commanded a legion of Magyar students, greatly feared by the grenadiers of Paskiewisch, in Hungary. The soldiers of Josef Ladany, after threatening to march upon Vienna, had many times held in check the grenadiers and Cossacks of the field-marshal. Spirited and enthusiastic, his fair hair floating above his youthful forehead like an aureole, Ladany made war like a patriot and a poet, reciting the verses of Petoefi about the camp-fires, and setting out for battle as for a ball. He was magnificent (Varhely remembered him well) at the head of his students, and his floating, yellow moustaches had caused the heart of more than one little Hungarian patriot to beat more quickly.

Varhely would experience real pleasure in meeting once more his old companion in arms. He remembered one afternoon in the vineyards, when his hussars, despite the obstacles of the vines and the irregular ground, had extricated Ladany's legion from the attack of two regiments of Russian infantry. Joseph Ladany was standing erect upon one of his cannon for which the gunners had no more ammunition, and, with drawn sabre, was rallying his companions, who were beginning to give way before the enemy. Ah, brave Ladany! With what pleasure would Varhely grasp his hand!

The former leader had doubtless aged terribly—he must be a man of fifty-five or fifty-six, to-day; but Varhely was sure that Joseph Ladany, now become minister, had preserved his generous, ardent nature of other days.

As he crossed the antechambers and lofty halls which led to the minister's office, Varhely still saw, in his mind's eye, Ladany, sabre in hand, astride of the smoking cannon.

An usher introduced him into a large, severe-looking room, with a lofty chimney-piece, above which hung a picture of the Emperor-King in full military uniform. Varhely at first perceived only some large armchairs, and an enormous desk covered with books; but, in a moment, from behind the mass of volumes, a man emerged, smiling, and with outstretched hand: the old hussar was amazed to find himself in the presence of a species of English diplomat, bald, with long, gray side-whiskers and shaven lip and chin, and scrupulously well dressed.

Yanski's astonishment was so evident that Josef Ladany said, still smiling:

"Well, don't you recognize me, my dear Count?" His voice was pleasant, and his manner charming; but there was something cold and politic in his whole appearance which absolutely stupefied Varhely. If he had seen him pass in the street, he would never have recognized, in this elegant personage, the young man, with yellow hair and long moustaches, who sang war songs as he sabred the enemy.

And yet it was indeed Ladany; it was the same clear eye which had once commanded his legion with a single look; but the eye was often veiled now beneath a lowered eyelid, and only now and then did a glance shoot forth which seemed to penetrate a man's most secret thoughts. The soldier had become the diplomat.

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"I had forgotten that thirty years have passed!" thought Varhely, a little saddened.

Count Ladany made his old comrade sit down in one of the armchairs, and questioned him smilingly as to his life, his friendships, Paris, Prince Zilah, and led him gradually and gracefully to confide what he, Varhely, had come to ask of the minister of the Emperor of Austria.

Varhely felt more reassured. Josef Ladany seemed to him to have remained morally the same. The moustache had been cut off, the yellow hair had fallen; but the heart was still young and without doubt Hungarian.

"You can," he said, abruptly, "render me a service, a great service. I have never before asked anything of anybody; but I have taken this journey expressly to see you, and to ask you, to beg you rather, to—"

"Go on, my dear Count. What you desire will be realized, I hope."

But his tone had already become colder, or perhaps simply more official.

"Well," continued Varhely, "what I have come to ask of you is; in memory of the time when we were brothers in arms" (the minister started slightly, and stroked his whiskers a little nervously), "the liberty of a certain man, of a man whom you know."

"Ah! indeed!" said Count Josef.

He leaned back in his chair, crossed one leg over the other, and, through his half-opened eyelids, examined Varhely, who looked him boldly in the face.

The contrast between these two men was striking; the soldier with his hair and moustache whitened in the harness, and the elegant government official with his polished manners; two old-time companions who had heard the whistling of the same balls.

"This is my errand," said Varhely. "I have the greatest desire that one of our compatriots, now a prisoner in Warsaw, I think—at all events, arrested at Warsaw a short time ago—should be set at liberty. It is of the utmost importance to me," he added, his lips turning almost as white as his moustache.

"Oh!" said the minister. "I fancy I know whom you mean."

"Count Menko."

"Exactly! Menko was arrested by the Russian police on his arrival at the house of a certain Labanoff, or Ladanoff—almost my name in Russian. This Labanoff, who had lately arrived from Paris, is suspected of a plot against the Czar. He is not a nihilist, but

simply a malcontent; and, besides that, his brain is not altogether right. In short, Count Menko is connected in some way, I don't know how, with this Labanoff. He went to Poland to join him, and the Russian police seized him. I think myself that they were quite right in their action."

"Possibly," said Varhely; "but I do not care to discuss the right of the Russian police to defend themselves or the Czar. What I have come for is to ask you to use your influence with the Russian Government to obtain Menko's release."

"Are you very much interested in Menko?"

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"Very much," replied Yanski, in a tone which struck the minister as rather peculiar.

"Then," asked Count Ladany with studied slowness, "you would like?—"

"A note from you to the Russian ambassador, demanding Menko's release. Angelo Valla—you know him—Manin's former minister—"

"Yes, I know," said Count Josef, with his enigmatical smile.

"Valla told me of Menko's arrest. I knew that Menko had left Paris, and I was very anxious to find where he had gone. Valla learned, at the Italian embassy in Paris, of the affair of this Labanoff and of the real or apparent complicity of Michel Menko; and he told me about it. When we were talking over the means of obtaining the release of a man held by Muscovite authority, which is not an easy thing, I know, we thought of you, and I have come to your Excellency as I would have gone to the chief of the Legion of Students to demand his aid in a case of danger!"

Yanski Varhely was no diplomat; and his manner of appealing to the memories of the past was excessively disagreeable to the minister, who, however, allowed no signs of his annoyance to appear.

Count Ladany was perfectly well acquainted with the Warsaw affair. As an Hungarian was mixed up in it, and an Hungarian of the rank and standing of Count Menko, the Austro-Hungarian authorities had immediately been advised of the whole proceeding. There were probably no proofs of actual complicity against Menko; but, as Josef Ladany had said, it seemed evident that he had come to Poland to join Labanoff. An address given to Menko by Labanoff had been found, and both were soon to depart for St. Petersburg. Labanoff had some doubtful acquaintances in the Russian army: several officers of artillery, who had been arrested and sent to the mines, were said to be his friends.

"The matter is a grave one," said the Count. "We can scarcely, for one particular case, make our relations more strained with a—a friendly nation, relations which so many others—I leave you to divine who, my dear Varhely—strive to render difficult. And yet, I would like to oblige you; I would, I assure you."

"If Count Menko is not set at liberty, what will happen to him?" asked Yanski.

"Hmm—he might, although a foreigner, be forced to take a journey to Siberia."

"Siberia! That is a long distance off, and few return from that journey," said Varhely, his voice becoming almost hoarse. "I would give anything in the world if Menko were free!"

"It would have been so easy for him not to have been seized by the Russian police."

“Yes; but he is. And, I repeat, I have come to you to demand his release. Damn it! Such a demand is neither a threat nor a cases belli.”

The minister calmed the old hussar with a gesture.

“No,” he replied, clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth; “but it is embarrassing, embarrassing! Confound Menko! He always was a feather-brain! The idea of his leaving diplomacy to seek adventures! He must know, however, that his case is—what shall I say?—embarrassing, very embarrassing. I don’t suppose he had any idea of conspiring. He is a malcontent, this Menko, a malcontent! He would have made his mark in our embassies. The devil take him! Ah! my dear Count, it is very embarrassing, very embarrassing!”

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The minister uttered these words in a calm, courteous, polished manner, even when he said "The devil take him!" He then went on to say, that he could not make Varhely an absolute promise; he would look over the papers in the affair, telegraph to Warsaw and St. Petersburg, make a rapid study of what he called again the "very embarrassing" case of Michel Menko, and give Varhely an answer within twenty-four hours.

"That will give you a chance to take a look at our city, my dear Count. Vienna has changed very much. Have you seen the opera-house? It is superb. Hans Makart is just exhibiting a new picture. Be sure to see it, and visit his studio, too; it is well worth examining. I have no need to tell you that I am at your service to act as your cicerone, and show you all the sights."

"Are any of our old friends settled here?" asked Varhely.

"Yes, yes," said the minister, softly. "But they are deputies, university professors, or councillors of the administration. All changed! all changed!"

Then Varhely wished to know if certain among them whom he had not forgotten had "changed," as the minister said.

"Where is Armand Bitto?"

"Dead. He died very poor."

"And Arpad Ovody, Georgei's lieutenant, who was so brave at the assault of Buda? I thought that he was killed with that bullet through his cheek."

"Ovody? He is at the head of the Magyar Bank, and is charged by the ministry with the conversion of the six per cent. Hungarian loan. He is intimately connected with the Rothschild group. He has I don't know how many thousand florins a year, and a castle in the neighborhood of Presburg. A great collector of pictures, and a very amiable man!"

"And Hieronymis Janos, who wrote such eloquent proclamations and calls to arms? Kossuth was very fond of him."

"He is busy, with Maurice Jokai, preparing a great book upon the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, a book patronized by the Archduke Rudolph. He will doubtless edit the part relative to the kingdom of Saint Stephen."

"Ha! ha! He will have a difficult task when he comes to the recital of the battle at Raab against Francis Joseph in person! He commanded at Raab himself, as you must remember well."

"Yes, he did, I remember," said the minister. Then, with a smile, he added: "Bah! History is written, not made. Hieronymis Janos's book will be very good, very good!"

"I don't doubt it. What about Ferency Szilogyi? Is he also writing books under the direction of the Archduke Rudolph?"

"No! no! Ferency Szilogyi is president of the court of assizes, and a very good magistrate he is."

"He! an hussar?"

"Oh! the world changes! His uniform sleeps in some chest, preserved in camphor. Szilogyi has only one fault: he is too strongly anti-Semitic."

"He! a Liberal?"

"He detests the Israelites, and he allows it to be seen a little too much. He embarrasses us sometimes. But there is one extenuating circumstance—he has married a Jewess!"

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This was said in a light, careless, humorously sceptical tone.

“On the whole,” concluded the minister, “Armand Bitto, who is no longer in this world, is perhaps the most fortunate of all.”

Then, turning to Yanski with his pleasant smile, and holding out his delicate, well-kept hand, which had once brandished the sabre, he said:

“My dear Varhely, you will dine with me to-morrow, will you not? It is a great pleasure to see you again! Tomorrow I shall most probably give you an answer to your request—a request which I am happy, very happy, to take into consideration. I wish also to present you to the Countess. But no allusions to the past before her! She is a Spaniard, and she would not understand the old ideas very well. Kossuth, Bem, and Georgei would astonish her, astonish her! I trust to your tact, Varhely. And then it is so long ago, so very long ago, all that. Let the dead past bury its dead! Is it understood?”

Yanski Varhely departed, a little stunned by this interview. He had never felt so old, so out of the fashion, before. Prince Zilah and he now seemed to him like two ancestors of the present generation—Don Quixotes, romanticists, imbeciles. The minister was, as Jacquemin would have said, a sly dog, who took the times as he found them, and left spectres in peace. Well, perhaps he was right!

“Ah, well,” thought the old hussar, with an odd smile, “there is the age of moustaches and the age of whiskers, that is all. Ladany has even found a way to become bald: he was born to be a minister!”

It little mattered to him, however, this souvenir of his youth found with new characteristics. If Count Josef Ladany rescued Menko from the police of the Czar, and, by setting him free, delivered him to him, Varhely, all was well. By entering the ministry, Ladany would thus be at least useful for something.

CHAPTER XXX

“To seek forgetfulness”

The negotiations with Warsaw, however, detained Yanski Varhely at Vienna longer than he wished. Count Josef evidently went zealously to work to obtain from the Russian Government Menko’s release. He had promised Varhely, the evening he received his old comrade at dinner, that he would put all the machinery at work to obtain the fulfilment of his request. “I only ask you, if I attain the desired result, that you will do something to cool off that hotheaded Menko. A second time he would not escape Siberia.”

Varhely had made no reply; but the very idea that Michel Menko might be free made his head swim. There was, in the Count's eagerness to obtain Menko's liberty, something of the excitement of a hunter tracking his prey. He awaited Michel's departure from the fortress as if he were a rabbit in its burrow.

"If he is set at liberty, I suppose that we shall know where he goes," he said to the minister.

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"It is more than probable that the government of the Czar will trace his journey for him. You shall be informed."

Count Ladany did not seek to know for what purpose Varhely demanded, with such evident eagerness, this release. It was enough for him that his old brother-in-arms desired it, and that it was possible.

"You see how everything is for the best, Varhely," he said to him one morning. "Perhaps you blamed me when you learned that I had accepted a post from Austria. Well, you see, if I did not serve the Emperor, I could not serve you!"

During his sojourn at Vienna, Varhely kept himself informed, day by day, as to what was passing in Paris. He did not write to Prince Zilah, wishing, above everything, to keep his errand concealed from him; but Angelo Valla, who had remained in France, wrote or telegraphed whatever happened to the Prince.

Marsa Laszlo was cured; she had left Dr. Sims's institution, and returned to the villa of Maisons-Lafitte.

The poor girl came out of her terrible stupor with the distaste to take up the thread of life which sometimes comes after a night of forgetfulness in sleep. This stupor, which might have destroyed her, and the fever which had shaken her, seemed to her sweet and enviable now compared to this punishment: To live! To live and think!

And yet—yes, she wished to live to once more see Andras, whose look, fixed upon her, had rekindled the extinct intellectual flame of her being. She wished to live, now that her reason had returned to her, to live to wrest from the Prince a word of pardon. It could not be possible that her existence was to end with the malediction of this man. It seemed to her, that, if she should ever see him face to face, she would find words of desperate supplication which would obtain her absolution.

Certainly—she repented it bitterly every hour, now that the punishment of thinking and feeling had been inflicted upon her—she had acted infamously, been almost as criminal as Menko, by her silence and deceit—her deceit! She, who hated a lie! But she longed to make the Prince understand that the motive of her conduct was the love which she had for him. Yes, her love alone! There was no other reason, no other, for her unpardonable treachery. He did not think it now, without any doubt. He must accuse her of some base calculation or vile intrigue. But she was certain that, if she could see him again, she would prove to him that the only cause of her conduct was her unquenchable love for him.

"Let him only believe that, and then let him fly me forever, if he likes! Forever! But I cannot endure to have him despise me, as he must!"

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It was this hope which now attached her to life. After her return to Maisons-Lafitte from Vaugirard, she would have killed herself if she had not so desired another interview where she could lay bare her heart. Not daring to appear before Andras, not even thinking of such a thing as seeking him, she resolved to wait some opportunity, some chance, she knew not what. Suddenly, she thought of Yanski Varhely. Through Varhely, she might be able to say to Andras all that she wished her husband—her husband! the very word made her shudder with shame—to know of the reason of her crime. She wrote to the old Hungarian; but, as she received no response, she left Maisons-Lafitte and went to Varhely's house. They did not know there, where the Count was; but Monsieur Angelo Valla would forward any letters to him.

She then begged the Italian to send to Varhely a sort of long confession, in which she asked his aid to obtain from the Prince the desired interview.

The letter reached Yanski while he was at Vienna. He answered it with a few icy words; but what did that matter to Marsa? It was not Varhely's rancor she cared for, but Zilah's contempt. She implored him again, in a letter in which she poured out her whole soul, to return, to be there when she should tell the Prince all her remorse—the remorse which was killing her, and making of her detested beauty a spectre.

There was such sincerity in this letter, wherein a conscience sobbed, that, little by little, in spite of his rough exterior, the soldier, more accessible to emotion than he cared to have it appear, was softened, and growled beneath his moustache—

“So! So! She suffers. Well, that is something.”

He answered Marsa that he would return when he had finished a work he had vowed to accomplish; and, without explaining anything to the Tzigana, he added, at the end of his letter, these words, which, enigmatical as they were, gave a vague, inexplicable hope to Marsa “And pray that I may return soon!”

The day after he had sent this letter to Maisons-Lafitte, Varhely received from Ladany a message to come at once to the ministry.

On his arrival there, Count Josef handed him a despatch. The Russian minister of foreign affairs telegraphed to his colleague at Vienna, that his Majesty the Czar consented to the release of Count Menko, implicated in the Labanoff affair. Labanoff would probably be sent to Siberia the very day that Count Menko would receive a passport and an escort to the frontier. Count Menko had chosen Italy for his retreat, and he would start for Florence the day his Excellency received this despatch.

“Well, my dear minister,” exclaimed Varhely, “thank you a thousand times. And, with my thanks, my farewell. I am also going to Florence.”

“Immediately?”

“Immediately.”

“You will arrive there before Menko.”

“I am in a hurry,” replied Varhely, with a smile.

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He went to the telegraph office, after leaving the ministry, and sent a despatch to Angelo Valla, at Paris, in which he asked the Venetian to join him in Florence. Valla had assured him that he could rely on him for any service; and Varhely left Vienna, certain that he should find Manin's old minister at Florence.

"After all, he has not changed so much," he said to himself, thinking of Josef Ladany. "Without his aid, Menko would certainly have escaped me. Ladany has taken the times as they are: Zilah and I desire to have them as they should be. Which is right?"

Then, while the train was carrying him to Venice, he thought: Bah! it was much better to be a dupe like himself and Zilah, and to die preserving, like an unsundered flag, one's dream intact.

To die?

Yes! After all, Varhely might, at this moment, be close to death; but, whatever might be the fate which awaited him at the end of his journey, he found the road very long and the engine very slow.

At Venice he took a train which carried him through Lombardy into Tuscany; and at Florence he found Angelo Valla.

The Italian already knew, in regard to Michel Menko, all that it was necessary for him to know. Before going to London, Menko, on his return from Pau, after the death of his wife, had retired to a small house he owned in Pistoja; and here he had undoubtedly gone now.

It was a house built on the side of a hill, and surrounded with olive-trees. Varhely and Valla waited at the hotel until one of Balla's friends, who lived at Pistoja, should inform him of the arrival of the Hungarian count. And Menko did, in fact, come there three days after Varhely reached Florence.

"To-morrow, my dear Valla," said Yanski, "you will accompany me to see Menko?"

"With pleasure," responded the Italian.

Menko's house was some distance from the station, at the very end of the little city.

The bell at the gate opening into the garden, had been removed, as if to show that the master of the house did not wish to be disturbed. Varhely was obliged to pound heavily upon the wooden barrier. The servant who appeared in answer to his summons, was an Hungarian, and he wore the national cap, edged with fur.

"My master does not receive visitors," he answered when Yanski asked him, in Italian, if Count Menko were at home.

“Go and say to Menko Mihaly,” said Varhely, this time in Hungarian, “that Count Varhely is here as the representative of Prince Zilah!”

The domestic disappeared, but returned almost immediately and opened the gate. Varhely and Valla crossed the garden, entered the house, and found themselves face to face with Menko.

Varhely would scarcely have recognized him.

The former graceful, elegant young man had suddenly aged: his hair was thin and gray upon the temples, and, instead of the carefully trained moustache of the embassy attache, a full beard now covered his emaciated cheeks.

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Michel regarded the entrance of Varhely into the little salon where he awaited him, as if he were some spectre, some vengeance which he had expected, and which did not astonish him. He stood erect, cold and still, as Yanski advanced toward him; while Angelo Valla remained in the doorway, mechanically stroking his smoothly shaven chin.

"Monsieur," said Varhely, "for months I have looked forward impatiently to this moment. Do not doubt that I have sought you."

"I did not hide myself," responded Menko.

"Indeed? Then may I ask what was your object in going to Warsaw?"

"To seek-forgetfulness," said the young man, slowly and sadly.

This simple word—so often spoken by Zilah—which had no more effect upon the stern old Hungarian than a tear upon a coat of mail, produced a singular impression upon Valla. It seemed to him to express unconquerable remorse.

"What you have done can not be forgotten," said Varhely.

"No more than what I have suffered."

"You made me the accomplice of the most cowardly and infamous act a man could commit. I have come to you to demand an explanation."

Michel lowered his eyes at these cutting words, his thin face paling, and his lower lip trembling; but he said nothing. At last, after a pause, he raised his eyes again to the face of the old Hungarian, and, letting the words fall one by one, he replied:

"I am at your disposal for whatever you choose to demand, to exact. I only desire to assure you that I had no intention of involving you in an act which I regarded as a cruel necessity. I wished to avenge myself. But I did not wish my vengeance to arrive too late, when what I had assumed the right to prevent had become irreparable."

"I do not understand exactly," said Varhely.

Menko glanced at Valla as if to ask whether he could speak openly before the Italian.

"Monsieur Angelo Valla was one of the witnesses of the marriage of Prince Andras Zilah," said Yanski.

"I know Monsieur," said Michel, bowing to Valla.

"Ah!" he exclaimed abruptly, his whole manner changing. "There was a man whom I respected, admired and loved. That man, without knowing it, wrested from me the

woman who had been the folly, the dream, and the sorrow of my life. I would have done anything to prevent that woman from bearing the name of that man.”

“You sent to the Prince letters written to you by that woman, and that, too, after the Tzigana had become Princess Zilah.”

“She had let loose her dogs upon me to tear me to pieces. I was insane with rage. I wished to destroy her hopes also. I gave those letters to my valet with absolute orders to deliver them to the Prince the evening before the wedding. At the same hour that I left Paris, the letters should have been in the hands of the man who had the right to see them, and when there was yet time for him to refuse his name to the woman who had written them. My servant did not obey, or did not understand. Upon my honor, this is true. He kept the letters twenty-four hours longer than I had ordered him to do; and it was not she whom I punished, but I struck the man for whom I would have given my life.”

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“Granted that there was a fatality of this sort in your conduct,” responded Varhely, coldly, “and that your lackey did not understand your commands: the deed which you committed was none the less that of a coward. You used as a weapon the letters of a woman, and of a woman whom you had deceived by promising her your name when it was no longer yours to give!”

“Are you here to defend Mademoiselle Marsa Laszlo?” asked Michel, a trifle haughtily.

“I am here to defend the Princess Zilah, and to avenge Prince Andras. I am here, above all, to demand satisfaction for your atrocious action in having taken me as the instrument of your villainy.”

“I regret it deeply and sincerely,” replied Menko; “and I am at your orders.”

The tone of this response admitted of no reply, and Yanski and Valla took their departure.

Valla then obtained another second from the Hungarian embassy, and two officers in garrison at Florence consented to serve as Menko’s friends. It was arranged that the duel should take place in a field near Pistoja.

Valla, anxious and uneasy, said to Varhely:

“All this is right and proper, but—”

“But what?”

“But suppose he kills you? The right is the right, I know; but leaden bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right, and—”

“Well,” interrupted Yanski, “in case of the worst, you must charge yourself, my dear Valla, with informing the Prince how his old friend Yanski Varhely defended his honor—and also tell him of the place where Count Menko may be found. I am going to attempt to avenge Zilah. If I do not succeed, ‘Teremtete!’” ripping out the Hungarian oath, “he will avenge me, that is all! Let us go to supper.”

CHAPTER XXXI

“If Menko were dead!”

Prince Zilah, wandering solitary in the midst of crowded Paris, was possessed by one thought, one image impossible to drive away, one name which murmured eternally in his ears—Marsa; Marsa, who was constantly before his eyes, sometimes in the silvery shimmer of her bridal robes, and sometimes with the deathly pallor of the promenader in

the garden of Vaugirard; Marsa, who had taken possession of his being, filling his whole heart, and, despite his revolt, gradually overpowering all other memories, all other passions! Marsa, his last love, since nothing was before him save the years when the hair whitens, and when life weighs heavily upon weary humanity; and not only his last love, but his only love!

Oh! why had he loved her? Or, having loved her, why had she not confessed to him that that coward of a Menko had deceived her! Who knows? He might have pardoned her, perhaps, and accepted the young girl, the widow of that passion. Widow? No, not while Menko lived. Oh! if he were dead!

And Zilah repeated, with a fierce longing for vengeance: "If he were dead!" That is, if there were not between them, Zilah and Marsa, the abhorred memory of the lover!

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Well! if Menko were dead?

When he feverishly asked himself this question, Zilah recalled at the same time Marsa, crouching at his feet, and giving no other excuse than this: "I loved you! I wished to belong to you, to be your wife!"

His wife! Yes, the beautiful Tzigana he had met at Baroness Dinati's was now his wife! He could punish or pardon. But he had punished, since he had inflicted upon her that living death—insanity. And he asked himself whether he should not pardon Princess Zilah, punished, repentant, almost dying.

He knew that she was now at Maisons, cured of her insanity, but still ill and feeble, and that she lived there like a nun, doing good, dispensing charity, and praying—praying for him, perhaps.

For him or for Menko?

No, for him! She was not vile enough to have lied, when she asked, implored, besought death from Zilah who held her life or death in his hands.

"Yes, I had the right to kill her, but—I have the right to pardon also," thought Zilah.

Ah, if Menko were dead!

The Prince gradually wrought himself into a highly nervous condition, missing Varhely, uneasy at his prolonged absence, and never succeeding in driving away Marsa's haunting image. He grew to hate his solitary home and his books.

"I shall not want any breakfast," he said one morning to his valet; and, going out, he descended the Champs-Elysees on foot.

At the corner of the Place de la Madeleine, he entered a restaurant, and sat down near a window, gazing mechanically at this lively corner of Paris, at the gray facade of the church, the dusty trees, the asphalt, the promenaders, the yellow omnibuses, the activity of Parisian life.

All at once he was startled to hear his name pronounced and to see before him, with his hand outstretched, as if he were asking alms, old General Vogotzine, who said to him, timidly:

"Ah, my dear Prince, how glad I am to see you! I was breakfasting over there, and my accursed paper must have hidden me. Ouf! If you only knew! I am stifling!"

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Andras.

“Matter? Look at me! I must be as red as a beet!”

Poor Vogotzine had entered the restaurant for breakfast, regretting the cool garden of Maisons-Lafitte, which, now that Marsa no longer sat there, he had entirely to himself. After eating his usual copious breakfast, he had imprudently asked the waiter for a Russian paper; and, as he read, and sipped his kummel, which he found a little insipid and almost made him regret the vodka of his native land, his eyes fell upon a letter from Odessa, in which there was a detailed description of the execution of three nihilists, two of them gentlemen. It told how they were dragged, tied to the tails of horses, to the open square, each of them bearing upon his breast a white placard with this inscription, in black letters: “Guilty of high treason.”

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Then the wretched General shivered from head to foot. Every detail of the melodramatic execution seemed burned into his brain as with a red-hot iron. He fancied he could see the procession and the three gibbets, painted black; beside each gibbet was an open ditch and a black coffin covered with a dark gray pall. He saw, in the hollow square formed by a battalion of Cossack infantry, the executioner, Froloff, in his red shirt and his plush trousers tucked into his boots, and, beside him, a pale, black-robed priest.

“Who the devil is such an idiot as to relate such things in the newspapers?” he growled.

And in terror he imagined he could hear the sheriff read the sentence, see the priest present the cross to the condemned men, and Froloff, before putting on the black caps, degrade the gentlemen by breaking their swords over their heads.

Then, half suffocated, Vogotzine flung the paper on the floor; and, with eyes distended with horror, drawing the caraffe of kummel toward him, he half emptied it, drinking glass after glass to recover his self-control. It seemed to him that Froloff was there behind him, and that the branches of the candelabra, stretching over his heated head, were the arms of gibbets ready to seize him. To reassure himself, and be certain that he was miles and miles from Russia, he was obliged to make sure of the presence of the waiters and guests in the gay and gilded restaurant.

“The devil take the newspapers!” he muttered.

“They are cursed stupid! I will never read another! All that stuff is absurd! Absurd! A fine aid to digestion, truly!”

And, paying his bill, he rose to go, passing his hand over his head as if his sword had been broken upon it and left a contusion, and glancing timidly into the mirrors, as if he feared to discover the image of Froloff there.

It was at this moment that he discovered Prince Zilah, and rushed up to him with the joyful cry of a child discovering a protector.

The Prince noticed that poor Vogotzine, who sat heavily down by his side, was not entirely sober. The enormous quantity of kummel he had absorbed, together with the terror produced by the article he had read, had proved too much for the good man: his face was fiery, and he constantly moistened his dry lips.

“I suppose it astonishes you to see me here?” he said, as if he had forgotten all that had taken place. “I—I am astonished to see myself here! But I am so bored down there at Maisons, and I rust, rust, as little—little—ah! Stephanie said to me once at Odessa. So

I came to breathe the air of Paris. A miserable idea! Oh, if you knew! When I think that that might happen to me!"

"What?" asked Andras, mechanically.

"What?" gasped the General, staring at him with dilated eyes. "Why, Froloff, of course! Froloff! The sword broken over your head! The gallows! Ach! I am not a nihilist—heaven forbid—but I have displeased the Czar. And to displease the Czar—Brr! Imagine the open square-Odessa-No, no, don't let us talk of it any more!" glancing suddenly about him, as if he feared the platoon of Cossacks were there, in the restaurant, come to drag him away in the name of the Emperor. "Oh! by the way, Prince," he exclaimed abruptly—"why don't you ever come to Maisons-Lafitte?"

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He must, indeed, have been drunk to address such a question to the Prince.

Zilah looked him full in the face; but Vogotzine's eyes blinked stupidly, and his head fell partially forward on his breast. Satisfied that he was not responsible for what he was saying, Andras rose to leave the restaurant, and the General with difficulty stumbled to his feet, and instinctively grasped Andras's arm, the latter making no resistance, the mention of Maisons-Lafitte interesting him, even from the lips of this intoxicated old idiot.

"Do you know," stuttered Vogotzine, "I, myself, should be glad—very glad—if you would come there. I am bored-bored to death! Closed shutters—not the least noise. The creaking of a door—the slightest bit of light—makes her ill. The days drag—they drag—yes, they do. No one speaks. Most of the time I dine alone. Shall I tell you?—no—yes, I will. Marsa, yes, well! Marsa, she is good, very good—thinks only of the poor—the poor, you know! But whatever Doctor Fargeas may say about it, she is mad! You can't deceive me! She is insane!—still insane!"

"Insane?" said Andras, striving to control his emotion.

The General, who was now staggering violently, clung desperately to the Prince. They had reached the boulevard, and Andras, hailing a cab, made Vogotzine get in, and instructed the coachman to drive to the Bois.

"I assure you that she is insane," proceeded the General, throwing his head back on the cushions. "Yes, insane. She does not eat anything; she never rests. Upon my word, I don't know how she lives. Once—her dogs—she took walks. Now, I go with them into the park—good beasts—very gentle. Sometimes, all that she says, is: 'Listen! Isn't that Duna or Bundas barking?' Ah! if I wasn't afraid of Froloffyes, Froloff—how soon I should return to Russia! The life of Paris—the life of Paris wearies me. You see, I come here today, I take up a newspaper, and I see what? Froloff! Besides, the life of Paris—at Maisons-Lafitte—between four walls, it is absurd! Now, acknowledge, old man, isn't it absurd? Do you know what I should like to do? I should like to send a petition to the Czar. What did I do, after all, I should like to know? It wasn't anything so horrible. I stayed, against the Emperor's orders, five days too long at Odessa—that was all—yes, you see, a little French actress who was there, who sang operettas; oh, how she did sing operettas! Offenbach, you know;" and the General tried to hum a bar or two of the 'Dites lui', with ludicrous effect. "Charming! To leave her, ah! I found that very hard. I remained five days: that wasn't much, eh, Zilah? five days? But the devil! There was a Grand Duke—well—humph! younger than I, of course—and—and—the Grand Duke was jealous. Oh! there was at that time a conspiracy at Odessa! I was accused of spending my time at the theatre, instead of watching the conspirators. They even said I was in the

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conspiracy! Oh, Lord! Odessa! The gallows! Froloff! Well, it was Stephanie Gavaud who was the cause of it. Don't tell that to Marsa! Ah! that little Stephanie! 'J'ai vu le vieux Bacchus sur sa roche fertile!' Tautin—no, Tautin couldn't sing like that little Stephanie! Well," continued Vogotzine, hiccoughing violently, "because all that happened then, I now lead here the life of an oyster! Yes, the life of an oyster, of a turtle, of a clam! alone with a woman sad as Mid-Lent, who doesn't speak, doesn't sing, does nothing but weep, weep, weep! It is crushing! I say just what I think! Crushing, then, whatever my niece may be—cr-r-rushing! And—ah—really, my dear fellow, I should be glad if you would come. Why did you go away? Yes, yes, that is your affair, and I don't ask any questions. Only—only you would do well to come—"

"Why?" interrupted Andras, turning quickly to Vogotzine.

"Ah! why? Because!" said the General, trying to give to his heavy face an expression of shrewd, dignified gravity.

"What has happened?" asked the Prince. "Is she suffering again? Ill?"

"Oh, insane, I tell you! absolutely insane! mad as a March hare! Two days ago, you see —"

"Well, what? two days ago?"

"Because, two days ago!—"

"Well, what? What is it? Speak, Vogotzine!"

"The despatch," stammered the General.

"What despatch?"

"The des—despatch from Florence."

"She has received a despatch from Florence?"

"A telegram—blue paper—she read it before me; upon my word, I thought it was from you! She said—no; those miserable bits of paper, it is astonishing how they alarm you. There are telegrams which have given me a fit of indigestion, I assure you—and I haven't the heart of a chicken!"

"Go on! Marsa? This despatch? Whom was it from? What did Marsa say?"

“She turned white as a sheet; she began to tremble—an attack of the nerves—and she said: ‘Well, in two days I shall know, at last, whether I am to live!’ Queer, wasn’t it? I don’t know what she meant! But it is certain—yes, certain, my dear fellow—that she expects, this evening, some one who is coming—or who is not coming, from Florence—that depends.”

“Who is it? Who?” cried Andras. “Michel Menko?”

“I don’t know,” faltered Vogotzine in alarm, wondering whether it were Froloff’s hand that had seized him by the collar of his coat.

“It is Menko, is it not?” demanded Andras; while the terrified General gasped out something unintelligible, his intoxication increasing every yard the carriage advanced in the Bois.

Andras was almost beside himself with pain and suspense. What did it mean? Who had sent that despatch? Why had it caused Marsa such emotion? “In two days I shall know, at last, whether I am to live!” Who could make her utter such a cry? Who, if not Michel Menko, was so intimately connected with her life as to trouble her so, to drive her insane, as Vogotzine said?

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"It is Menko, is it not? it is Menko?" repeated Andras again.

And Vogotzine gasped:

"Perhaps! anything is possible!"

But he stopped suddenly, as if he comprehended, despite his inebriety, that he was in danger of going too far and doing some harm.

"Come, Vogotzine, come, you have told me too much not to tell me all!"

"That is true; yes, I have said too much! Ah! The devil! this is not my affair!—Well, yes, Count Menko is in Florence or near Florence—I don't know where. Marsa told me that—without meaning to. She was excited—very excited—talked to herself. I did not ask her anything—but—she is insane, you see, mad, mad! She first wrote a despatch to Italy—then she tore it up like this, saying: 'No, what is to happen, will happen!' There! I don't know anything but that. I don't know anything!"

"Ah! she is expecting him!" cried Andras. "When?"

"I don't know!"

"You told me it was to be this evening. This evening, is it not?"

The old General felt as ill at ease as if he had been before a military commission or in the hands of Froloff.

"Yes, this evening."

"At Maisons-Lafitte?"

"At Maisons," responded Vogotzine, mechanically. "And all this wearies me—wearies me. Was it for this I decided to come to Paris? A fine idea! At least, there are no Russian days at Maisons!"

Andras made no reply.

He stopped the carriage, got out, and, saluting the General with a brief "Thank you!" walked rapidly away, leaving Vogotzine in blank amazement, murmuring, as he made an effort to sit up straight:

"Well, well, are you going to leave me here, old man? All alone? This isn't right!"

And, like a forsaken child, the old General, with comic twitchings of his eyebrows and nostrils, felt a strong desire to weep.



“Where shall I drive you, Monsieur?” asked the coachman.

“Wherever you like, my friend,” responded Vogotzine, modestly, with an appealing look at the man. “You, at least, must not leave me!”

CHAPTER XXXII

THE VALE OF VIOLETS

In the Prince’s mind the whole affair seemed clear as day, and he explained the vague anxiety with which he had been afflicted for several days as a mysterious premonition of a new sorrow. Menko was at Florence! Menko, for it could be no other than he, had telegraphed to Marsa, arranging a meeting with her. That very evening he was to be in the house of Marsa Laszlo—Marsa who bore, in spite of all, the title and name of the Zilahs. Was it possible? After the marriage, after this woman’s vows and tears, these two beings, separated for a time, were to be united again. And he, Andras, had almost felt pity for her! He had listened to Varhely, an honest man; drawing a parallel between a vanquished soldier and this fallen girl—Varhely, the rough, implacable Varhely, who had also been the dupe of the Tzigana, and one evening at Sainte-Adresse had even counselled the deceived husband to pardon her.

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In a state bordering on frenzy, Zilah returned to his hotel, thinking:

“He will be with her this evening!”

This was worse than all the rest. How could he punish her?

Punish her?

Why not? Was not Marsa Laszlo his wife? That villa of Maisons-Lafitte, where she thought herself so safe, was his by law. He, the husband, had a right to enter there at any hour and demand of his wife an account of his honor.

“She wished this name of Zilah! Well! she shall know at least what it costs and what it imposes upon her!” he hissed through his clenched teeth. He walked nervously to and fro in the library of his hotel, his excitement increasing at every step.

“She is Princess Zilah! She—a princess! Nothing can wrest from her that title which she has stolen! Princess be it, then; but the Prince has the right to deal out life or death to his wife—to his wife and to the lover of his wife!” with a spasmodic burst of laughter. “Her lover is to be there; Menko is to be there, and I complain! The man whom I have sought in vain will be before me. I shall hold him at my mercy, and I do not thank the kind fate which gives me that joy! This evening! He will be at her house this evening! Good! Justice shall be done!”

Every moment added to his fever. He would have given ten years of his life if it were already evening. He waited impatiently for the hour to come when he could go and surprise them. He even thought of meeting Menko at the railway station on his arrival from Italy: but what would be the use? Menko would be at Maisons; and he would kill him before her face, in a duel if Menko would fight, or like a thief caught in the act if he attempted to fly. That would be better. Yes, he would kill him like a dog, if the other—but no! The Hungarian, struck in the presence of the Tzigana, would certainly not recoil before a pistol. Marsa should be the sole witness of the duel, and the blood of the Prince or of Menko should spatter her face—a crimson stain upon her pale cheek should be her punishment.

Early in the evening Andras left the hotel, after slipping into the pocket of his overcoat a pair of loaded pistols: one of them he would cast at Menko’s feet. It was not assassination he wished, but justice.

He took the train to Maisons, and, on his arrival there, crossed the railway bridge, and found himself almost alone in the broad avenue which runs through the park. As he walked on through the rapidly darkening shadows, he began to feel a strange sensation, as if nothing had happened, and as if he were shaking off, little by little, a hideous nightmare. In a sort of voluntary hallucination, he imagined that he was going, as in

former days, to Marsa's house; and that she was awaiting him in one of those white frocks which became her so well, with her silver belt clasped with the agraffe of opals. As he advanced, a host of memories overwhelmed him.

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He had walked with Marsa under these great lindens forming an arch overhead like that of a cathedral. He remembered conversations they had had in the evening, when a slight mist silvered the majestic park, and the white villa loomed vaguely before them like some phantom palace of fairyland. With the Tzigana clinging to his arm, he had seen those fountains, with their singing waters, that broad lawn between the two long lines of trees, those winding paths through the shrubbery; and, in the emotion aroused by these well-remembered places, there was a sensation of bitter pain at the thought of the happiness that might have been his had fate fulfilled her promises, which increased, rather than appeased, the Prince's anger.

As his steps led him mechanically nearer and nearer to the house where she lived, all the details of his wedding-day rose in his memory, and he turned aside to see again the little church, the threshold of which they had crossed together—she exquisitely lovely in her white draperies, and he overflowing with happiness.

The square in front of the sanctuary was now deserted and the leaves were beginning to fall from the trees. A man was lying asleep upon the steps before the bolted door. Zilah stood gazing at the Gothic portal, with a statue of the Virgin Mother above it, and wondered whether it were he who had once led there a lovely girl, about to become his wife; and the sad, closed church produced upon him the effect of a tomb.

He dragged himself away from the contemplation of the stone threshold, where slept the tired man—drunk perhaps, at all events happier than the Prince—and proceeded on his way through the woods to the abode of Marsa Laszlo.

There was, Zilah remembered well, quite near there, a sort of narrow valley (where the Mayor of Maisons was said to have royally entertained Louis XIV and his courtiers, as they were returning from Marly), a lovely spot, surrounded by grassy slopes covered with violets, a little shady, Virgilian wood, where he and Marsa had dreamed away many happy hours. They had christened it The Vale of Violets. How many memories were in that sweet name, each one of which stabbed and exasperated Zilah, rising before him like so many spectres.

He hastened his steps, repeating:

“He is there! She is waiting for him! Her lover is there!”

At the end of the road, before the villa, closed and silent like the old church, he stopped. He had reached his destination; but what was he about to do, he who—who up to this time had protected his name from the poisonous breath of scandal?



He was about to kill Menko, or to be killed himself. A duel! But what was the need of proposing a duel, when, exercising his rights as a husband, he could punish both the man and the woman?

He did not hesitate long, however, but advanced to the gate, saying, aloud:

"I have a right to enter my own house."

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The ringing of the bell was answered by the barking of Duna, Bundas, and Ortog, who tore furiously at their iron chains.

A man presently appeared on the other side of the gate. It was a domestic whom Andras did not know and had never seen.

"Whom do you wish to see?" asked the man.

"The Princess Zilah!"

"Who are you?" demanded the man, his hand upon the inner bolt of the gate.

"Prince Zilah!"

The other stood stock-still in amazement, trying to see, through the darkness, the Prince's face.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Andras.

And, as the domestic opened the gate, as if to observe the appearance of the visitor, the Prince gave it a nervous push, which threw the servant backward; and, once within the garden, he came close to him, and said:

"Look well at me, in order that you may recognize me again. I am master here."

Zilah's clear eye and imperious manner awed the man, and he bowed humbly, not daring to speak.

Andras turned on his heel, mounted the steps, and entered the house; then he stopped and listened.

She was with him. Yes, a man was there, and the man was speaking, speaking to Marsa, speaking doubtless of love.

Menko, with his twisted moustache, his pretty smile and his delicate profile, was there, behind that door. A red streak of light from the salon where Marsa was showed beneath the door, which the Prince longed to burst open with his foot. With anger and bitterness filling his heart, he felt capable of entering there, and striking savagely, madly, at his rival.

How these two beings had played with him; the woman who had lied to him, and the coward who had sent him those letters.

Suddenly Marsa's voice fell upon his ear, that rich, contralto voice he knew so well, speaking in accents of love or joy.

What was he waiting for? His hot, feverish hand sought the handle of his pistol, and, striding forward, he threw open the door of the room.

The light from an opal-tinted lamp fell full upon his face. He stood erect upon the threshold, while two other faces were turned toward him, two pale faces, Marsa's and another's.

Andras paused in amazement.

He had sought Menko; he found—Varhely!

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DUEL

"Yanski!"

Marsa recoiled in fear at hearing this cry and the sudden appearance of the Prince; and, trembling like a leaf, with her face still turned toward that threshold where Andras stood, she murmured, in a voice choked with emotion:

"Who is there? Who is it?"

Yanski Varhely, unable to believe his eyes, advanced, as if to make sure.

"Zilah!" he exclaimed, in his turn.

He could not understand; and Zilah himself wondered whether he were not the victim of some illusion, and where Menko could be, that Menko whom Marsa had expected, and whom he, the husband, had come to chastise.

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But the most bewildered, in her mute amazement, was Marsa, her lips trembling, her face ashen, her eyes fixed upon the Prince, as she leaned against the marble of the mantelpiece to prevent herself from falling, but longing to throw herself on her knees before this man who had suddenly appeared, and who was master of her destiny.

"You here?" said Varhely at last. "You followed me, then?"

"No," said Andras. "The one whom I expected to find here was not you."

"Who was it, then?"

"Michel Menko!"

Yanski Varhely turned toward Marsa.

She did not stir; she was looking at the Prince.

"Michel Menko is dead," responded Varhely, shortly. "It was to announce that to the Princess Zilah that I am here."

Andras gazed alternately upon the old Hungarian, and upon Marsa, who stood there petrified, her whole soul burning in her eyes.

"Dead?" repeated Zilah, coldly.

"I fought and killed him," returned Varhely.

Andras struggled against the emotion which seized hold of him. Pale as death, he turned from Varhely to the Tzigana, with an instinctive desire to know what her feelings might be.

The news of this death, repeated thus before the man whom she regarded as the master of her existence, had, apparently, made no impression upon her, her thoughts being no longer there, but her whole heart being concentrated upon the being who had despised her, hated her, fled from her, and who appeared there before her as in one of her painful dreams in which he returned again to that very house where he had cursed her.

"There was," continued Varhely, slowly, "a martyr who could not raise her head, who could not live, so long as that man breathed. First of all, I came to her to tell her that she was delivered from a detested past. Tomorrow I should have informed a man whose honor is my own, that the one who injured and insulted him has paid his debt."

With lips white as his moustache, Varhely spoke these words like a judge delivering a solemn sentence.

A strange expression passed over Zilah's face. He felt as if some horrible weight had been lifted from his heart.

Menko dead!

Yet there was a time when he had loved this Michel Menko: and, of the three beings present in the little salon, the man who had been injured by him was perhaps the one who gave a pitying thought to the dead, the old soldier remaining as impassive as an executioner, and the Tzigana remembering only the hatred she had felt for the one who had been her ruin.

Menko dead!

Varhely took from the mantelpiece the despatch he had sent from Florence, three days before, to the Princess Zilah, the one of which Vogotzine had spoken to Andras.

He handed it to the Prince, and Andras read as follows:

"I am about to risk my life for you. Tuesday evening either I shall be at Maisons-Lafitte, or I shall be dead. I fight tomorrow with Count M. If you do not see me again, pray for the soul of Varhely."

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Count Varhely had sent this despatch before going to keep his appointment with Michel Menko.

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It had been arranged that they were to fight in a field near Pistoja.

Some peasant women, who were braiding straw hats, laughed as they saw the men pass by.

One of them called out, gayly:

“Do you wish to find your sweethearts, signori? That isn’t the way!”

A little farther, Varhely and his adversary encountered a monk with a cowl drawn over his head so that only his eyes could be seen, who, holding out a zinc money-box, demanded ‘elemosina’, alms for the sick in hospitals.

Menko opened his pocketbook, and dropped in the box a dozen pieces of gold.

“Mille grazie, signor!”

“It is of no consequence.”

They arrived on the ground, and the seconds loaded the pistols.

Michel asked permission of Yanski to say two words to him.

“Speak!” said Varhely.

The old Hungarian stood at his post with folded arms and lowered eyes, while Michel approached him, and said:

“Count Varhely, I repeat to you that I wished to prevent this marriage, but not to insult the Prince. I give you my word of honor that this is true. If you survive me, will you promise to repeat this to him?”

“I promise.”

“I thank you.”

They took their positions.

Angelo Valla was to give the signal to fire.



He stood holding a white handkerchief in his outstretched hand, and with his eyes fixed upon the two adversaries, who were placed opposite each other, with their coats buttoned up to the chin, and their pistols held rigidly by their side.

Varhely was as motionless as if made of granite. Menko smiled.

“One! Two!” counted Valla.

He paused as if to take breath: then—

“Three!” he exclaimed, in the tone of a man pronouncing a death-sentence; and the handkerchief fell.

There were two reports in quick succession.

Varhely stood erect in his position; Menko’s ball had cut a branch above his head, and the green leaves fell fluttering to the ground.

Michel staggered back, his hand pressed to his left side.

His seconds hastened toward him, seized him under the arms, and tried to raise him.

“It is useless,” he said. “It was well aimed!”

And, turning to Varhely, he cried, in a voice which he strove to render firm:

“Remember your promise!”

They opened his coat. The ball had entered his breast just above the heart.

They seated him upon the grass, with his back against a tree.

He remained there, with fixed eyes, gazing, perhaps, into the infinite, which was now close at hand.

His lips murmured inarticulate names, confused words:

“Pardon—punishment—Marsa—”

As Yanski Varhely, with his two seconds, again passed the straw-workers, the girls saluted them with:

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"Well, where are your other friends? Have they found their sweethearts?"

And while their laughter rang out upon the air, the gay, foolish laughter of youth and health, over yonder they were bearing away the dead body of Michel Menko.

.....

Andras Zilah, with a supreme effort at self-control, listened to his old friend relate this tale; and, while Varhely spoke, he was thinking:

It was not a lover, it was not Menko, whom Marsa expected. Between the Tzigana and himself there was now nothing, nothing but a phantom. The other had paid his debt with his life. The Prince's anger disappeared as suddenly in proportion as his exasperation had been violent.

He contemplated Marsa, thin and pale, but beautiful still. The very fixedness of her great eyes gave her a strange and powerful attraction; and, in the manner in which Andras regarded her, Count Varhely, with his rough insight, saw that there were pity, astonishment, and almost fear.

He pulled his moustache a moment in reflection, and then made a step toward the door.

Marsa saw that he was about to leave the room; and, moving away from the marble against which she had been leaning, with a smile radiant with the joy of a recovered pride, she held out her hand to Yanski, and, in a voice in which there was an accent of almost terrible gratitude for the act of justice which had been accomplished, she said, firmly:

"I thank you, Varhely!"

Varhely made no reply, but passed out of the room, closing the door behind him.

The husband and wife, after months of torture, anguish, and despair, were alone, face to face with each other.

Andras's first movement was one of flight. He was afraid of himself. Of his own anger? Perhaps. Perhaps of his own pity.

He did not look at Marsa, and in two steps he was at the door.

Then, with a start, as one drowning catches at a straw, as one condemned to death makes a last appeal for mercy, with a feeble, despairing cry like that of a child, a strange contrast to the almost savage thanks given to Varhely, she exclaimed:

“Ah! I implore you, listen to me!”

Andras stopped.

“What have you to say to me?” he asked.

“Nothing—nothing but this: Forgive! ah, forgive! I have seen you once more; forgive me, and let me disappear; but, at least, carrying away with me a word from you which is not a condemnation.”

“I might forgive,” said Andras; “but I could not forget.”

“I do not ask you to forget, I do not ask you that! Does one ever forget? And yet—yes, one does forget, one does forget, I know it. You are the only thing in all my existence, I know only you, I think only of you. I have loved only you!”

Andras shivered, no longer able to fly, moved to the depths of his being by the tones of this adored voice, so long unheard.

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"There was no need of bloodshed to destroy that odious past," continued Marsa. "Ah! I have atoned for it! There is no one on earth who has suffered as I have. I, who came across your path only to ruin your life! Your life, my God, yours!"

She looked at him with worshipping eyes, as believers regard their god.

"You have not suffered so much as the one you stabbed, Marsa. He had never had but one love in the world, and that love was you. If you had told him of your sufferings, and confessed your secret, he would have been capable of pardoning you. You deceived him. There was something worse than the crime itself—the lie."

"Ah!" she cried, "if you knew how I hated that lie! Would to heaven that some one would tear out my tongue for having deceived you!"

There was an accent of truth in this wild outburst of the Tzigana; and upon the lips of this daughter of the puszta, Hungarian and Russian at once, the cry seemed the very symbol of her exceptional nature.

"What is it you wish that I should do?" she said. "Die? yes, I would willingly, gladly die for you, interposing my breast between you and a bullet. Ah! I swear to you, I should be thankful to die like one of those who bore your name. But, there is no fighting now, and I can not shed my blood for you. I will sacrifice my life in another manner, obscurely, in the shadows of a cloister. I shall have had neither lover nor husband, I shall be nothing, a recluse, a prisoner. It will be well! yes, for me, the prison, the cell, death in a life slowly dragged out! Ah! I deserve that punishment, and I wish my sentence to come from you; I wish you to tell me that I am free to disappear, and that you order me to do so—but, at the same time, tell me, oh, tell me, that you have forgiven me!"

"I!" said Andras.

In Marsa's eyes was a sort of wild excitement, a longing for sacrifice, a thirst for martyrdom.

"Do I understand that you wish to enter a convent?" asked Andras, slowly.

"Yes, the strictest and gloomiest. And into that tomb I shall carry, with your condemnation and farewell, the bitter regret of my love, the weight of my remorse!"

The convent! The thought of such a fate for the woman he loved filled Andras Zilah with horror. He imagined the terrible scene of Marsa's separation from the world; he could hear the voice of the officiating bishop casting the cruel words upon the living, like earth upon the dead; he could almost see the gleam of the scissors as they cut through her beautiful dark hair.

Kneeling before him, her eyes wet with tears, Marsa was as lovely in her sorrow as a Mater Dolorosa. All his love surged up in his heart, and a wild temptation assailed him to keep her beauty, and dispute with the convent this penitent absolved by remorse.

She knelt there repentant, weeping, wringing her hands, asking nothing but pardon—a word, a single word of pity—and the permission to bury herself forever from the world.

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“So,” he said, abruptly, “the convent cell, the prison, does not terrify you?”

“Nothing terrifies me except your contempt.”

“You would live far from Paris, far from the world, far from everything?”

“In a kennel of dogs, under the lash of a slavedriver; breaking stones, begging my bread, if you said to me: ‘Do that, it is atonement!’”

“Well!” cried Andras, passionately, his lips trembling, his blood surging through his veins. “Live buried in our Hungary, forgetting, forgotten, hidden, unknown, away from all, away from Paris, away from the noise of the world, in a life with me, which will be a new life! Will you?”

She looked at him with staring, terrified eyes, believing his words to be some cruel jest.

“Will you?” he said again, raising her from the floor, and straining her to his breast, his burning lips seeking the icy ones of the Tzigana. “Answer me, Marsa. Will you?”

Like a sigh, the word fell on the air: “Yes.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

A NEW LIFE

The following day, with tender ardor, he took her away to his old Hungarian castle, with its red towers still bearing marks of the ravages of the cannon—the castle which he never had beheld since Austria had confiscated it, and then, after long years, restored it to its rightful owner. He fled from Paris, seeking a pure existence, and returned to his Hungary, to the country of his youth, the land of the vast plains. He saw again the Danube and the golden Tisza. In the Magyar costume, his heart beating more proudly under the national attila, he passed before the eyes of the peasants who had known him when a child, and had fought under his orders; and he spoke to them by name, recognizing many of his old companions in these poor people with cheeks tanned by the sun, and heads whitened by age.

He led Marsa, trembling and happy, to the door of the castle, where they offered him the wine of honor, drank from the ‘tschouttora’, the Hungarian drinking-vessel, the ‘notis’ and cakes made of maize cooked in cream.

Upon the lawns about the castle, the ‘tschiko’ shepherds, who had come on horseback to greet the Prince, drank plum brandy, and drank with their red wine the ‘kadostas’ and the bacon of Temesvar. They had come from their farms, from their distant pusztas, peasant horsemen, like soldiers, with their national caps; and they joyously celebrated

the return of Zilah Andras, the son of those Zilahs whose glorious history they all knew. The dances began, the bright copper heels clinked together, the blue jackets, embroidered with yellow, red, or gold, swung in the wind, and it seemed that the land of Hungary blossomed with flowers and rang with songs to do honor to the coming of Prince Andras and his Princess.

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Then Andras entered with Marsa the abode of his ancestors. And, in the great halls hung with tapestry and filled with pictures which the conquerors had respected, before those portraits of magnates superb in their robes of red or green velvet edged with fur, curved sabres by their sides and aigrettes upon their heads, all reproducing a common trait of rough frankness, with their long moustaches, their armor and their hussar uniforms—Marsa Laszlo, who knew them well, these heroes of her country, these Zilah princes who had fallen upon the field of battle, said to the last of them all, to Andras Zilah, before Ferency Zilah, before Sandor, before the Princesses Zilah who had long slept in “dull, cold marble,” and who had been no prouder than she of the great name they bore:

“Do you know the reason why, equal to these in devotion and courage, you are superior to them all! It is because you are good, as good as they were brave.

“To their virtues, you, who forgive, add this virtue, which is your own: pity!”

She looked at him humbly, raising to his face her beautiful dark eyes, as if to let him read her heart, in which was only his image and his name. She pressed closely to his side, with an uneasy, timid tenderness, as if she were a stranger in the presence of his great ancestors, who seemed to demand whether the newcomer were one of the family; and he, putting his arm about her, and pressing to his beating heart the Tzigana, whose eyes were dim with tears, said: “No, I am not better than these. It is not pity which is my virtue, Marsa: it is my love. For—I love you!”

Yes, he loved her, and with all the strength of a first and only love. He loved her so that he forgot everything, so that he did not see that in Marsa’s smile there was a look of the other side of the great, eternal river. He loved her so that he thought only of this woman, of her beauty, of the delight of her caresses, of his dream of love realized in the air of the adored fatherland. He loved her so that he left without answers the charming letters which Baroness Dinati wrote him from Paris, so far away now, and the more serious missives which he received from his compatriots, wishing him to utilize for his country, now that he had returned to it, his superior intelligence, as he had formerly utilized his courage.

“The hour is critical,” wrote his old friends. “An attempt is being made to awaken in Hungary, against the Russians, whom we like, memories of combats and extinct hatreds, and that to the profit of a German alliance, which is repugnant to our race. Bring the support of your name and your valor to our cause. Enter the Diet of Hungary. Your place is marked out for you there in the first rank, as it was in the old days upon the battlefield.”

Andras only smiled.

“If I were ambitious!” he said to Marsa. Then he added: “But I am ambitious only for your happiness.”

Marsa’s happiness! It was deep, calm, and clear as a lake. It seemed to the Tzigana that she was dreaming a dream, a beautiful dream, a dream peaceful, sweet, and restful. She abandoned herself to her profound happiness with the trustfulness of a child. She was all the more happy because she had the exquisite sensation that her dream would have no awakening. It would end in all the charm of its poetry.

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She was sure that she could not survive the immense joy which destiny had accorded her; and she did not rebel against this decree. It seemed to her right and just. She had never desired any other ending to her love than to die beloved, to die with Andras's kiss of forgiveness upon her lips, with his arms about her, and to sink with a smile into the eternal sleep. What more beautiful thing could she, the Tzigana, have wished?

When the Prince's people saluted her by that title of "Princess" which was hers, she trembled as if she had usurped it; she wished to be Marsa to the Prince, Marsa, his devoted slave, who looked at him with her great eyes full of gratitude and love. And she wished to be only that. It seemed to her that, in the ancient home of the Zilahs, the birthplace of soldiers, the eyrie of eagles, she was a sort of stranger; but, at the same time, she thought, with a smile:

"What matters it? It is for so short a time."

One day Prince Zilah received from Vienna a large sealed envelope. Minister Ladany earnestly entreated him to come to the Austrian capital and present, in the salons of Vienna and at the imperial court, Princess Zilah, of whose beauty the Austrian colony of Paris raved.

Marsa asked the Prince what the letter contained.

"Nothing. An invitation to leave our solitude. We are too happy here."

Marsa questioned him no further; but she resolved that she would never allow the Prince to take her to that court which claimed his presence. In her eyes, she was always the Tzigana; and, although Menko was dead, she would never permit Zilah to present her to people who might have known Count Michel.

No, no, let them remain in the dear old castle, he living only for her, she breathing only for him; and let the world go, with its fascinations and its pleasures, its false joys and its false friendships! Let them ask of life only what truth it possesses; an hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs, and—the right to love each other. To love each other until that fatal separation which she felt was coming, until that end which was fast advancing; her poor, frail body being now only the diaphanous prison of her soul. She did not complain, as she felt the hour gently approach when, with a last kiss, a last sigh, she must say to Andras, Adieu!

He, seeing her each day more pale, each day more feeble, was alarmed; but he hoped, that, when the winter, which was very severe there, was over, Marsa would regain her strength. He summoned to the castle a physician from Vienna, who battled obstinately and skilfully against the malady from which the Tzigana was suffering. Her weakness and languor kept Marsa, during the cold months, for whole days before the lofty, sculptured chimney-piece, in which burned enormous logs of oak. As the flames gave a

rosy tinge to her cheeks and made her beautiful eyes sparkle, Andras said to herself, as he watched her, that she would live, live and be happy with him.

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The spring came, with the green leaflets and the white blossoms at the ends of the branches. The buds opened and the odors of the rejuvenated earth mounted subtly into the soft air.

At her window, regarding the young grass and the masses of tender verdure in which clusters of pale gold or silvery white gleamed like aigrettes, Marsa said to Andras:

"It must be lovely at Maisons, in the Vale of Violets!" but she added, quickly:

"We are better here, much better! And it even seems to me that I have always, always lived here in this beautiful castle, where you have sheltered me, like a swallow beaten by the wind."

There was, beneath the window, stretching out like a ribbon of silver, a road, which the mica dust caused, at times, in the sunlight to resemble a river. Marsa often looked out on this road, imagining that she saw again the massive dam upon the Seine, or wondering whether a band of Tzigani would not appear there with the April days.

"I should like," she said one day to Andras, "to hear again the airs my people used to play."

She found that, with the returning spring, she was more feeble than she had ever been. The first warmth in the air entered her veins like a sweet intoxication. Her head felt heavy, and in her whole body she felt a pleasant languor. She had wished to sink thus to rest, as nature was awakening.

The doctor seemed very uneasy at this languidness, of which Marsa said:

"It is delicious!"

He whispered one evening to Andras:

"It is grave!"

Another sorrow was to come into the life of the Prince, who had known so many.

A few days after, with a sort of presentiment, he wrote to Yanski Varhely to come and spend a few months with him. He felt the need of his old friend; and the Count hastened to obey the summons.

Varhely was astonished to see the change which so short a time had produced in Marsa. In seven months her face, although still beautiful, had become emaciated, and had a transparent look. The little hand, white as snow, which she gave to Varhely, burned him; the skin was dry and hot.

“Well, my dear Count,” said Marsa, as she lay extended in a reclining-chair, “what news of General Vogotzine?”

“The General is well. He hopes to return to Russia. The Czar has been appealed to, and he does not say no.”

“Ah! that is good news,” she said. “He must be greatly bored at Maisons; poor Vogotzine!”

“He smokes, drinks, takes the dogs out—”

The dogs! Marsa started. Those hounds would survive Menko, herself, the love which she now tasted as the one joy of her life! Mechanically her lips murmured, too low to be heard: “Ortog! Bundas!”

Then she said, aloud:

“I shall be very, glad if the poor General can return to St. Petersburg or Odessa. One is best off at home, in one’s own country. If you only knew, Varhely, how happy I am, happy to be in Hungary. At home!”

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She was very weak. The doctor made a sign to Andras to leave her for a moment.

“Well,” asked the Prince anxiously of Varhely, “how do you think she is?”

“What does the doctor say?” replied Yanski. “Does he hope to save her?”

Zilah made no response. Varhely’s question was the most terrible of answers.

Ensnconced in an armchair, the Prince then laid bare his heart to old Varhely, sitting near him. She was about to die, then! Solitude! Was that to be the end of his life? After so many trials, it was all to end in this: an open grave, in which his hopes were to be buried. What remained to him now? At the age when one has no recourse against fate, love, the one love of his life, was to be taken away from him. Varhely had administered justice, and Zilah had pardoned—for what? To watch together a silent tomb; yes, yes, what remained to him now?

“What remains to you if she dies?” said old Yanski, slowly. “There remains to you what you had at twenty years, that which never dies. There remains to you what was the love and the passion of all the Zilah princes who lie yonder, and who experienced the same suffering, the same torture, the same despair, as you. There remains to you our first love, my dear Andras, the fatherland!”

The next day some Tzigana musicians, whom the Prince had sent for, arrived at the castle. Marsa felt invigorated when she heard the czimbalom and the piercing notes of the czardas. She had been longing for those harmonies and songs which lay so near her heart. She listened, with her hand clasped in that of Andras, and through the open window came the “March of Rakoczy,” the same strains which long ago had been played in Paris, upon the boat which bore them down the Seine that July morning.

An heroic air, a song of triumph, a battle-cry, the gallop of horses, a chant of victory. It was the air which had saluted their betrothal like a fanfare. It was the chant which the Tzigani had played that sad night when Andras’s father had been laid in the earth of Attila.

“I would like,” said Marsa, when the music had ceased, “to go to the little village where my mother rests. She was a Tzigana also! Like them, like me! Can I do so, doctor?”

The doctor shook his head.

“Oh, Princess, not yet! Later, when the warm sun comes.”

“Is not that the sun?” said Marsa, pointing to the April rays entering the old feudal hall and making the bits of dust dance like sparks of gold.

“It is the April sun, and it is sometimes dangerous for—”

The doctor paused; and, as he did not finish, Marsa said gently, with a smile which had something more than resignation in it—happiness:

“For the dying?”

Andras shuddered; but Marsa’s hand, which held his, did not even tremble.

Old Varhely’s eyes were dim with tears.

She knew that she was about to die. She knew it, and smiled at kindly death. It would take away all shame. Her memory would be to Andras the sacred one of the woman he adored. She would die without being held to keep that oath she had made not to survive her dreamed-of happiness, the union she had desired and accepted. Yes, it was sweet and welcome, this death, which taking her from Andras’s love, washed away all stain.

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She whispered in his ear the oft-repeated avowal:

"I love you! I love you! I love you! And I die content, for I feel that you will love me always. Think a moment! Could I live? Would there not be a spectre between you and your Marsa?"

She threw her arms about him as he leaned over the couch upon which she lay, and he made a gesture of denial, unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob.

"Oh, do not deny it!" she said. "Now, no. But later, who knows? On the other hand, you see, there will be no other phantom near you but mine, no other image but mine. I feel that I shall be always near you, yes, always, eternally, my beloved! Dear death! blessed death! which renders our love infinite, yes, infinite. Ah, I love you! I love you!"

She wished to see once more, through the open window, the sunny woods and the new blossoms. Behind those woods, a few leagues away, was the place where Tisza was buried.

"I should like to rest by her side," said the Tzigana. "I am not of your family, you see. A princess, I? your wife? I have been only your sweetheart, my Andras."

Andras, whiter than the dying girl, seemed petrified by the approach of the inevitable grief.

Now, as they went slowly down the white road, the Tzigani played the plaintive melancholy air of Janos Nemeth, that air impregnated with tears, that air which she used so often to play herself—"The World holds but One Fair Maiden!"

And this time, bursting into tears, he said to her, with his heart breaking in his breast:

"Yes, there is but thee, Marsa! but thee, my beloved, thee, thee alone! Do not leave me! Stay with me! Stay with me, Marsa, my only love!"

Then, as she listened, over the lovely face of the Tzigana passed an expression of absolute, perfect happiness, as if, in Zilah's tears, she read all his forgiveness, all his love, all his devotion. She raised herself, her little hands resting upon the window-sill, her head heavy with sleep—the deep, dreamless sleep—and held up her sweet lips to him: when she felt Andras's kiss, she whispered, so that he barely heard it:

"Do not forget me! Never forget me, my darling!" Then her head drooped slowly, and fell upon the Prince's shoulder, like that of a tired child, with a calm sweet smile upon her flower-like face.

Like the salute they had once given to Prince Sandor, the Tzigani began proudly the heroic march of free Hungary, their music sending a fast farewell to the dead as the sun gave her its last kiss.

Then, as the hymn died slowly away in the distance, soft as a sigh, with one last, low, heart-breaking note, Andras Zilah laid the light form of the Tzigana upon the couch; and, winding his arms about her, with his head pillowed upon her breast, he murmured, in a voice broken with sobs: "I will love only, now, what you loved so much, my poor Tzigana. I will love only the land where you lie asleep."

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ETEXT editor's bookmarks:

An hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs
Anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers
At every step the reality splashes you with mud
Bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right
Does one ever forget?
History is written, not made.
"I might forgive," said Andras; "but I could not forget"
If well-informed people are to be believe
Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized
It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Man who expects nothing of life except its ending
Not only his last love, but his only love
Pessimism of to-day sneering at his confidence of yesterday
Sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony
Taken the times as they are
Unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob
What matters it how much we suffer
Why should I read the newspapers?
Willingly seek a new sorrow

ETEXT editor's bookmarks for the entire set:

A man's life belongs to his duty, and not to his happiness
All defeats have their geneses
An hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs
Anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers
At every step the reality splashes you with mud
Bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right
Does one ever forget?
Foreigners are more Parisian than the Parisians themselves
History is written, not made.
"I might forgive," said Andras; "but I could not forget"
If well-informed people are to be believe
Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized
It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing
Let the dead past bury its dead!
Life is a tempest
Man who expects nothing of life except its ending
Nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair
No answer to make to one who has no right to question me
Not only his last love, but his only love



Nothing ever astonishes me
One of those beings who die, as they have lived, children
Pessimism of to-day sneering at his confidence of yesterday
Playing checkers, that mimic warfare of old men
Poverty brings wrinkles
Sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony
Superstition which forbids one to proclaim his happiness
Taken the times as they are
The Hungarian was created on horseback
There were too many discussions, and not enough action
Unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob
What matters it how much we suffer
Why should I read the newspapers?
Willingly seek a new sorrow
Would not be astonished at anything
You suffer? Is fate so just as that