





PRIMROSE EDITION.

No. 5.

Her Royal Lover



A Novel.

PRIMROSE EDITION
No. 5.

By Ary Ecilaw.
translated by N.T. Laycock

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"MY HUSBAND!" SUDDENLY MURMURED MADAME DE MINELEKO.—(P. 29.)

Kolemine, Alexandrine von

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE, \$6.00 PER YEAR.

No. 5.—JULY, 1890.

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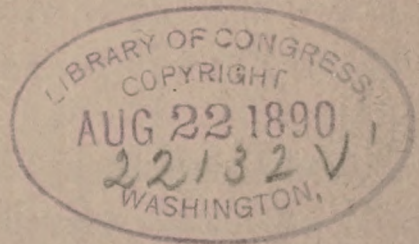
Entered at the Post-Office, New York, as Second-Class Matter.

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A NOVEL.

By ARY ECILAW.

Translated by Mrs. N. T. LAYCOCK.



NEW YORK:
STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
31 Rose Street.

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PREFACE.

TO HER IMPERIAL HIGHNESS:

Madame La Princess:—Your Imperial Highness will recollect how much we have both been affected by the cruel fate of the heroine of this narrative? If I have desired to relate it thus to the world, it is not merely to prove that that which appears the most improbable is often but too true in life, but in order to demonstrate how, stifling the cries of conscience, wounded vanity and pride, in its demoniacal hideousness, can crush the innocent.

To the great of the earth I dedicate this book, who imagine they have the right to violate the laws even, and forget, in the intoxication of their haughty arrogance, that above them there is one greater than they—God! and that he will measure his justice to them according to the measure that they have meted to their victims.

Marble hearts form ice around them. It is in these mirrors that they must look, in order to see themselves such as they are.

Always and forever thine, madam,

A. E.

PERM, Siberia, October, 1885.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
I—The Caucasian Beauty.....	9
II—Two Lovers.....	18
III—Count Heiligenthal.....	22
IV—Why She Married Him.....	32
V—The Jealous Husband.....	41
VI—"I Must See You Alone.".....	52
VII—Heiligenthal's Visit.....	57
VIII—At the Banquet.....	63
IX—The Opiate.....	66
X—A Horrible Dream.....	72
XI—In the Studio.....	76
XII—"Oh, Infamous Creature!".....	102
XIII—Plans to Destroy the King.....	104
XIV—An Appointment.....	114
XV—Repulsed.....	121
XVI—The Whip.....	139
XVII—Note from the King.....	147
XVIII—The Flower Girls.....	153
XIX—The Wagging of Tongues.....	158
XX—A Summons from the King.....	161
XXI—Obeying His Majesty.....	165
XXII—The Stolen Paper.....	171
XXIII—The Prince Sees His Wife.....	178
XXIV—Indignation of the King.....	180
XXV—Proposal of Marriage.....	183
XXVI—The Divorce.....	191
XXVII—A Prey to Remorse.....	198
XXVIII—Regrets.....	204
XXIX—The King's Presents.....	209
XXX—A Feeble Reed.....	213
XXXI—The Two Old Maids.....	221
XXXII—The Private Marriage.....	225

CONTENTS.

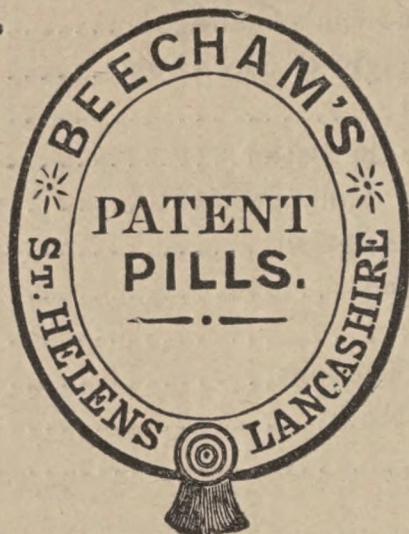
CHAPTER.	PAGE.
XXXIII—The Royal Procession.....	234
XXXIV—The Empress' Rage.....	241
XXXV—"You Must Expel That Woman.".....	252
XXXVI—Najeska Ivanowna's Courage.....	257
XXXVII—Under the Weight of Her Cross.....	269
XXXVIII—A New Insult.....	276
XXXIX—A Change for the Better.....	282
XL—The Marriage Announcement.....	286
XLI—The Judge's Anguish.....	292
XLII—A Ray of Hope.....	298
XLIII—The Duel.....	307
XLIV—Najeska's Reflections.....	323
XLV—A Woman's Faith.....	330
XLVI—Last Hours.....	341

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HER ROYAL LOVER.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAUCASIAN BEAUTY.

“See, then, how smitten the king appears!”

“You think so?”

“Follow his eyes; he cannot turn them away from her; see, also, how secretly vexed the women are!”

“Who is she?”

“You do not know her?”

“How could you suppose that a bird of passage like me, arriving this very afternoon from Paris, before setting out to-morrow morning for the East, could know her?”

“But, my dear, that is Madame de Mineleko, Ambassadors from Caucasus, hardly married a year.”

This short colloquy took place between two guests of the grand ball which was given at the little Court of Thessaly to celebrate simultaneously the betrothals of the two charming daughters of the king, a widower since several years.

The exiguity of the kingdom of Thessaly did not

exclude a less rigorous etiquette than that of the greatest courts.

The salons in which the ball took place were adorned with men in brilliant uniforms and women in gala toilets. Among this multitude, coming and going, those who attracted the most attention were incontestably the affianced ladies who, with the exception of certain princes of the royal family, were remarkable for their beauty, truly rare.

The first was the Princess Augusta of Thessaly, and her cousin, Prince George of Pattenpouff. Now the Pattenpouffs, at the close of this good nineteenth century, have the immense chance which the Coburgs had in the commencement. "They attain to the highest destinies," some say, "by the intrigue of their mother;" others affirm that they owe it to their real qualities.

Prince George of Pattenpouff possessed a delicacy, a regularity of features, that in nowise spoiled his tall and slender form.

The Princess Augusta had a little of the type of her grandmother, the Empress of Hindustan, type happily attenuated by that of the royal family of Thessaly, so remarkable for its beauty.

But the glory, the radiance of the *fete*, was assuredly the Princess Aline of Thessaly, betrothed to the Grand Duke Ivan, brother of the Emperor of Caucasus.

Let us stop a moment before this radiant child, who did not count more than eighteen summers.

Have you never in the morning mist, remained in contemplative ecstasy before a rising sun, which on issuing from a rent in the clouds, inundates in dilating, little by little, the landscape with a brilliancy always increasing, always augmenting, mak-

ing you think thus of that refulgent Jerusalem, of that heaven where all is light!

Such an effect the Princess Aline produced. Everywhere she passed, she left behind her a luminous train. Tall, fragile, she had features that Phidias had vainly attempted to embellish. Her eyes, of a deep azure, like the wild forget-me-nots, instead of shining on this day with the exuberance of their eighteen years, were veiled with a cloud of melancholy and of reverie, which showed that the soul was far from this *fete*, in which the body alone took part. Her complexion, her hair, her expression, were so radiant that she would have lightened the darkness even.

That smile so sweet, which bloomed so brilliantly on this fresh young face; that regal inclination of the head, which seemed the innate appanage of an empress; these movements at the same time sprightly and undulating, rendered her beautiful! beautiful! Thus at this moment, Ivan Alexandrowitch had only eyes for her, without preoccupying himself with the malicious tongues, which, wagging merrily, whispered in his train, even on this betrothal visit to the country of his fiancée, that there were two clouds in a royal palace certainly less prudish than this of Thessaly, charming little animals with rosy muzzles, who, with their pointed teeth, white as milk, encased in their red and humid gums, nibbled all that they could devour of the possessions of the grand duke.

Aline of Thessaly observed complacently the movements of her father and Madame de Mineleko. Ivan Alexandrowitch, eager near his fiancée, did not lose her out of his sight; each of the regards of the young girl were followed by those of the grand

duke, who could not mistake this cry of admiration which escaped (if I may so express it) from the princess:

“Truly, she is very beautiful!”

“Not as beautiful as you, princess,” the grand duke responded, very gallantly. “Does she please you?”

“Oh, yes, very much! and my sister, Agusta, is entirely of my opinion. The ambassadress possesses such a charm that it seems that no one can resist her; but her husband, however, is a veritable Bluebeard, jealous as a tiger, who, it is said, renders her life miserable.

“But it seems to me that,” commenced Ivan Alexandrowitch, with a peculiar smile, looking toward the king and Madame de Mineleko. He did not finish his thought.

“What does it seem to your highness?” said Aline of Thessaly, in an icy tone, desiring to make him comprehend that she would defend the king and Madame de Mineleko against him and against every one, and that on occasion she would retain a very strong resentment to him who, even in thought, would dare to reproach those two beings, one of whom was so dear to her and, the other so sympathetic.

The king was now no longer speaking to Madame de Mineleko, but to that one of the ladies who, in the circle which he formed, had been able to hold his attention the longest; he continued this fatiguing drudgery, consisting of finding two or three amiable but different words for each of these ladies, who, bowing to the ground on the passage of his majesty, vied with each other as to who should at the most opportune time best perform that famous

ceremonial reverence, object of so many solitudes, of so much study.

According to the programme of this royal *fete*, a quadrille of honor was to follow the circle of the king; the betrothed would dance it together, and the king with one of the ambassadors.

The mistress of ceremonies, the Countess Langweilig, was passing and repassing, full of business with the Count of Leerkopf, the master of ceremonies. Like all the rest of the women, she threw by stealth an envious glance upon the incontestable beauty of the evening, the new Ambassador of Caucasus, whom the king would undoubtedly order to dance the quadrille of honor with him.

Thus, it was this arrival of yesterday who alone was noticed, who alone was admired this evening! Grave outrage to the spirit of these native women, who, certainly, would have cordially detested one of their compatriots on whom such an honor had been conferred; thus, how could they ever pardon this rival come from abroad, this foreigner preferred to them all! What an offense! what an abhorrence!

Yes, she was truly the luminous star of this firmament, this slender and supple Caucasian, whose hair, bronzed like a chestnut ripened by the rays of an ardent sun, then no less scintillating than the diadem of diamonds and rubies set boldly upon the scarlet velvet "kokochnik," and from whence flowed the long and becoming gauze veil bordered with gold.

What was the color of this woman's eyes?

Like the chameleon they seemed to change their hue, according as the emotions of her heart alternately increased or diminished their brilliancy. At certain times the light which flowed from them

was bold like the regard of the eagle which soars toward the highest regions of heaven. Then, when with dilated pupils, she directed her regard on some one, it produced the effect of an electric shock. Then, suddenly, a delicious smile produced on her face a mutinous and mischievous expression, similar to that of the roguish shepards of Tragonard and of Watteau, and displayed, through lips fresh as the petals of the rose, teeth of snowy whiteness.

In this woman of a sculptural and pleasing form, that the satin of her somewhat tight-fitting robe charmingly molded, all was harmonious, from the dainty feet imprisoned in fine scarlet shoes, to her admirably gloved hands, whose delicate childish wrist was inclosed in a superb diamond bracelet that a queen would not have disdained.

This feminine apparition, truly ravishing, excited a spirit of rivalry in all; the old men, bedizened with decorations, whose hanging lips sought to dissimulate it under an amiable smile, were re-animated, and revived by the sight of her. The young and vivacious aides-de-camp, with all the advantages with which nature had endowed them, exerted themselves to attract the attention of this star of the *fete*.

The Count de Leerkopf, the master of ceremonies, was himself subjugated, while the countess, his wife, a coquette approaching nearly her fiftieth year, without, however, losing any of her pretensions to youth and beauty, had, with great acrimony, elevated high her head when the Prince of Theiss, one of the king's cousins, had exclaimed with enthusiasm, on showing her Madame de Mineleko:

“What a pretty woman!”

“Goodness! they speak of nothing but her this

evening! That is what it is to be a 'new-comer!' ” and the countess made a disdainful move.

“A new arrival—a sensation,” smilingly said the Prince of Theiss.

“And of a very bad reputation!” exclaimed, with acerbity, this countess, acidulated like a green fruit when she heard the beauty and youth of other women extolled.

“What! she has a bad reputation?”

“Execrable, mon prince! It was about her that they talked so much last summer at Carlsbad.”

“Talked of her! With whom? and who said it?”

The countess, having no name to furnish, seized the ball that calumniators, when at bay, always seize.

“With whom? Monseigneur is very simple! But—with everybody. Who said it? But—everybody said it. See her eyes, how they seek all the men!”

The Prince of Theiss had by no means made this remark so unfavorable to every honest woman; but, in order not to augment the fury of this gentle countess, become an enraged shrew by the admiration which this young beauty excited, he prudently changed the tenor of their conversation.

“And she comes from?”

“She is a Caucasian—that is all that I know. Her husband is he who, eight or nine months ago, had with the Prince of H—— that celebrated duel, for which they sent him to take the air in the heart of Asia when, it is said,” this viper added, maliciously “the emperor allowed himself to be moved by the prayers—the favors even of the guilty man’s wife.”

“What? Madame de Mineleko was already mar-

ried at that epoch? How long is it then since she married the prince?"

"A year. The duel took place a few months after her marriage. But, moreover, this quiet young woman is from twenty-five to thirty years old."

Madame de Mineleko was scarcely twenty.

"Was the duel occasioned by the frivolous conduct of the princess, or was it on the husband's part, the effect of an ill-founded jealousy?"

"I do not know; but, certainly his wife could never have loved him much. She was forced to make this marriage, a brilliant match for her, whose fortune was very moderate."

"But he must be terrible, this husband! A veritable Othello!"

"Poor man! He suffers horribly from the constant coquetries of his fickle spouse."

"She is so young!—so beautiful!"

"That is a matter of taste!"

"No, it is an incontestable fact. And her husband appears to adore her," said the Prince of Theiss, following with his eyes M. de Mineleko, who, leaning against a screen, was conversing absently with M. de Brandt, Minister of the Interior.

At each instant he turned his eyes in the direction where the charming silhouette of his wife was delineated, chosen indeed by the king to figure with him in the quadrille of honor. Her beauty was enhanced by this distinction; surrendering herself to the happiness of the moment, she danced with an ease which, tempered by an unusual grace, gave her an inexpressible charm.

Suddenly, as she was vis-a-vis the grand duke and the Princess Aline, Ivan Alexandrowitch, profiting of the moment when the lady is obliged to give her

hand to the cavalier who is opposite her, murmured very low in her ear:

“Do you know, princess, that Waldemar de Heiligenthal is present at this *fete*?”

At those words she became very pale, and believed that she was going to fall; but, resisting the emotion which invaded her, she surmounted that momentary weakness. She did not respond to the grand duke, and, when she turned around again to the king, the Princess of Mineleko had completely recovered her self-possession. However, from this moment, a close observer would have easily been able to perceive that her eyes seemed to desire to penetrate the crowd, as though seeking some one.

CHAPTER II.

TWO LOVERS.

While in the principal salon of the chateau all these incidents were unfolding, the gravity of which will soon be perceived, a duet of love was cooing in a little alcove adjoining the apartments where, not far from the grand salon, they were playing whist.

"They are still inexorable!" whispered in the ear of a handsome young man the sweet voice of a ravishing brunette enveloped in a vaporous cloud of rose tulle, and whose black hair, gathered in a large knot on the top of a delicate and crafty head, gave to this physiognomy a stamp which recalled the delicious and mutinous Patti. A large bouquet of rose camellias, arranged like the diva alone knows how to arrange them as Rosine in "The Barber of Seville," bloomed in the midst of the jet-braids of the young girl.

"What!" responded her cavalier, "your parents refuse to listen even to the slightest allusion to our marriage, on which depends the entire happiness of our lives? You love me as I love you, is it not so, Walpurga?"

"If I love you, Conrad! But look then in that mirror, and see if, among all these princes and nobles, there is a single one who may be compared with you!"

Effectively, Conrad Haller, the unhappy suitor of the young Countess of Heiligenthal, was a brilliant cavalier. Blond like a Saxon, superbly built, of a fine carriage, the form tall and arched, the mustache

long and silky, which he turned up swaggeringly between his long slender fingers, the young re-frendary, whose carriage was rather that of an officer of the guard than an advocate, was sure of being able to, like his father, the Chief of the Supreme Tribunal of the Residence (a common name given to the capitol), to aspire one day to the most elevated positions of the magistracy.

An only son, he was rich—a great deal richer than most of the princes, counts and barons, who, transported by the harmonious sounds of the orchestra, were whirling at this moment in the ball-room of this royalty of the third order. However, in the minor as in the greater courts of continental Europe, when one is not noble, one is almost a pariah in society; so wills the vain and narrow minds of these little kingdoms where Poverty & Co. are admitted with any little whatsoever, while if hazard has not presided to ennoble their birth, the young people of the most meritorious families see themselves often refused invitations to balls of the meanest of princelings.

So, this young man, of a great intelligence, capable of attaining to the highest social positions, having neither parchment nor coat of arms, was rejected by the poor but noble family of Heiligenthal, who sacrificed thus to their pride the assured happiness of Walpurga. Now if, this evening, the two young people could abandon themselves without restraint to the pleasures of the dance, they owed it to Aunt Mohrenberg, a half-blind dowager, who chaperoned Walpurga, whose parents were absent, restrained by a slight indisposition.

Madame Haller, mother of the handsome Conrad, was the only daughter of the court pharmacist,

who, dying, left her a fine fortune. Arriving at a marriageable age, she had wedded a very young man, then a simple refrendary. Rare talents, seconded by an indefatigable love of work, had rapidly advanced this man in the career of the law which he had chosen; at the end of thirty years of a regular and incorruptible life, he found himself on the highest round of the ladder of his profession; he was judge of the court, then president of the supreme tribunal.

Notwithstanding the high position that her husband had been able to make for her, Madame Haller was not happy. Consumed with ambition, she dreamed of nothing less than to obtain from the king the ennoblement of her husband, in order to be able to go to court and be treated there on the same footing of equality as the princesses and countesses.

But, alas! her desire did not seem to be realized so promptly. If she was occasionally admitted to the palace, it was always in the ante-rooms, in the crowd of guests of the fifth rank on the occasion of an extraordinary *fete*. Among that enormous multitude she passed unperceived. Never had she assisted at the select reunions.

From his most tender infancy, Conrad had always heard the lamentations of his mother; lamentations so often repeated that, even for this intelligent son, this prejudice which he had, if I may so express it, experienced the evil of in the bosom of his mother, had created in him a species of resentment which increased when, for an increase of misfortune, he was smitten with a young noble girl whose family refused her hand to him who had no other nobility than that of the heart. This circumstance only rendered still more eager the desire which they had

to see the king accord them this nobility, object of all their ambitions.

Conrad said to himself with bitterness that, if he found himself this evening at the court, he owed it only to the great betrothal *fete* of the princesses. The king, desiring the people to share in the happiness which he prepared for his daughters, had been liberal in his invitations. In fact, in this dense crowd, how many saw for the first time, and without doubt for the last, the gilded ceilings of the salons of the palace of the Residence!

“My dear Conrad, we must separate,” said Walpurga, after some moments passed in a delicious *tete-a-tete*, far from the eyes of all, and endeavoring thus to console themselves for the obstacles which opposed their marriage. “It is time that I return to my aunt; she commences, without doubt, to grow uneasy at my absence—she may find it perhaps too long. For our interest, it is necessary that she may have nothing disagreeable to say to my family. Take me back then to her.”

And the two young people, returning to the crowded salons, were again carried along by the human waves.

CHAPTER III.

COUNT HEILIGENTHAL.

Notwithstanding the presence of many beauties remaining hitherto undisputed, Madame de Mineleko was still the attraction which captivated all regards.

The king had left her. Now, on the arm of the royal prince, she promenaded, fresh and graceful, creating everywhere upon her passage a flood of admiration. She advanced with head erect, a smile on her lips, really happy and proud of this triumph, always grateful to every pretty woman arrived to the apogee of her glory. She appeared to have completely forgotten the anxiety that the words of Ivan Alexandrowitch had made her experience, when suddenly, despite the very complacent attention which she seemed to lend to the gallant and empty discourse that his royal highness delivered, a lively terror was depicted on her charming features; she tottered and was obliged, in order not to fall, to lean heavily upon the arm which she scarcely seemed to touch before.

“Great God! princess, what is the matter?” cried the prince royal, whom the sudden alteration of Madame de Mineleko had not escaped.

Still very pale, the ambadress endeavored to smile:

“It is nothing—absolutely nothing; I am subject to these giddy spells, and——”

“Then, princess, you should not gratify yourself by giving them,” responded, very gallantly, the prince, really fascinated by this pretty woman. “But, seriously, are you not ill?”

“Not at all. I felt a slight uneasiness. It passed very quickly, and without any consequence. How sorry I am then to have thus frightened your highness!” added she, on seeing the prince fasten upon her regards filled with uneasiness.

“Najeska Ivanowna,” these words alone, flung in her ear by the grave voice of a young man passing rapidly by her, the impassioned flame of the looks which he had cast upon her, had sufficed to awaken in the beautiful ambassadress all this disquietude, inexplicable for all but her.

A year had already expired since the princess had seen this specter of Banquo, and behold! at the first grand *fete* given at the Court of Thessaly, where she had only just arrived, appeared to her he who had loved her with a delicious love; he to whom she had been affianced, and to whom her father had refused her in order to give her to the richest of her admirers.

“Will your highness leave me an instant? I feel that I can only recover when alone,” said she, suddenly, on seeing in the distance the supplicating eyes that the stranger fixed upon her—whose humble but impassioned attitude seemed to say to her: “Dismiss the prince, I entreat you! I must speak to you!”

The prince, great lord, in the true acceptation of the word, conducted the young woman to a remote drawing-room where the noise of the crowd could not even reach her, then, bowing profoundly to the princess, he discreetly retired.

His highness had hardly disappeared behind the heavy portiere, when the stranger was already with the ambassadress. He remained standing a moment, silent, absorbed in a veritable contempla-

tion; Madame de Mineleko, mute, her fan before her eyes, her head slightly bowed, divined rather than saw him. At last these words escaped the lips of the stranger:

“You see, madam, I am not dead yet!”

Slowly, sadly, Madame de Mineleko raised her head.

“I pray you,” said she, gently, “let us forget the past, and let us converse like old friends.”

“What!” said he, “you wish me to forget a past which has remained so dear to me, although the role that you have played in it has been so odious!”

He could not continue, so great was the indignation expressed in the eyes of the princess who, rising precipitately, regarded him with a sort of defiance, cast at the injurious words which he had just pronounced. Then, reconsidering, she suddenly assumed a tone of badinage but little in harmony with the alteration of her voice.

“Come, count, let us not play tragedy here; offer me your arm, and let us take a turn in the ball-room. Will you not dance a quadrille with me?”

The young man, confounded by so much *sang froid*, threw an icy glance upon the beautiful ambassadress:

“Adieu, madam, since you have nothing else to say to me!”

“Adieu, then.”

As she was about to withdraw, the stranger, with a passionate gesture, threw himself before her, obliging her to remain.

“No,” said he, “no—you cannot leave me thus! You must tell me first, that which you have refused to tell me for a year. What did you do when this marriage was broken which we had determined

with so much love, with so much happiness? Nothing came then to mitigate this and decree the misfortune of my life! Not a kind word fell from your lips upon the bleeding wound of my heart! not a word of consolation was sent me to enable me to support that horrible torture. A dry and cold letter from your father announced to me, as a very commonplace, a very ordinary event, that ‘some circumstances recently transpired would hinder this union;’ that is all that they thought necessary to fling in my face as an explanation of a lost happiness—a stolen happiness! When, after such a missive, and with despair, I ran to your house, desperate, entreating a domestic to allow me to see you; when by dint of prayers, he was moved and went to take you my card, what did you do? Cold as marble you refused to receive me. To all my letters, confidants of my sorrows, of my anguish, you did not deign to give the least response capable of soothing a heart with which you had played so heedlessly! But twenty-four hours later you left Nice, and, a short time after, all the journals published your engagement with the rich Prince of Mineleko.

“It is a year since all that, madam! A year of sufferings, of struggles, of disdain! I wished to forget you, but I could not. This evening, I have you in my power; you shall not leave me until you have given me this explanation which I have a right to demand of you. I wish it, I exact it!”

A haughty look from Madame de Mineleko cut short this conversation, the violence of which seemed to increase as the count spoke.

“Monsieur, cease, I pray you, these pleasantries; I desire to leave you, and I expect from your court-

esy that you will take me immediately to the drawing-rooms."

"Najeska—Najeska Ivanowna!—have pity on me!—do not force me to extremities! Do you not see that I am mad? Who would have ever been able to believe that you would one day repulse me thus! Have you forgotten, then, your oaths of love? Have you forgotten those divine days, passed under the sunny skies of the South? Those evenings where, entwined, we waltzed indefatigably, happy to feel ourselves in each other's arms!—blessed hours in which we exchanged vows of a fidelity which was to be eternal!

"But let us leave these remembrances, as dear as painful to my heart. I see you then! What an effect this meeting produces on me! but, however, I cannot say that it rekindles in me a love illy extinguished, for I have never had any other thought but you, I declare it to you before God! Freely I surrendered myself; freely you had chosen me among many others; by what right did you repulse me?"

"Monsieur de Heilighenthal, if you do not let me go, I will call. At present you transgress the limits of all propriety; I like to believe that this paroxysm of folly will cease as soon as you appeal to your good sense, to your reason, then you will see how more impossible than ever all intercourse between us has become, and I expect from your chivalrous gallantry the promise that you will make no attempt to bring about a meeting between us."

"You believe that I will go away?"

"I pray you! If necessary, I even order you to do so."

"Well, no! I will not go away!" Then changing

his tone: "Najeska Ivanowna! there is yet time—in the name of Heaven—in the name of your past love, listen to me!" said he.

"That is what I will not do, count. I refuse absolutely."

"And why?"

"Why—because I am the wife of another, and that nothing which I do is concealed from my husband. If the Prince of Mineleko suspected that which has just passed between us, he would know how to disembarass me of your persecutions. Has not report then taught you that one may not jest with Louis Michailowitch, Prince of Mineleko? Now, I am not one of these women who bring misfortune and scandal upon the heads of others."

"And is it from me, madam, that you wish to avert misfortune? So then!—this is a sarcasm."

"Yes, I wish to prevent a misfortune, and an irreparable misfortune, for if my husband saw you paying addresses to me, he would challenge you to a duel, and then——"

"It is truly high time to have such a great forethought for me. But who other than you, madam, has crushed me under the weight of misfortune which I must endure? Was it as a proof of your solicitude for me that you consented to put in parallel with my poverty and my love, the millions and the position of the Prince of Mineleko? Was it still through solicitude, through love even, that you placed yourself on that side of the scale where fortune weighed the balance, and that you did not hesitate between him who brought you riches and honor and him who could offer you nothing but poverty, and——"

"Ah, Waldemar, you are severe—you are cruel!"

exclaimed the young woman, who could no longer sustain the role which she had imposed upon herself in this comedy. "Do you not see that I, also, am at the end of my strength—have you no eyes, then, but for your own sufferings, and are you thus blind to that of others?"

"But then, Najeska, you love me still! Ah! tell me so, that you are still mine at heart! tell me so, and I go without murmuring!" cried the young man, affected at last by the real grief imprinted upon the features of the princess.

"No! No!—I will not say so; I cannot say so; that would be to betray my husband!"

"Is it necessary for you to tell me so? I see it. I feel it! everything in you proves it; your palpitating bosom, your pale lips, the anxious expression of your face when I suddenly arose before you! Najeska Ivanowna, do not lie!—you love me!—you love me! Without that, what would it signify to you if your husband should challenge me to a duel?" said he, with all the conceit of a man who does not admit for a single instant that an unhappy woman might tremble for any other than himself.

"It is only very lately," continued Heiligenthal, "that the truth has at last disclosed itself, and that I have known that which has caused our separation. When the news was reported that you had renounced our marriage only in order to save your father from ruin and dishonor, when I knew why you had consented to destroy it—our happiness—and when I had learned that you were here, for a moment I believed that I would go mad with joy. The coldness that you affected at my approach, the confusion that you appeared to experience from it, the care that you took to keep me out of your path, are

so many apprehensions that you have for the danger that I might incur. But, do not tremble; I will be calm, I will be prudent, for I love you! for I want you! When I received from your father that letter which put forever an impediment to our projects, I became furious. I wished to come and seek you, to kill you, you whom I had loved so much and whom I lost, your father who broke this union, and that other, who stole from me the only desire of my life, the joy of my existence! I wished to kill him no matter who he was—I wanted blood in order to satiate my vengeance. But I became ill—oh, yes! very ill—perhaps you find me changed even yet. However, I am healed, in body at least. One single aim alone remains to me now; that of possessing you, of having you myself, in spite of this marriage, in spite of your husband, whose life I want and that I will have! Najeska Ivanowna, I am going to leave you, to give you time to choose. One observation alone before separating from you; never forget that I am as tenacious as he—the other one. Whatsoever you do, we are bound to each other; our union, sealed by an invisible spirit, is more indissoluble than if the church itself had consecrated it. After having been your fiance, you have now no longer the right to repulse me.”

Carried away by his passion, he seemed to take a bitter pleasure in pouring out the overflow of his heart.

“My husband!” suddenly murmured Madame de Mineleko.

In fact, the Ambassador of Caucasus, putting aside the portiere which concealed the place where the two young people were, had just appeared. He advanced toward them, his brow

laden with clouds that the prolonged absence of the princess had amassed there.

“Thanks, monsieur,” said she aloud to Heiligenthal; “you may dispense with the drudgery that I have inflicted upon you; here is my husband, my lord and master; it is upon him devolves the duty of conducting me to the dressing-room, for I wish to retire.”

The Prince of Mineleko had that thoughtful expression that Najeska knew to be the certain indication of an approaching tempest. He coldly offered his arm to his charming companion.

Heiligenthal, with swelling heart at being thus dismissed, remained riveted to the same place, following with his eyes the young princess whose lithe and slender form was at present entirely enveloped in the crimson satin mantel embroidered with gold, which her husband had just thrown over her shoulders. On seeing this vaporous creature disappear with this man so little calculated to inspire love, the unhappy Waldemar was invaded by an immense despair.

“Who do you follow thus with your eyes? The Princess of Mineleko, without doubt?” suddenly said a young and cheerful voice, while a hand fell familiarly on the shoulder of Heiligenthal. It was a young secretary of the Armenian Embassy, very intimate with Waldemar’s family.

This apparition, which drew him from the allurements of his thoughts, permitted no denial on the part of the count, whose ill-humor betrayed itself.

“Ah! so, my dear, was not the flirtation successful? do not blame thy person for it, it is exceedingly good, moreover, even all that there is of the best;

but only an element stronger than thou, and whose object is the same."

"The king?" murmured Heiligenthal, through his closed lips.

"Bless me! yes, the king," said the Armenian, smiling. "What woman was ever known to resist a majesty? And what have you to offer her as a compensation for the sweet joy which she will experience on seeing herself preferred to all the other women, whose jealousy will be without limit against this monopolizer, very involuntary, without doubt, of the royal favors. Come! let us go to supper. Some cups of Cliquot will quickly remove this heavy sadness which disturbs thy countenance."

CHAPTER IV.

WHY SHE MARRIED HIM.

The observer, in fact, was not mistaken in his previsions when he affirmed that the Ambassador of Caucasus was devoured by jealousy. Everywhere where the exigencies of his position made it his duty to present himself with the ambassadress, everywhere he encountered material for this terrible passion. The admiration which this beautiful creature excited, the constant triumph which accompanied her steps, was for him a subject of apprehensions, of suspicions, of tortures.

Najeska Ivanowna was the only daughter of the Prince of Narish, a lord possessing large estates on the borders of the Black Sea. Becoming a widower almost immediately after the birth of his daughter, this man, as learned as distinguished, consecrated himself entirely to the education of this dear little creature. In order the better to acquit himself of this sacred mission, he fled from the large cities, and he, the inveterate gambler, did not hesitate to shut himself up in these vast solitudes. Having promised himself to give the child a brilliant education, worthy of the exalted position which was reserved for her, he surrounded her with teachers as skilful as enlightened; St. Petersburg and Paris furnished him with some who had been warmly recommended to him.

A skillful horsewoman, the young princess could, without fatiguing herself, make twenty leagues on horseback, neither more nor less than a cavalry officer. Gymnastics and dancing found in her a

pupil as bold as indefatigable. The exercises of the body were not the only ones to which she applied herself with delight; ancient and modern literature, the most abstruse sciences, had nothing of concealment for this mind, as great as the vast nation which she inherited; she spoke correctly five or six languages which seemed to be natural to her; in a word, this daughter of the air, this independent, had all the talents which is exacted to-day from the best educated young ladies. She possessed, more than all, the wild and fragrant beauty of the superb women of Caucasus.

Although having grown up far from the world, in the midst of the vast steppes and infinite vestas of lands, almost boundless, of her father, she created, from her first appearance in the capital of Caucasus, an immense sensation. She was barely seventeen when the Prince of Narish presented her at court. From that time a multitude of admirers came to offer their homages on the altar erected to this enchantress. The list is open. To whom will this delicate hand, so *recherche* decree the palm of victory? All eyes are turned toward her—each waits, and waits in vain.

After a season passed in the capital, the Prince of Narish went in the spring with his daughter to establish himself at Nice for some weeks. The young princess met there the Count of Heiligenthal, belonging to one of the most ancient and proudest families of Thessaly, standing very well at court, but who served in the army of the Emperor of the Danube, neighbor of the King of Thessaly, his mother being a Danubian, and he was the heir of her brother, an old Hungarian noble without children, possessing a large fortune.

Najeska Ivanowna fell in love immediately with Heiligenthal, with whom she danced at all the balls; what more was necessary for this young heart?

Although she knew that her father destined her for the Prince of Mineleko, a man nearly forty years old, already occupying an exalted position, and who had been appointed ambassador to the capital of Flanders, some promises were quickly exchanged between her and Heiligenthal. The idea of this marriage arranged between them was kept secret; no one knew of it, not even the families interested.

All, until then, seemed to go according to their desires; but who can count on happiness here below? Upon his return in the world, the Prince of Narish resumed his gambling habits. A great number of his evenings were passed at the baccarat-tables of some of the prominent clubs of Nice. He had already met with some heavy losses; it was an admonition, he realized it, for each time he promised himself to extricate himself from this terrible passion; but each time he was more violently carried away by it.

One evening, notwithstanding the animation of the play, and although he was winning, the prince appeared more anxious than ever; the unhappy man comprehended that he was upon the brink of an abyss in which all was going to be engulfed; his fortune and that of his daughter. He wished to withdraw; vain efforts; he was nailed to this place by an invisible power. All changed; by some hazard of the cards the entire fortune of the prince passed into the hands of his adversary; desperate, he resisted still this inconstant goddess, who, deaf to his wishes, dragged him in a deeper precipice, for, this time, his home will remain there if in twenty-four hours

this debt of play, this sacred debt, is not entirely paid.

One man alone can save him: it is Mineleko. The prince knows it—he confides his misfortune to him. A telegram calls him quickly to him.

The ambassador promises to pay at once, but on one condition; he shall be the husband of the beautiful Najeska Ivanowna, whom her father had almost promised him the preceding year; but the young girl had always hesitated to accept this match. Mineleko, moreover, was completely ignorant of the secret engagement with Waldemar. Did he even know that there was a Waldemar de Heiligenthal in the world?

Although terrified by the despair of her idolized father, the unhappy Najeska Ivanowna still hesitates, however, to make the sacrifice of her happiness. A struggle arises in her heart between the love which she has for her unfortunate father and that which she has sworn to the elect of her choice; but the remembrance of the tenderness, of the devotion of Narish, the tears which she sees him shed, prevails at last; she immolates herself. She will be forever unhappy, but she will have saved the honor of her well-beloved father!

The sacrifice, however, is not consummated! How to make Heiligenthal acquainted with the truth? One means remains perhaps to her—to tell him all! But will not that confidence debase in the eyes of Heiligenthal this father whom she desires that all should venerate? What to do, then? She throws herself in despair on the neck of the Prince of Narish, telling him all, and imploring him to write to Waldemar that an important reason had just

placed an insuperable obstacle to the realization of their marriage.

Heiligenthal, raving, wounded to the quick, accuses poor Najeska Ivanowna: "It is cupidity, the desire of honors, the expectation of finding a richer husband, which make her act so odiously!" He is determined to avenge himself; but this unhappy one, who had loved his fiancée with all the violence of a heart still young, had presumed too much on his strength. Shocked by this unexpected blow, he was seized with a grave malady which nailed him on a bed of suffering. During some weeks, he hovered between life and death.

Did he forget, during the months in which circumstances kept them far from each other?

Alas! no—never a minute passed that he did not think of this lost treasure, and lost without hope.

Of an irresolute mind, a heart without great principles, Waldemar had yet had one profound sensation in his life: the sincere love which he had devoted to Najeska of Narish. This love of his heart and of his senses, ought we not to say—especially of his senses—would it have vibrated again for her if fate had unfortunately not decreed that she should come to the Court of Thessaly? That is what we cannot positively say. The dazzling apparition of this superb woman was always like a magnetic commotion which traversed the mind of this feeble man, having never known how to subdue any of his passions.

This charming cavalier, this unprincipled Lovelace, accustomed to easy conquest, believed that he could easily overcome the scruples of the beautiful Najeska; listening, as we have said, only to the voice of his insensate love, he said to himself that this

fascinating creature who had escaped him should belong to him, cost what it might. In order to fortify himself in this resolution, he sought to persuade himself that it was not only right, but also his duty, and that he could not forfeit it without failing in honor. From this time forward he thought of nothing else but the means which would facilitate the success of his enterprise.

What became of Najeska, when, in the bloom of her nineteen summers, she married this serious man whom she esteemed without loving? What would be hereafter her existence, bound to that of a husband twenty years older than she, and who a long time since had already exhausted the cup of pleasure of an existence which she was still ignorant of and which she was eager to learn?

Wholly new to the pleasures and the impressions of life, she wished to go, to roam, to enjoy everything, seeking to forget or to diminish the loss of this adored man of whom her heart was full, and of whom, even on the first days of her marriage, she had not ceased to think.

But she was so young when she had loved him! Before the age of twenty, the affections have not yet the strength which they assume when years come to confirm their character, and the love of that time is to that of later years only like the froth which ascends to the surface of the bubbling spring to the profound passions which then consume us.

Gradually this memory, which she had believed to be indelible, was effaced. Great duties, the sacred duties of maternity alone occupied her heart; that love which to-day would be sacrilege, she lavished upon the cherished heads of her two little twin girls, babies, who, ten months after her marriage, seemed

born to enliven that fireside and bring to the mother the joys that the wife had sought in vain; for Najeska was not happy! And she would have asked, however, nothing better than to be so, if her husband had been less jealous, less suspicious!

Notwithstanding the admirers which her beauty unceasingly attracted, notwithstanding the wicked tongues whose hatred endeavored to tarnish this star who eclipsed them, the young woman had remained faithful to the duties of the wife.

At the epoch where our narrative commences, thirteen months of married life had passed over the heads of the Prince and Princess of Mineleko, whose primitive characters were scarcely modified.

Notwithstanding the circumstances, Najeska Ivanowna, married, had remained that which we have seen her, a young girl—gay, lively, always covetous of the pleasures that her youth had not yet tasted. She was still the ingenuous child that Monsieur de Mineleko had married.

On the contrary, the prince experienced the effects of the very difficult politics which, in these later days, agitated entire Europe; his disposition, instead of becoming more genial at the contact of those three beings who adorned his home, only became more peevish and morose.

Unconscious of the love that Heiligenthal had entertained for the princess, Mineleko suffered, however from a fixed idea.

This child that he had married, whom he ardently loved, could care nothing for him, man of an already mature age, with the black and correct whiskers of an advocate, with shaven lips covered by short blue hair.

He fully realized that he possessed no remarkable

attractions, nothing of that physique of early youth which always produced such an impression on young girls just out of boarding-school; thus, all these men, some more beautiful than others, and hovering around his dear Najeska Ivanowna, his light, his life, kept his uneasy nature alert.

How many scenes of jealousy, having no other origin than a multitude of chimeras which his watchful imagination had been ingenious to suggest to him, had not the poor Najeska already undergone for a whole year!

Recalled to reason by this woman whose eminently upright character gave an explicit denial to his injurious suspicions, Mineleko invariably recognized his errors, and always, after having acknowledged them, this ferocious Othello humbly implored a pardon which he wished henceforth to merit by a devotion and a confidence without limit.

Najeska, listening only to her generous and indulgent heart, forgetting all in presence of the grief of this really unhappy man, whom she threatened, however, sometimes to leave—she and her babies, with whom she would go and live on her estates by the Black Sea, which now belonged to her, the Prince of Narish having died from an attack of apoplexy, eight days after the marriage of his daughter, a sacrifice that had become useless. Destiny alone deals such blows!

Mineleko, always uneasy, always suspicious, was watching, if not to say spying, on his young wife; his role near her was really that of a detective.

Until their arrival in Thessaly, nothing had occurred to seriously justify his suspicions, for this duel with H——, in Flanders, was too clearly an effect of the jealousy of the prince not resting upon any

serious foundation save that Najeska had complained that H—— was too amiable for her. But at present, this shadow, which haunted him without reason, assumed a body which arose more distinctly each day: it was the shadow of the king—of the king, subjugated, fascinated by the princess—his wife!

CHAPTER V.

THE JEALOUS HUSBAND.

Madame de Mineleko, Najeska Ivanowna, had never been able to discard the habit which in her youth she had acquired in the steppes of her father. For her to mount a horse every day was a need, a necessity, a happiness. Her husband generally accompanied her on her rides; but if the ambassador, detained by any reason, could not do so, she went without him, and followed by a groom, surrendered herself entirely to this pleasure, one of the few which had remained to her.

Now the day after the one on which the prince had been officially received by the king, and on which the king, being a widower, had come to the hotel of the embassy to call upon Madame le Ambassadrice*, his majesty had encountered them taking their ride. Was it chance afterward which each morning found the king upon the route of the prince and princess? At first Mineleko endeavored to stifle the jealousy which, anew, consumed his heart; but after this great betrothal ball, where, infatuated by the beauty of the new ambadress, which he saw for the first time in all the splendor of a festive toilet, the king had neither suppressed nor concealed the intense attraction that this woman exercised over him. The ambassador said to him-

*According to the etiquette of the court an ambadress must always receive the first visits of a king who is a widower, whereas it is she who would be obliged to make it to the palace if there was a living queen.

self that this time his jealousy rested upon serious basis, for everybody, the most artless of the young girls as well as the most insignificant of the lieutenants, had remarked that which, during a whole night, had banished a sleep that his rankling heart sought in vain. Undoubtedly the king was desperately in love with the ambassadress.

Charles Ferdinand of Thessaly, aged forty-five years, in all the heyday of his maturity, was a handsome man, whose prestige was still increased by his rank, for kings, queens, and princes appear always more beautiful than they really are.

The next morning, when Monsieur de Mineleko, according to his custom, entered in the chamber of his wife, she, at the appearance of her husband, whose discomposed features sufficiently announced what struggles he had just undergone, saw well that a scene was about to burst forth.

The sleep of Najeska Ivanowna had not been less disturbed than that of the prince. Her unexpected meeting with her first betrothed distressed her more than she wished to confess to him, for she had everything to fear from the well-known jealousy of her husband. For the present, that thought occupied her more than the remembrance of the attentions of the king, for that which disquiets, that which terrifies, haunts the mind a great deal more than that which flatters and charms.

“Have you slept well?” asked Monsieur de Mineleko, of his wife, whose lips coldly touched the brow which the ambassadress presented to him.

“Admirably,” said she; “I was exhausted with fatigue.”

“Fatigue resulting from all the coquetries with which you have bombarded the king.”

Najeska Ivanowna, stupefied, looked at her husband.

"It seems to me," said she, haughtily, "that, before the evident adoration of his majesty, I had no need to give myself much trouble to attract him!"

An impudent remark that vexation drew from her.

"Ah, you confess then that he is smitten with you?" roared the prince.

"Goodness! are you going to commence again? Is this another foolish scene which I must undergo? I warn you, I had already a headache; if you continue you will give me one of those violent headaches which annoy you so much and which you always provoke. I pray you, then, to leave me."

In order to compel her husband to leave her chamber, Najeska Ivanowna violently pulled the bell-cord suspended near her bed; her waiting-maid came immediately. At the entrance of this domestic, Monsieur de Mineleko, very sulky, and very disagreeable, returned to his office, where he vainly endeavored to conceal his pre-occupation from his secretaries, whom he kept near him in order to receive the instructions which the ambassador might have to give them after the perusal of his dispatches.

Najeska Ivanowna knew that until then the prince was ignorant of her secret engagement with Heiligenthal. And how would he have been able to know it? it had taken place at Nice. Besides, Heiligenthal, never having appeared in the capital of Caucasus, was unknown to the prince; chance alone, then, would have been able to inform him of it. But, undoubtedly, this secret was in the power of Ivan Alexandrowitch, who was at Nice at the same time as Najeska Ivanowna, and seemed to

have forgotten nothing of these circumstances. He remembered, indeed, the assiduous attention that Waldemar then paid to the beautiful princess—thus was it with a malicious pleasure that he had mysteriously uttered that remark: “Heiligenthal is here.” Now for the ambadress, no more peace! The days, the hours would pass in trembling. What would in reality occur, if Ivan Alexandrowitch, intentionally or unintentionally, making the count the subject of conversation, should happen imprudently, in the presence of Mineleko, to divulge all those things which she kept so profoundly concealed in her heart? Happily the young grand duke would depart the next day after the betrothal ball, and thus her disquietude would be dissipated.

An hour had scarcely flown since the ambassador had so abruptly left his wife, when two little knocks, discreetly rapped on his door, made him raise his head. It was Glascha, the princess’ chambermaid, who, sent by her, came to ask the prince if he would not like to come and take a ride with her, on this beautiful spring morning.

Besides his jealous temperament, Mineleko had also a peevish, morose disposition. He was furiously angry at his wife for having, that very morning, so carelessly dismissed him from her chamber. It was, then, in a surly tone that he responded:

“Tell Madame la Princess that, having no desire to go out, she will be obliged to remain or ride alone.”

But the waiting-woman had scarcely gone than Mineleko, his soul consumed by fury, said to himself that he had really been very awkward in thus allowing Najeska Ivanowna to go out alone; it was himself, and not her, that he punished, in putting the

trump cards in the game of his wife, who, free, would not fail to meet her adorer; this accursed king, who, without doubt, would find himself as usual on her road.

Alone, inhaling with delight the spring air all impregnated with the odor of the flowering chestnuts, the hedges of white hawthorn and wild roses, she would allow herself to be borne along by the rapid strides of her horse, far from him, far from their children; while he, and by his own fault, remained alone munching his anger in this room where he was suffocating.

The constraint which he imposed on himself rendered him more furious, for his blind jealousy showed him a thousand chimeras, some more impossible than others; at last, no longer containing himself, he threw aside passionately the dispatches to which he was about to respond; there remained to him still more time than he required for the evening courier, and, giving orders to saddle "Vengeance" immediately, his superb Arabian horse, in less than a quarter of an hour, without being followed by any one, not even a groom, he rode in the direction of a little woods where he knew Najeska Ivanowna was in the habit of riding, mounted on "Reverie," a magnificent English mare.

The morning is radiant. The sky, of a pale turquoise blue, is cloudless. When he arrives in the solitude of the forest, the flocks of birds throw their light trills from branch to branch. Upon the petals of the little wild-wood flowers, the dew sparkles like the facets of diamonds. The sod is enameled with daisies and buttercups; the wild strawberry and the violet mingle together under the taller plants. A delicious odor exhales from the vernal earth. Even

this constantly vexed character is appeased and relaxed in this revival of nature.

Suddenly, in the distance, he sees the little English groom of his wife bent over his large horse. He recognizes this British profile with the hair neatly parted on the back of his head under his high hat, and the red neck enclosed in a stiff collar. As he approaches, he perceives that before this domestic there are two persons on horseback. A cavalier near an elegant and handsome Amazon. Who are they? At this distance he cannot distinguish. Suddenly he starts. This woman with the slender form and superbly-developed bust, it is Najeska Ivanowna, it is his wife! He has recognized her; it is she! everything tells him so. That red flower fastened to her corsage, that pinked-out pocket on the breast of her costume, from which a little cambric handkerchief escapes, are so many indications which cannot deceive him; moreover, his heart, his jealousy have spoken. It is she!

The cavalier and his companion penetrate farther and farther into the thick coppice-wood of the forest; soon they disappear entirely.

“Where are they going?”

This thought tortures the unhappy husband. He will know, he must know.

He incites Vengeance—he becomes unmaneagable; but instead of taking the path followed by the solitary couple, he enters into a parallel road. Suddenly, his eager eyes, which peer through the forest, perceive the two riders who have stopped under the tufted branches of an oak.

The cavalier who escorts Najeska Ivanowna is not the king!—it is a young man that the reader has without difficulty recognized—it is Heiligenthal.

When and where has the ambassador seen this figure which has left only vague recollections in his mind? He considers, but in vain. Suddenly he recollects. It is that young man who was conversing with his wife when, on the evening before, he was looking for her at the court ball.

Still another suitor! Who can this one be? It is very necessary that he should know.

The young man was speaking with great animation to his beautiful companion, and if Monsieur de Mineleko had been less jealous, he had easily been able to observe that the princess was listening to this passionate Romeo with much more fear than love.

Although having been very much smitten with her first betrothal, Najeska Ivanowna had never had for him a passion as profound as that which her extraordinary beauty had inspired in the heart of Heiligenthal.

Undoubtedly, she had loved him a great deal, but it was because he loved her so much! Her love for him, if one may say so, had sprung from his; but, since she was in Thessaly, had not the king, so seducing, inspired in her a more lively, a more serious admiration? Alas! the young woman would not have dared to confess it; she did not realize clearly her own sensations, but she felt that, unknown to herself, the thought of Charles Ferdinand absorbed her entirely. Waldemar was no longer anything to her.

But, however, what anguish had she not experienced when, at that time, she had been obliged to make for her father the sacrifice of her marriage with Heiligenthal!

This morning, while Mineleko was observing

them, Waldemar was endeavoring by all the force of his eloquence to rekindle under the lash of his impetuous desires, the tenderness which he had formerly created in the heart of this woman. But more unskillful than intelligent, he did not perceive that in tormenting this choice nature he bruised a proud and tender heart, that gentleness and prayers might perhaps effect, but that menaces, reproaches and compulsion would render invulnerable.

Najeska Ivanowna lashed nervously the leaves of the trees which surrounded her, while listening to Waldemar, whose conversation awakened in her the gloomy remembrance of the time when her greatest, her only happiness was to be near him—him—the husband of her choice.

Mineleko did not comprehend that which was passing in her heart; he took for a guilty confusion the regards which she averted from the young man.

She loved!—but who?—this one, or the king?

During the time that the ambassador was observing everything, the red flower that the princess wore in her buttonhole became unfastened and was just falling to the ground. The young man dismounted from his horse, feverishly, picked up the carnation already half-faded by the warmth of the young woman's body, and covered its petals with passionate kisses; then, showing Najeska Ivanowna this precious souvenir, he put it religiously in his pocket-book, probably not without uttering some commonplace phrase.

“What! she did not snatch from this man the flower which she ought not to let him retain at any price? Then, he pleased her! Ah! infernal co-

quette," thought Mineleko. "And she considers herself pure!"

Apart from this, nothing else of a serious nature transpired.

Shortly afterward, the horses being somewhat rested, the riders went back and re-entered the city. In his suspicious susceptibility, Mineleko remarked, however, that they separated on approaching the populous quarter of the Residence.

Returned to the embassy, Najeska Ivanowna was not aware that her husband had gone out a short time after her.

At breakfast, the prince questioned her about her ride. The princess responded evasively: "that the weather was so fine, the atmosphere so pure that she had had a very agreeable ride;" but she did not say one word about her encounter with Heiligenthal. This detail did not escape her husband. If she was innocent in deed and intention, why did she conceal it?

If he had asked her the question, could she not have responded: "If I do not speak to a man whom I have met, is it not because that every allusion of this nature leads unceasingly to storms which my fatigued nerves can no longer endure?"

Thus the most trivial things engender in this brain, always on the alert, a grave suspicion which everything conspired to establish.

On this very afternoon, the ambassador repaired to the palace; he had obtained of his majesty a private audience, in order to communicate to him some dispatches from the country which he represented.

Received with great deference, he was obliged, however, to wait a moment until the king was at

liberty to receive him. It was during this short interval that he overheard the following conversation, held on the balcony on which all the lower apartments of the palace opened.

“‘Hop, Praslin! hop, Chviseul!’ Madame du Barry has said,” cried a bantering voice; “I—I say: hop the king! hop Heiligenthal!”

“And for what reason do you say that?” responded another voice.

The drawing-room in which Mineleko was, was generally empty, and the two indiscreet persons who spoke thus supposed that it was impossible for them to be overheard.

“For two reasons: at first, on account of the striking sensation produced upon the king at the sight of the lovely Ambassadors of Caucasus, and afterward because of that time when she was said to have been affianced to Heiligenthal. She only married the other one, it appears, in order to save her father. Is it true? Is it false? I know nothing of that! A balloon that I threw in the air! Answer me: which of the two champions will first succeed in attaining the good graces of the princess?”

Mineleko was terribly shocked by this revelation—for, hitherto, he had not been aware that his wife had ever been engaged before he had asked her in marriage—he was about to rush forward to see who dared to hold such a conversation, when the folding-doors of the royal apartments opened:

“The king!”

Although terribly agitated, the prince immediately became again the polished, cold, and correct diplomat that he was esteemed at his court.

The diplomatic affairs were discussed with such

presence of mind, and such *sang froid*, that the royal audience was terminated without King Charles Ferdinand XVIII having been able to remark the least weakness, the least pre-occupation in the mind of the ambassador.

“Apropos, mon prince,” said the monarch, on taking leave of him, “how is Madame l’ Ambassadrice after her triumphs of last evening? Veni, vidi, vici! was that not really so, upon her first entrance in the ball-room? Ah! you must be very proud of your wife, Monsieur l’ Ambassadeur.”

CHAPTER VI.

“I MUST SEE YOU ALONE.”

In the encounter on horseback, surprised by Monsieur de Mineleko, between his wife and Heilighenthal, this added still to the fear that her interview the day before at the court ball had inspired in Najeska Ivanowna.

“You shall receive me alone, in private, at your house, or I will pay you, before everybody, such attentions that your husband will be obliged to seek a quarrel with me,” the young man had repeated to her twenty times.

Najeska Ivanowna knew Heilighenthal; she knew that his obstinacy and his determination fully equaled the jealous and suspicious character of her husband.

Dear me! dear me! what would be the result of all this? What could she do to extricate herself from this painful and dangerous situation? Confide in a madman like her husband? It was not to be thought of; that had been to precipitate herself head first into the abyss. To refuse squarely, energetically, to receive Waldemar on the conditions which he had imposed on her, that was to provoke him to make some *coup d'etat*. On whatsoever way she turned, the poor princess saw misfortune hovering over her.

Was he not capable of everything, this count who, when the Prince of Narish had demanded them by writing, had affirmed that he had destroyed

all the letters of his young fiancée. She had had faith in his pledged word, and here only the other morning he had shown them to her intact—happily before her husband encountered them—these letters in which she had so constantly ridiculed “the” other suitor, Mineleko, and sworn to him—to him, Waldemar—an eternal love. An imprudence for which she would have to pay dearly, by a whole existence of terror and remorse! The inexperience of the young girl who, with the indiscretion, the confidence of her age, delivers her innocence, her reputation, the happiness of an entire life, to the mercy, to the discretion often of the vainest and most indelicate of men.

When she accepted the hand of Mineleko he had royally acquainted her with his jealous and passionate character; he had entreated her to refuse his offer if she had ever loved another, and, terrified by the idea of all the consequences that her refusal would involve, moved also by the tenderness of her heart, she was afraid of wounding this man, whom she felt loved her so profoundly, and she concealed the truth from him! Alas! where had this pious lie led her; in what a terrible labyrinth does she not find herself, and how can she ever get out of it? One alone of these letters, written to her first fiancée and sent by him to her husband, and all is over forever with her happiness and with that of her children!

Najeska Ivanowna had entreated Heiligenthal to come and see her as an ordinary visitor, at her customary hour in which she received at the embassy.

“I will come when you please, only, swear to me that, being with you, no one will disturb our inter-

view. I desire that we may be alone, absolutely alone."

"Bless me! that which you ask does not altogether depend on my will; I cannot promise you it. I will do all I possibly can to be agreeable to you, but I cannot pledge myself to anything. Suppose that a fortuitous circumstance should arise, that an unexpected visitor should present himself, that my husband, to whom I cannot refuse my door, should wish to enter——"

"Oh, as to that, I oppose that myself; I being present, that man will never cross the threshold of your apartment. All the circumstances which may happen, you will arrange as you please, but I must see you alone. Do not object that you cannot; I will not believe it. If you wish, you will succeed in it. Nothing is impossible to the woman who loves. In abandoning me, you have not only ruined my life, but also my career, my future. Without your knowing it, I sent in my resignation in order not to leave you at Nice, for I was recalled to the army and I was obliged to go. Ah! I astonish you—but, however, it is true! I did it without hesitation, although I know that in acting thus I lost at the same time the heritage of my Uncle D——, the Danubian count, my mother's rich brother, for it was at his request that I had taken service in his country."

The Count de Heiligenthal, like many young people of noble families of the little neighboring kingdoms of the Danubian Empire, served in the Danubian army.

That which he related was true. After his severe illness, being without a situation, he had found employment in the administration of the Thessalian domains. That is why he was at present in the

capital, while Najeska, who did not even suspect his discharge, believed him still at the Danube.

“Have I murmured, however, a single instant, when your love was to me a sweet compensation for all my sacrifices?” passionately continued the young man. “To-day I want an imdemnification for this everlasting love that you have sworn to me and that you have violated. Is it too much to demand as the price of your cruel treason, to receive me alone, all alone, though it were only once? There in a private interview with you, I will acquaint you with all the tortures that you have inflicted on me, and under the weights of which I sink crushed.”

In his ferocious and indifferent egotism, Heiligen-thal did not even suspect the torments, the anguish that this passionate cry might inflict on this woman whose only wrong was to have loved him.

The attitude of Waldemar, however, was so despondent that Najeska Ivanowna, at the age where all in us is kindness and indulgence, did not think of being offended at so many unjust reproaches, so many exactions. Ignorant of life, of its trials, of its sorrows, she was afraid. Of an essentially loyal and upright nature, she realized well that it was as impossible to refuse as to grant this rendezvous. The only thing which remained in her power, was postponement, delay; she was obliged to let him hope, in order to gain time. If only she had been able to confide all to her husband, to hope for his support, his counsels! But no! there is only one danger the more. She had not forgotten that it was only a few months since that she had found herself in a similar situation. What had been the price of her confidence, of her abandonment?

The enraged husband, listening only to his anger,

had immediately sought a quarrel with a young attachee of the embassy in the capital of Flanders; a duel had followed, in which Mineleko had killed the diplomat. She recollected the terrible excitement, followed by a frightful trembling which had seized her, when her husband, re-entering, had said to her: "Thou shalt be avenged; after to-morrow, I will kill H——" Oh! no, no! never would she have the courage to renew, to support, those accursed days; those nights of terror, those hours of agony which had preceded the combat. The very remembrance of them awakened in her a thousand fears. An inexpressible uneasiness, an invincible horror took possession of her when she thought of all that. The mental disturbance, precursor of the insanity which had then stricken her poor brain, weakened by all these cruel pre-occupations, violently recommenced. She did not cease to address to herself to-day the same reproaches which she had reproached herself with then.

Was she any better than an assassin? Was it not she who had caused the death of this young and handsome creature who was entering carelessly and happily into life? By her indiscretions, by her need of complaining, should she expose again the existence of two men? But to what was she then destined?" Then she reflected how much irony there often is in circumstances! How in life, the simplest, the most frivolous things jostle often very closely the gravest events! Oh! if she could only leave Thessaly—depart for a distant country! But Heilighenthal, would he not follow her?

Such were the painful thoughts which beset her, when a visitor was announced to her; it was Walpurga de Heilighenthal, Waldemar's sister.

CHAPTER VII.

HEILIGENTHAL'S VISIT.

We have said that the young Countess Walpurga de Heiligenthal was the friend, the companion of the Princesses of Thessaly; she had been presented the evening before to the Ambassadors of Caucasus.

This young girl, together with the daughter of the grand mistress of ceremonies of the Thessalian Court, the worthy Countess le Langweilig, shared the duties of ladies of honor to the royal princesses. Walpurga was the favorite. Pretty, obstinate, amusing, she diverted the princesses by her witty and mischievous sallies; while the old maids of the grand mistress of ceremonies, (alas they had both been on the old maid's list for a long time!) had, thanks to the education given by their mamma become such extinguishers that Walpurga, in her mocking nature, said that she was astonished to see that the lamps and candles remained lighted when these two automatons appeared, very proper, moreover, but who were incapable of stirring only when set in motion by the maternal strings. Ah, one could not jest with Madame de Langweilig, whose first principle was that, in order to be worthy of appearing at court, one could not be silent enough, nor immovable enough. Walpurga, she dared everything, said everything; and that, although her heart was often very sad, for she did not advance in her love affairs.

The young princesses had often spoken to their father of the ennoblement of Haller, making him

comprehend perfectly why they desired it so much. But his majesty did not seize the bait.

Walpurga knew that her brother had had a little flirtation in Nice with Madame de Mineleko, but she was ignorant, however, that this marriage had been so near taking place.

She came this day, sent partially by her brother, for at breakfast, when their parents had left the table, Waldemar had said to her:

“Walpurga, thou desirest a title for him whom thou lovest! Dost thou not perceive where is the power which could lead to this elevation?”

Walpurga, at first, had not comprehended.

“How very short-sighted thou art, then!” exclaimed her brother. “To whom did the king pay such assiduous attention, yesterday evening?”

“To the new ambassadress.”

“Ah, well! believe me, make an intimate friend of this young woman. Go and see her to-day, and if thou knowest how to profit by my counsel, I doubt not that thy wishes will be speedily realized.”

Waldemar, in persuading thus his sister to this visit, was working as much in his own interest as in that of the young girl. During the night, kept awake by his thoughts, by his desires, he had made his calculations, erected his batteries. It seemed to him that it was absolutely necessary for the success of his projects, that he should have in the place some one on whom he could rely. Who better than a woman could even unconsciously assist him? Her very quality of a feminine creature would be a guarantee of security for Mineleko, whose jealousy and suspicions could not be awakened by the presence of a friend of his wife.

Now, Walpurga appeared to Waldemar the only

proper person to fill well the mission which he was going to entrust to her. Thus, according to him, this young girl could by a little diplomacy obtain the ennoblement of her betrothed if the beautiful ambassadress would interest herself in it with the king, and by some questions asked adroitly by her, keep Heilighenthal *au courant* with the habits of the princess.

Walpurga remained quite a long time with Najeska Ivanowna; they conversed on different subjects, skimming all lightly with wit and gayety, but by neither one was the name of Heilighenthal mentioned.

On the same afternoon, Waldemar came to present his homages to the princess.

There were already several persons in the drawing-rooms of the embassy when he was introduced there; this *contretemps*, so contrary to his wishes, was a relief to the terrors of the trembling Najeska Ivanowna, who did not apprehend anything as long as she was not alone with this rash young man. Notwithstanding his determination to weary every one by a visit prolonged beyond the limits of the most ordinary propriety, Waldemar was compelled to retire when, toward four o'clock, Mineleko, entering in the drawing-room, came to remind the ambassadress that some official visits, that could not by any pretext be deferred, demanded their attention.

The princess, after having graciously dismissed her guests, to whom she expressed many regrets at being obliged to leave them, departed with her husband for the receptions at which they were expected.

On returning at home, her astonishment was great when she found on a piece of furniture in her

chamber a letter from Heiligenthal, which had arrived during her absence. To remove it quickly was for her the work of a moment. What danger! what imprudence for him thus to write her! What would have happened if this missive had fallen into the hands of her husband, who, since their marriage, had always opened that which was addressed to his wife?

As soon as she was alone she anxiously broke the wax which sealed the envelope; the contents were as follows:

“Since you refuse to receive me in private, I will come this evening after the departure of your husband for the banquet of the ministers. Desiring to leave you all the time that is necessary for your dinner, I will not be with you until toward nine o’clock.”

Hardly had she finished perusing this short and insolent missive, than a great indignation, a profound contempt for the author of these few lines took possession of her.

Thus, this man was cowardly enough, base enough, to expect that he would succeed by force! What an opinion had he then of her? For whom did he take her? It was war, then, that he was declaring! Well, he shall see! By her disdain she would crush him in this struggle, and would make him yield.

She approaches her secretary, hastily writes an invitation for a lady of her acquaintance, and, to be sure of her acceptance, she gives the order to harness up quickly and bring her immediately to the embassy, where she will dine and spend the evening with her.

She felt calmer at the idea that a third person

would be with her if Waldemar dared to execute his threat. At no price would she consent to receive him alone, as long as she knows him to be in the disposition of mind in which he shows himself.

Without doubt the anger of this quick and passionate man was to be feared, but for the moment, in the soul of Najeska Ivanowna revolt had gained the ascendancy over every other sentiment, even over that of prudence.

Madame de H——, whom Madame de Mineleko had sent for, responded to the appeal of the princess.

When Heiligenthal, his heart all swollen with triumphant hope, arrived in the presence of the ambassadress, at the sight of this lady he comprehended the snare that Najeska had set for him.

The violence of the opposition which he experienced was so great, that he believed he was suffocating.

“Madame de H——,” said the princess, presenting her guest to him; “one of my kind acquaintances who comes to keep me company when the prince is compelled to absent himself. It is so tedious to dine alone! Is it not so, count?” added maliciously the young woman on presenting her white hand to the well-entrapped Heiligenthal, who, according to the Thessalian custom, would place a kiss upon the long and slender fingers.

Najeska Ivanowna was so indignant that a vivid flash of lightning shone in her eyes; one could easily read there: “Never! dost thou comprehend perfectly? never against my will, wilt thou extort from me that which I only grant voluntarily.”

For a moment, in the presence of this energetic woman, Waldemar felt confused, ashamed. But

rage soon predominated over all the tumultuous sensations which arose in him.

Is it thus, then, that she treats him? Then, no more scruples! all means will be fair to him, and it will be war to the knife that he will undertake to attain his end.

He clings to the hope, however, that perhaps Madame de H—— will retire before him. He waits, but in vain, for Najeska Ivanowna had in advance instructed her friend.

Madame de Mineleko had rarely been so beautiful. The struggle which she was commencing, and from which she wished to come out victorious, produced a brilliant color in her face, animated as much by indignation as by malice.

Dressed entirely in a cloud of white lace, upon her breast bloomed a bouquet of magnificent tea-roses, come from the royal conservatories of Heligothek. The king had sent them with a respectful message.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE BANQUET.

A new torture was reserved for the suspicious heart of Mineleko; truly, all seemed to conspire to make him uneasy.

At the banquet of the ministers, presided over by the king, the prince, as a high dignitary, occupied one of the places of honor. Not far from him was seated the minister of fine arts, a man whose wit, often wicked, was very renowned.

Suddenly the attention of the ambassador was briskly attracted by a piquant conversation exchanged between the minister and his neighbor. He comprehended immediately that they were speaking of his wife:

“Yes, she is so beautiful that our king has fallen in love with her, to such an extent that they say——”

“That they say—what?”

“That a second history, reversing that of Napoleon and Josephine, will soon be unfolded here. This time, it will be the beautiful ambassadress who will repudiate the legitimate husband to become Queen of Thessaly.”

“So, thou, buffoon! To hear you, would not one always believe that all improbabilities may be realized?”

“Pshaw! who lives will see!”

These words were a thunderbolt for the tortured heart of the prince. Become pale as death, he was about to speak, to summon, to arrest the insolent

fellow! But etiquette, inexorable etiquette is there. Notwithstanding the indignation which wrings him, he is silent and covers his countenance with the impassable mask of the diplomat, always master of himself.

“Prince, how is the lovely ambassadress? Here is to her health!” And the king, making a gracious inclination of the head, extended his glass to Mineleko.

Mineleko responded automatically, similar to a maniken which, being accustomed to move, when the mechanism is wound up, stops no more, whatsoever tumult may arise in it.

It was true, then; the king was really smitten with the princess! that young Count de Heilighenthal, whom he had seen one morning, was undoubtedly only sent by his sovereign.

“Accursed king! Brute!” These two epithets are the only ones formulated by his thoughts, goaded by an idea whose certitude became each day more notorious. “Besides, what other would dare pay court to an ambassador’s wife,” thought Mineleko, thoroughly imbued with his despotical Caucasian ideas, “when the monarch of the country is sighing for her. Ah! despicable king!”

When, quite late in the night, Mineleko returned home, his wife had retired. Madame de H——, well trained in the role which had been assigned to her, had departed, taking Heilighenthal with her, who had only yielded through the force of propriety.

Najeska Ivanowna was not asleep when her husband softly entered her chamber. At the sight of the prince, the unhappy woman, fatigued by the struggle which she had just undergone, yielded to an impulse of nervous weakness, of despair.

“Take me away, let us depart from here; I pray thee! Let us leave forever this country of Thesaly!”

Cowering, pressed against the broad breast of Mineleko, the unfortunate woman seemed to seek there a refuge, a support. Her nerves, at last unstrung, left her no hope, whatever way she turned; one alone should have remained to her: her husband. So it was in his arms that she threw herself, sobbing like a child escaped from a peril.

Mineleko regarded her with stupefaction. What was the matter with her? Did she love the king? From whence came this fear? Why did she wish to flee?

The ambassador was too severely bitten by jealousy to think of being tender, of being kind. He was awkwardly cold and constrained, and on this day, when it might have been so easy to win forever the confidence and affection of his young wife, he himself laid the first foundation of his misfortune.

Wounded by the attitude of her husband, poor Najeska Ivanowna, feeling that she could neither confide nor depend on him who ought to be her support, her friend, uttered a profound sigh, and, discouraged, she let herself fall on her pillows. All was over! Alone; what was going to become of her? to whom should she cling now?

CHAPTER IX.

THE OPIATE.

Three weeks had already elapsed since the arrival of the Prince and Princess of Mineleko in the capital of Thessaly. By dint of tact and skill, Najeska Ivanowna had hitherto succeeded in holding young Heiligenthal in check.

One evening that, meditative, she was alone in her chamber, the princess felt herself suddenly invaded by a great pre-occupation, a profound disquietude. The day had been oppressive, a burning sun had darted rays of fire upon the city; and this evening the atmosphere, completely charged with electricity, announced a tempest that great black and copper-colored clouds rendered imminent.

Poor Najeska Ivanowna was not suffering alone from the influence of nature; that which she experienced was more moral than physical.

The attentions of Heiligenthal were becoming more importunate than ever. The unhappy woman was obliged to confess it to herself; she would be soon at the end of her resources. The young man, furious at the care which she took to avoid him, revenged himself by making her weep at home, over letters, some more passionate and compromising than others. What skill was displayed that none might fall into the hands of her husband!

Heiligenthal was doing everything to bring about an open scandal, wherein would be engulfed at one stroke, the reputation, the happiness, the tranquillity of Najeska Ivanowna.

In each letter he demanded as a right the rendezvous which he had at first solicited; to-day, weary of waiting, he threatened: "If you persist in refusing me, I will introduce myself, in spite of you, by night in your apartment."

"But no, never," said Najeska Ivanowna to herself, "could he be so great a scoundrel!"

Then, in order to penetrate to her, he must have means, and, at night, all the passages were locked or guarded.

Alas! would she ever have been able to believe that one day this man, whom she had loved so much, would be the source of her sorrows, of her cares!

Like the dark and cloudy night, the heart of Najeska Ivanowna was filled with gloomy presentiments.

"Glascha," said she to her maid, upon the eve of retiring, "Glascha, is the window at the end of the corridor securely fastened?"

"Hermetically, Madame la Princess."

Hardly had the waiting-maid gone, than Najeska Ivanowna arose, and glided furtively along the corridor. This window, overlooking the garden, made her really afraid. A resolute man, who by any means whatever, should introduce himself in the park, could, by making use of the ivy-covered trellis which was on that side of the house, ascend to it. After having assured herself that all was well secured, that no danger was to be apprehended, she returned calmer to her apartment. It was quite late in the night, however, that she decided to retire.

She had so much to do during the day that it was necessary to encroach on her nights in order to find time for the thousand little nothings which are in

the province of a woman. The heat was depressing. She put on a long cambric dressing-gown and applied herself to the task of filling up the gaps in her ordinary occupations.

Toward eleven o'clock, according to his custom, her husband came to bid her good-night.

"You are not going to bed yet?" said he.

"No, my friend, I have a good many letters to write. And you?"

"I—I have had such a terrible attack of neuralgia, that I have had to send this evening for Geheimrath Schlotz (the court physician). To quiet me, he has just rubbed my temples with a chloroform mixture, and has left me an opiate that I must drink immediately. I am going to bed then, and try to sleep. Go you to bed also, it is late, and you know you have promised the young princesses to accompany them early to-morrow morning on their equestrian ride."

Mineleko went away, not without having cast upon his wife a look full of mistrust. The unhappy man passed three quarters of his life in always suspecting. This horseback ride with the princesses made him very uneasy; the king would certainly be with them! Doubtless it was for that very reason that he had not been invited. Thereupon his head commenced throbbing.

Arriving in his chamber, Mineleko, really suffering, took his potion and rubbed himself again with the chloroform mixture. Suffering intensely with the pain, he did not go to bed, however. Never had he felt so agitated, so incapable of sleeping, even in spite of the powerful soothing remedy with which he had anointed his forehead and the potion which he had taken. The idea of his wife wooed by the

king, the remembrance of that morning in which he had seen her on horseback escorted by Heiligenthal, over-excited his nerves, and, more than his physical sufferings, banished from his heavy eyelids the sleep of which he had so much need. For him, on this sleepless night, hours succeeding hours, passed mortally slow.

A profound quiet hovered over the embassy. Except himself, all were reposing peacefully. Nature seemed to invite him to a sleep by which alone he could recuperate from the fatigue which overwhelmed him; but the more profound was the silence, the greater also was the tumult of his passions.

His thoughts, similar to a light atom, were continually tossed about by the surge of his so often contradictory sensations.

Alone in the silence of the night he scrutinized the immense gulf of his agitated soul where anger, like a second life within his life, whirled unceasingly in the hell of his passions.

Without, like a soul in torment, the tempest commenced to moan.

The sky, darkened by the wind, permitted here and there its azure to be perceived, studded with pale stars whose brilliancy were diminished by the intensity of the darkness.

From time to time, a cloud heavier than the rest separated like one divides a piece of cotton, and each scattered particle floated away, vanishing in the immensity of space.

At equal intervals a dull rumbling was heard in the distance; a vivid flash of lightning left the horizon, precursor of a tempest that entire nature was awaiting.

All was dark. Alone, the white disk of the moon in her first quarter permitted from time to time her silhouette to appear through the fleet of clouds.

In spite of himself, Mineleko thinks of those descriptions of the Apocalypse, of those angels with unfolded wings, of those monsters, terrible hydras, of which the holy Bible gives a description. Truly, he is afraid.

All these things clash together in his aching head; he scarcely knows whether he is asleep or awake.

His limbs, broken by fatigue, refuse their office; the more active the mind, the more the body seems devoted to torture, to inertia.

As in a harp, whose lightly stretched cords vibrate at the slightest contact of the fingers which press it, thus his hearing, marvelously developed by the sensibility of his over-excited nerves, is of an extreme delicacy. From his secretary a paper falls to the floor; this noise, slight as it was, makes him start; a sudden and convulsive movement takes possession of him.

It had been impossible for him to tell for how long a time this sort of lethargy had lasted, when it appeared to him that his door was opened, that a light and gliding step advanced toward him.

Does he dream that a shadow holds a light raised above its head, or is it really some one who is before him? This woman, this vision, does she wish to assure herself that the prince is really asleep? Is that a real sigh which he hears breathed there, near him, or does he still continue to be the sport of a dream? But, however, this sigh, so laden with sorrow, appeared to proceed from the oppressed breast of a woman.

“Najeska Ivanowna, perhaps?”

Where is he? What fantastic dream bears him to the realms of the unknown?

Twice he believes to hear his name. This phrase has re-echoed near him:

“Boris—Boris Michailowitch!—are you asleep? I am afraid—the steps of a man have resounded in the garden—I pray you, awake!”

His hearing, although acute, perceives nothing—the murmurs of the wind, playing in the window-curtains, is all that he hears.

“My God! my God! if I could awaken him! But, no! he is as if thunderstruck. I tremble! What will become of me?”

These words, wailed by a voice wrung with terror, these deep sobs, painfully escaping from a wounded heart, do not get beyond his physical sensations, do not reach his intelligence. Inert, the body stupefied, he lays stretched out, in an immovable leaden sleep.

A minute passes, a sigh yet again floats trembling, fearful!—the steps retrace again the road which they have already followed; they withdraw—nothing more!

Although annihilated by the opiate, Mineleko, without rendering any good account to himself, vaguely asks himself if the voice which he has perceived is real, or whether he is under the influence of an halucination.

“Where is he?—what has taken place?”

Gradually the conception of life is completely extinguished. The anæsthetic effect of the chloroform makes itself felt more and more; his brain grows dull, his eyelids close, his ideas become confused—he no longer thinks—he sleeps profoundly. But, however, by a will stronger than nature, his

mind survives this numbness, remains alone awake,
and acts still

CHAPTER X.

A HORRIBLE DREAM.

However profound was the sleep of Mineleko, it was not able to resist a dull noise which re-echoed in the corridor scarcely an hour after he had fallen asleep. He trembles, he is agitated, he wishes to rise; but his languid limbs refuse to serve him; he falls back inanimate. In the troubled sleep which oppresses him, a dream, really a dream this time, takes possession of him.

He is aboard a ship, it seems to him that in his head re-echoes every movement of the pitching and the rolling that the surge of the waves impress upon a vessel.

It is like a jerking sound which, after a short pause, recommences more wearisome.

Nevertheless the dream continues still to unfold itself.

The vapor mutters, hisses, advances with all the rapidity of the engine. Its furnaces, propelled by an incessant fire, send a black and thick smoke that sputters in waves from the large high smokestack.

Geometrical lines, plunging profoundly in the eddies of the waves, chase precipitately far from each other, leaving behind them a large and hollow furrow, edged with foam.

In the east arises, soft and majestic, the light of the sun; all is flooded with it. The moon, with pale extinguished rays, descends slowly to the horizon; the polar heavens still constellated with their innumerable stars, sheds everywhere a magical en-

chantment which plunges the soul in an indescribable and melancholy reverie.

"Here," the great poet has said, "is fought the combat of day and night."

Mineleko, in the presence of this sublime spectacle, feels his chest, like the waves of the sea, alternately swell and subside. He contemplates, he admires; subjugated he falls on his knees, and alone in the presence of God, he adores the Creator in His magnificent creation.

Suddenly, similar to Our Lord, a woman advances on this sea, dragging after her the inanimate body of a man wounded to the death. This woman, with her hair floating over her shoulders, is supernaturally beautiful. A large and white garment envelops her like a shroud from head to foot. Terror glitters in her haggard eyes; the man whom she drags like painful burden is all stained with blood; the glittering rings which sparkle upon the hands of this vision, let you perceive the blackish red stains which cover her nervous and cold fingers. Is it she who has assassinated this man whose corpse seems riveted to her feet?

Filled with horror, the ambassador regards her convulsively.

From whence comes this unhappy wretch? what is the crime of this man? what is his chastisement? what are his features?

But that hair, so remarkable for its beauty, for its peculiar color, is that of his wife! Those deep eyes, of a dark blue, those noble and proud features, now pale and rigid like a marble mask, belong indeed to Najeska Ivanowna. He utters a terrible cry. Frightened, breathless, he arises; his hair is glued to his temples, which are bathed in a cold sweat; he

examines himself, he feels himself. Does he sleep, does he sleep still? His terror is so great that he remains there, rooted to the same spot; his efforts are vain; he cannot shake off the deadly torpor which has invaded him. But it is a dream, a vision—nothing of that which he has seen is true—his Najeska Ivanowna! his idol—his love!

Perceiving his face, that is reflected in a mirror opposite him, Mineleko realizes, perfectly, that he is now awake, and that he has just been the plaything of a frightful dream. He breathes. Suddenly an unusual noise is heard; something anomalous is happening. It is there—near him—within two steps—but benumbed, impotent he remains, nailed to his place. A sudden rage seizes him and chases away the last vestige of the anæsthetic.

During a few moments almost completely lucid, he seizes a light, and hastily penetrates in the corridor, where he believes that he has recognized the noise of a step that they seek to dissimulate.

Although his strength seems ready to abandon him, he rushes forward. Nothing! “He sees only the night, hears only the silence.” It seems to him, however, that a shadow arises, and, in less time than it requires to describe it, it disappeared by the window at the end of the corridor. This shadow has a body; it is a man. Who is it, that would dare to penetrate at this hour, in his residence? He wishes to know, but the night is dark, he cannot distinguish anything; he counts upon his light in vain, which he holds in the expectation of discovering an indication, one alone, to put him on the track of the criminal; but the wind, friend of the fugitive, blows out that last glimmer, and plunges him in profound darkness.

His head violently shaken by the annoyances of the day, by the terrifying visions of the night, and especially by this shadow which he believes to have seen fleeing in such a strange fashion, he wishes to run, to cry out, to alarm the house, but he cannot, he cannot! If an assassin should rise before him, with a raised knife, he could do nothing, nothing! he is so heavy, so benumbed.

A strange weariness possesses him, instinct alone guides him, stumbling, to his chamber. There, in this half-sleep, one detail alone is impressed upon his chloroformed brain; he has heard the old clock of the chateau strike one.

He feels that he has an imperative duty to fulfill, but the chloroform has already caused new phantasmagorical visions to arise, and he cannot recollect anything—he cannot recollect, and he falls back in his lethargic sleep filled with hallucinations.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE STUDIO.

The awakening of Mineleko was terrible, when on the next morning, he found himself completely dressed, opposite his bed, which remained intact. He did not comprehend what that signified. What had happened to him then? Had he dreamed or had he been the unconscious spectator of that lugubrious scene?

It is still early in the morning; hardly half past six.

One by one, all his recollections group themselves painfully in his thoughts.

He had seen that window wide open and a shadow leap out of it. What being then, if not the king, would have been so audacious? Was not public opinion pleased to affirm that the monarch was in love with his wife? Monsieur de Mineleko uttered a cry of rage; undoubtedly, Najeska Ivanowna has betrayed him.

Ambition, future, honor, all crumbled before this horrible discovery; for what can he do when his rival is a sovereign, the sovereign of the country to which he is accredited? If he refused to remain at his post, it would be necessary to send in his resignation, and then, would he obtain in exchange another equivalent to this?

Until now he had always doubted, although suspicious; his confidence was so great in the loyalty of the princess that he had refused to believe that this woman with eyes so clear, so frank, could

forget herself to the point of failing in her dignity of a wife, in her title of a mother; but the undeniable reality was there; he had seen a man, this man, ashamed at being discovered, had fled; his flight alone betrayed him. "Is it because one is king that one may permit oneself to take the wife of others?"

He remains for a long time absorbed in these painful reflections; but, reconsidering, he recovers from the discouragement which invaded him. He said to himself, "that he the energetic man, must act, must watch, in order to acquire a certainty. He would learn if his wife was faithful, and then, no more offensive suspicions, no more injurious doubts. But, if she was culpable, his vengeance would be as great as the immensity of her guilt."

During the time that he remains thus absorbed in his reflections, it seems to him that he hears an unusual running about, especially at this early hour. Doors were opened and shut, running steps were heard in every direction. Decidedly something is occurring.

He rings violently.

Vassili, his faithful valet, the same one who had served his father, appeared immediately. But in what a state!—his face is frightful, livid, unrecognizable.

"Monseigneur! monseigneur! Kassar—my brother—my poor brother, has been assassinated this very night! Not finding him in his chamber and surprised at his delay, he so punctual in his duties, I have sought him everywhere, and I have at last discovered him in the garden, at the foot of the window of the corridor, stretched out dead, stark dead! His visage was coated with a thick coating of mud accumulated by the night's rain; his arms extended

as if in supreme supplication, were already cold with the icy coldness and rigidity of death. Ah! monseigneur—monseigneur! what a loss for me!”

This recital was often interrupted by the sobs that Vassili uttered. It was sickening to see the desolation of this old servant; Mineleko was himself stricken by it.

However, notwithstanding the pity which invades his soul, his disquieted mind recovers itself; he perceives that this dream, this hallucination which he had believed to be a chimera, is indeed a reality, and that shadow which he had believed to have seen spring out the window, takes a body in this corpse, which was appearing in all its austerity.

All these reflections had been cruel, imprudent even, to tell to this unhappy brother.

“We must immediately,” said he, “send for a physician and assure ourselves if all hope of life is really lost, then, at the same time they will inform the commissary of police of all those events, as astonishing as frightful. Wait, my poor Vassili, my poor fellow,” the prince kindly added, “here are some lines from me; give this card to one of the valets, that he may run and deliver it as quickly as possible.

Vassili, blinded by tears, choked by the sobs of an unlimited despair, went out staggering.

Immemorable thoughts proceeding from those sad discoveries, were revolving in the mind of the Prince of Mineleko. So, he had really heard those sounds, in the passage, on the preceding night. It was then that the murder must have been committed! Greatly agitated by all those ideas which incoherently succeeded each other, he leaves his apartment and goes to examine minutely the corri-

dor which he regards as the theater of the scene. There is not a stain of blood which may justify his fears, his suspicions, nothing anomalous indicates that a struggle has taken place; only, in some places the carpet appears a little rumped.

After this inspection, the Prince of Mineleko repairs to the chamber of his wife. The hasty rap which he gives at the door awoke or appeared to awaken the ambassadress, who came herself to admit him; for nearly always during the night, she kept herself locked in.

Najeska Ivanowna was horribly pale. In a few hurried words, Boris Michailowitch related to her all that had transpired. On hearing the frightful history of this dreadful night she uttered a terrible cry.

"Kassar! our brave and faithful Kassar is dead! —and was assassinated, moreover! Oh, it is impossible! impossible!

"Assassinated or committed suicide. However, the commissary will be here in a moment; he will perhaps solve for us this hideous doubt. But suddenly the prince stopped, looking amazed at some stains of blood on the pedestal of a bust of the princess which was near the door of her chamber.

"What is this?" demanded he of Najeska Ivanowna.

The ambassadress falters, starts.

"This? Ah! I recollect; my nose bled last night, and it must have dropped on the marble."

But she trembles so violently while speaking that a frightful suspicion enters the heart of her husband. A strange instinct made him arise as if he wished to run to the wash basin and remove those stains. But he stopped on the way and recovered his icy coldness.

"I advise you, madam," said he, stiffly, "to wash that marble. The investigating magistrate and the police, when they arrive, will make undoubtedly a domiciliary visit."

The princess obeyed. Going to her toilet-table, she returned with a brush covered with soap. It was in trembling like a leaf that she accomplished her task, which fully succeeded. At the end of a few moments there remained no trace of the blood.

Mineleko, almost as agitated as she, left the princess to repair to the corpse. Some minutes after, the commissary arrived, followed by a multitude of idlers, for, even at the residence, the curious abound and spring up everywhere when a sensational event is in question.

The rabble remained, to be sure, massed before the entrance door, which was closed upon them.

"Permit no one whatever from without to penetrate either in the garden or in the palace," said the commissary; and to assure himself that his orders will be faithfully executed, he places police before all the exits. This arrangement of force and of precautions was not unnecessary, for the crowd which was increasing continually, became difficult to restrain.

I, accompanied by a physician who had been hastily summoned, the commissary, by whose side Mineleko was at present walking, followed by nearly all the servants of the embassy, proceeded toward the chamber whither Vassili and several other servants had carried their inanimate comrade.

Kassar was extended on his bed; a cloth piously thrown over the unfortunate victim, showed by its folds the rigid outlines of the corpse upon whose

breast rested a Russian cross, that the devout hands of his brother had placed there.

The commissary and the doctor bent over the unfortunate victim.

“Some light!” said the physician, briefly; and the curtains, religiously closed, were immediately drawn aside.

This first examination, very summary moreover, proved that the vertebral column had been broken as if by a fall, and that in consequence, death, which had set in for several hours already, had been sudden.

“From this fact,” added the physician, “two hypotheses may be deduced. Either this man has thrown himself voluntarily out of the window, and we are in the presence of an ordinary suicide, or he has fallen out accidentally, unless he has been thrown out by a criminal hand, and then we have to learn who the murderer is and seek for him; for if the cause escapes us, the effect is here undeniable, in all its horror.”

At this accusation of suicide which was going to rest upon the memory of his brother, Vassili was indignant.

“Never, no never, Kassar has never killed himself!” cried he, as much afflicted as outraged. “My poor brother had too much faith, too much piety to commit such a crime. Ah! doctor, if my brother has fallen from this window, some one has pushed him out, be convinced of that!”

Vassili was still speaking when Mineleko, pale with that solemn pallor which covers the visage at the gravest moments of life, advanced toward the representative of justice and requested that he might be permitted to speak in his turn.

“This very night, with my own eyes, I have seen, or I believe I saw, a man leap out of that window; but the night was so dark, the obscurity so intense, that I supposed that I was mistaken; then the influence of the chloroform, employed in the evening to alleviate neuralgic pains, was such that in spite of my will, it was impossible for me to act. I was as if annihilated.” Then briefly he related all that which had impressed him during this stupor impossible to subdue.

The deposition of Mineleko was regarded by the commissary as very serious and very important who, not taking in consideration enough the anæsthetic condition of the prince during the preceeding night, considered it inexplicable that, even having only believed to have seen a man jump out of the window, he had not aroused the whole house and made immediately the necessary researches in order to assure himself if he was really the sport of nervous excitement. All this seemed to him at least very strange, very astonishing, and perhaps he was going to communicate his reflections to the doctor, when the doctor suddenly exclaimed:

“Look, then! but look then at that which I have discovered after a second examination of the body!”

At these words, all eyes were anxiously directed on the hand of the physician who displayed the neck of the unfortunate Kassar.

There they saw plainly the imprint of ten frantic fingers by which he had surely been strangled. Everybody remained silent in the presence of this new disclosure.

“Sapristi! a powerful hand has caused this death,” exclaimed the commissary. “The unfortunate man must have passed from life to death without even

having had the time to know where he was or how to utter a single cry!"

"If these incontestable marks of strangulation have at first escaped my observation," said the physician, interrupting the tragic-comical exclamation of the commissary, "it was because my attention having been first concentrated on the breaking of the back, had prevented me from thinking of removing the cravat of the victim."

In fact, the corpse was still clothed the same as the commissary had found it on his arrival.

No more uncertainty; Kassar had been strangled! That dull noise that Mineleko had heard, was that of his body dragged with difficulty toward the window from whence the corpse had been thrown into the garden. The man whom the ambassador had seen leap out was then, incontestably, the murderer of his faithful servant.

"There is not an instant to lose to inform the justice of peace," said the commissary, "and also to take this report to court in order to entreat as quickly as possible the presence of the investigating magistrate. For my part, while waiting for those gentlemen, I am going to proceed with a provisional inquiry. Bring me the witnesses."

One of the first things to do, and what must be done moreover, is to search if it is yet possible to find and follow some traces of footsteps in the garden. But the storm during the night had inundated the garden and thus effaced all impressions. Immense pools of water were extended on all sides, as much upon the turf as upon the gravel, thus it was materially impossible to know whether the criminal had escaped or whether he must be sought for among the household.

The whole morning passed lugubriously, excitedly, at the embassy.

The investigating magistrate arrived an hour after having been informed.

The depositions of the witnesses so far interrogated were incoherent, incomplete, without any definite result. There was little or nothing to be learned from that quarter.

One of the nurses, however, who slept with the children in the upper story, had heard some noise and had even risen. She had gone to the door of Glascha, the chambermaid of the princess, whose room adjoined her own. But she had tranquillized her; their master, very passionate, very violent, often had scenes with their mistress, even during the night; then he would fly into a passion, and for nothing he would utter the loudest cries.

"It is probably he that you heard, and Kassar, who sleeps on the ground floor, near the entrance door, watches so well that you have nothing to fear," the chambermaid had added, endeavoring to quiet the nurse.

Moreover, all had very quickly returned to the habitual calm.

A Thessalian hostler, recently dismissed, gave some details still more precise about the passionate temperament of the prince. But there was nothing to extract from the Caucasian servants of the ambassador, and the magistrate remained morally convinced, in his own mind, that Mineleko after having in a fit of rage strangled his old Kassar, had thrown the body out of the window, a suspicion, however, which he could not openly declare, the indications which he had being neither conclusive enough nor

precise enough to enable him to formulate a regular file of accusation against Boris Michailowitch.

When the interrogation of Glascha came, this girl compelled to make the sign of the cross, executed all sorts of contortions, then she fainted and had a long hysterical fit, during which some incoherent phrases, void of sense and words, escaped from her breast. This was all that they were able to extract from her.

The Princess of Mineleko, questioned in her turn, responded that she had heard nothing of the assassination until the hour when her husband came to announce it to her that same morning.

“When and by whom has the victim been seen for the last time, either during the day or during the night?” demanded the magistrate.

This point was difficult to unravel, to solve, Kassar sleeping alone down stairs.

When, after their work completed, all the servants had ascended to their rooms, he also had gone to his chamber. And afterward, not a sound, not a cry, which could attract attention or require investigation.

No one, outside the prince and the nurse, had then seen or heard anything.

The grave and compromising fact which had so strongly impressed the commissary (of Mineleko keeping quiet when he thought he had seen a man leap out of the window), struck the magistrate also. But all his suspicions were dissipated when the Geheimrath Schlotz, court physician, a man whose honor and integrity was known to all, called by the magistrate, affirmed to the two magistrates upon the faith of the most sacred oaths, that he had left an opiate with Mineleko and that before leaving

him he had himself rubbed his temples with an anæsthetic mixture, whose lethargic symptoms described by the prince were really those which almost infallibly occurred after such a medication.

In these circumstances, before this deposition of the prince of science, the recital of Mineleko became more probable and consequently they credited it. From that time, they thought no more of disturbing him about an event of which he had been the unconscious witness.

Hardly was the first inquest terminated, than the prince and his wife repaired to the dressing-room of the princess.

The young ambadress was very much agitated, very much impressed with all that had just transpired, for she was sincerely attached to the poor old man. Throwing herself upon her couch, she appeared overwhelmed. She burst suddenly in convulsive weeping. Mineleko, very much frightened, immediately administered a soothing remedy. Notwithstanding the terrible suspicion which had entered his mind at the sight of those drops of blood on the pedestal of the statue, his heart was affected with an immense compassion at the sight of his wife's sufferings. And she, did she believe her husband guilty of the crime? or had her subtle feminine instinct discovered that the suspicions of the magistrate resting on him would create a dangerous situation for her?

The tenderness of Mineleko suddenly became cold and surly again. Najeska Ivanowna perceiving this change, was frightened; an alarming shivering seized her.

"Of what are you thinking, Boris Michailowitch?" said she, close to him. "Of that blood which you

have seen upon the statue? I assure you its production is such as I have indicated to you."

"Najeska, may I, can I believe you? Ah! if you knew how much I am disheartened by all this terrible business!"

"Yes, it is dreadful! dreadful!" said she.

Mineleko was silent during a moment; then fixed his eyes on his young wife:

"Najeska Ivanowna," said he, solemnly, "have you really heard nothing last night as you have just sworn to the magistrate? Was it really I who apprised you of this murder?"

"But, I assure you! I swear it to you, my friend!"

She became pale, however.

"But, however, the man that I believed I saw has most assuredly introduced himself in our house!"

Najeska Ivanowna answered nothing, then said suddenly:

"How do you suppose that one could penetrate by night in a house of which all means of ingress are so rigidly closed?" demanded she.

"They could if some one in the house was in collusion with them. Ah! Najeska, if you know anything and you have concealed it, your guilt would be great!"

"Is it I then that you are going to suspect?" cried the ambassadress. "Ah! I imagined it when I saw you looking at that blood! Oh, is it your dreadful jealousy which is awakening again, to inspire you with the thought that I have let a man enter this night? My God! what woman has ever suffered as I have, and that always on account of chimeras! You ought to know at last, however, that I would not deceive you for a kingdom! Why is it that death, that I so ardently desire, does not come to

deliver me from a life that you render so odious to me, and to which alone my poor little daughters attach me!"

She spoke passionately, and in presence of this grief so genuine, Mineleko sorrowfully bowed his head. She was perfectly right! What unlikelihood, what improbabilities had he not invented in order to excuse the outrageous scene which he was making!

"Najeska Ivanowna, pardon me and love me!—me alone! Do you seriously affirm that I have dreamed last night?"

His regard was so ardent, so sinister, that the princess grew pale. Then, endeavoring to recover her countenance, she said to him:

"You speak in enigmas, my friend, and I have never been skillful in solving them. I have heard nothing last night, I repeat it to you. What I think, is that Kassar on making his last round in the house, has perhaps believed to hear, or that he has really heard, some thieves in the garden; that he has then leaned quickly out of the window and that, losing his equilibrium, he must have fallen and must have broken his back. If he has really found some malefactor there, which is almost certain, since some one must have committed the assassination, they have strangled him to force him to silence. If the thieves have not dared to enter in the house, it is that they have probably seen you at the window, since you say that you were there with your light. But let us cut short this painful conversation; I should be pleased if you would leave me alone a moment, for really, after these terrible emotions, I am suffering very much, and I have an excruciating headache."

Saying this, she hastily arose and went to immerse in a basin of cold water her pretty face, all disfigured by tears and agitation; then, in order to be able more easily to press upon her neck, long and flexible as that of a swan, her sponge completely saturated with perfumed water, she let slowly slip her muslin dressing-gown. Then, from the elegant red satin corset, which imprisoned her graceful and exquisite form, from some slender bands of lace which were delineated upon her pearly shoulders, her beautiful bust, her rosy and white flesh escaped.

Mineleko, enchanted, fascinated, seized anew with passion, forgot for a moment his uneasiness and the terrible gravity of the circumstances.

Springing forward, he imprinted a burning kiss upon this snowy bosom and swore to his wife "that all that which she would tell him, all! all! he would blindly believe." The ambadress smiled sadly while putting on again her dressing-gown. She knew that this paroxysm of confidence would last no longer than the others.

After having left the princess and re-entered his chamber, Mineleko began to pace the floor feverishly. Was it true that the noise which he thought he had heard had escaped all except that superstitious nurse? Was it true that the princess also, during the night, had seen nothing, known nothing? But that stain on the marble, that blood that his wife at his advice had so eagerly washed in order to remove it! Najeska Ivanowna has furnished him, however, with a plausible excuse. Why should this explanation be false, after all? If it was she, however, why deny it?

From whom came this blood? If there has been a struggle it is the young woman then who has been

attacked; but by whom? And how is it that Kassar is dead? If, having heard a struggle in the apartment of the princess, he had entered there and the assassin had struck him, Najeska Ivanowna would know it. And she denies it! she denies all! If she lies it is because she loves the assassin then and wishes to save him.

A terrible combat between the suspicion which overwhelms and the love which excuses is waged within him.

If it was the king! How to discover that fact, for which he would have given ten years of his life?

But, to the point, did he not know all the aides-de-camp of the king, all the dignitaries of the palace? Why should he not go to them and adroitly question them?

His resolution is taken.

Behold him then, upon the little dead and sleepy square of the residence city; where one may see the grass grow upon which no indiscreet foot comes to trod. At the same time as he, a man traverses it: it is Count Adlersward, the favorite aide-de-camp of the king.

“Wait,” said the count, “this happens admirably; I was going directly to your house to inquire about this terrible affair.”

Mineleko, subduing his agitation, regulated his steps by those of the aide-de-camp. After he had spoken of the assassination he asked:

“How is his majesty this morning?” demanded he, coming to the point.

“As always, very well. But wherefore this sudden disquietude for a health which rarely leaves anything to be desired?”

“For nothing—nothing. Only, I was informed

yesterday that his majesty had retired very early, and I was afraid that he might be indisposed."

"They have told you that?"

"Yes."

"Ah, well! they were wrong. His majesty has played piquet peaceably until one o'clock in the morning."

One o'clock in the morning! It was precisely at this hour that the man had leaped out of the window; he knew it, for although half asleep, we recollect, he had heard the big bell of the chateau at the moment when he re-entered his chamber. It was not Charles Ferdinand then.

However, Mineleko said to himself that if he whom he had perceived was the king, for fear of an indiscretion the monarch would have given to all the aides-de camp the formal order to say that which Adlersward had just communicated to him.

During the whole day, the embassy, generally so quiet, was the theater of a perpetual coming and going.

Mineleko awaited the night with great impatience. This man, generally so intelligent, was blinded to such an extent by suspicion and jealousy, that he imagined that the individual who had already come not being able during the day to find an opportunity to communicate with the princess, would perhaps return at night to concert with his sweetheart or his accomplice, for, in his tenor and his rage, he firmly believed at times that Najeska Ivanowna was either the one or the other.

The dinner of the husband and wife passed in almost absolute silence. Both of them were disheartened. Najeska Ivanowna furtively watched

the prince, divining probably that which was passing in him.

She was seized by a nervous trembling; she was afraid; her eyes did not dare to encounter those of her husband.

When the hour in which they always separated arrived, Madame de Mineleko arose, and bidding him a timid "Good-night," wished to retire.

The prince, half furious with himself for being capable of suspecting her, but, however, not being able to hinder himself from doing so, experienced a sudden revulsion before the mild, lovely eyes of his wife.

"Najeska Ivanowna, remain!" he entreated. "Dost thou not desire that we may pass the night together? Dost thou not wish that we may confide to each other all that which we have in our hearts, as in the first days of our marriage?" said he, suddenly coaxing her, a habit which also recalled the first days of their marriage.

"As you like," responded Najeska Ivanowna, "but I am so fatigued that I would be grateful to you if you would let me rest."

The ambassador did not try to retain her; it is true that he imagined himself to have so much to watch this night, that an absolute solitude was indispensable to him. The response of his wife, was for his jealous heart, a confirmation that she was expecting some one.

Hardly alone, Mineleko breathed a profound sigh; he went to a table upon which a statuette of his wife was placed, he contemplated it passionately. What were his thoughts? He was frightened at the anxiety which agitated him, for if Najeska Ivanowna was guilty, the police would sooner or later

discover it, and the most fearful chastisement would crush this ravishing creature who, in spite of all his suspicions, all his jealousies, he loved above everything.

If he had opened the door at this moment he might have seen Najeska Ivanowna, very pale, standing listening, her hands convulsively pressed against her breast.

The prince was determined to watch all night, and wishing to inspect all himself, he made the tour of the apartments.

Several entrances gave admittance to the hotel of the embassy. First, there was the door of honor for the master, the visitors and the more honored guests, then that which was reserved for the use of the domestics, the employes and the tradesmen. Then a third called the little private door, which gave on the garden with which all the windows at the back were on a level.

When the footsteps of the servants were completely extinguished, when a death-like silence seemed to cover with leaden wings the entire palace, when all appeared asleep except those who were watching the corpse, Mineleko went himself to assure himself that people and things were all in their proper places. He examined the windows of the saloons, he strengthened the bolts, he felt and shook feverishly all the exits, which, however, were firmly closed—nothing to fear on that side.

At each of the two principal doors a sentinel was posted, left by the commissary of police. Some Caucasian servants of the prince were conversing in low tones with them.

The garden entrance and the private exit, which appeared more appropriate for a clandestine visit,

was intrusted to two colossal Tartars esteemed for their devotion, and for greater security they let loose in the garden the big dog "Nero," a magnificent beast who was worth alone as a guard two of the most resolute men.

After all these precautions, taken as much by the police as by the Prince de Mineleko, he returned to his apartment, which was opposite that of his wife. All was tranquil and dark in the house. In the chamber of the dead, only, many candles were burning as in a chapel. Vassili and two or three Caucasians servant-women were kneeling before the sacred Russian images with which they had piously surrounded it, and were watching the corpse while reciting the prayers of the orthodox church.

On re-entering his chamber, the prince extinguished his lamp so that Najeska Ivanowna should believe him asleep, and would feel herself thus more serene, more quiet, if she really was in collusion with the man, who had come the preceding nights and whom she was doubtless expecting again.

In the chamber of the princess, all appeared plunged in the most profound obscurity. Mineleko breathed a sigh of relief in believing that she was resting. Did his jealousy, which was making him so miserable, positively deceive him?

Was Najeska Ivanowna really ignorant of this apparition of the preceding night? But wherefore those red stains upon the marble, those stains of blood! But, after all, why should not the suppositions of his wife as to the manner in which Kassar had met his death be exact. That man who had introduced himself in the house was perhaps only a simple thief, attracted by the allurements of a rich booty. The unfortunate Kassar had probably sur-

prised him, and thus as the princess pretended to suppose, the scoundrel had killed him to prevent him from summoning witnesses.

Several thefts had been committed a short time since in the peaceful residence. It was scarcely two months ago that all the papers of the Illyrian embassy had been stolen. On the other hand, nothing was missing, nothing was broken in the house, and the profile of the man who had so rapidly disappeared had nothing of a thief. He listened at the partition of his wife's door; not a sound was heard.

Thus, without a light, Mineleko, completely dressed, had thrown himself in his arm-chair. Bless me! how long the night seemed to this man who, notwithstanding his lassitude, did not wish to let sleep gain upon him, and remained thus for some hours, with ears on the watch!

The spring evenings, a little cool, necessitated some fire toward night. At present, there being no fuel to feed the fire, it was slowly dying out in the large white porcelain stove; the penetrating cold of the night was gradually invading this chamber, that a very small night-lamp was feebly lighting. Placed near the princess' bed, it threw its feeble light upon all the surrounding objects, and gave to them a fantastic form.

Not a sound which fills, even by night, the gay and broad streets of large cities, was heard in this little quiet town. At such an hour the carriages which by their weight shake the causeways, and the steps of belated pedestrians, are sounds completely unknown here. Here nothing, nothing of all that comes to disturb the peaceful repose of our good Thessalian citizens.

Suddenly the large cracked bell of the old chateau

begins to ring. Eleven strokes at equal intervals breaks the silence of the night; then all relapses into silence. A quarter of an hour passes; another is added to the preceding one, and always the same unbroken silence.

Decidedly, Mineleko is mistaken, nothing unusual will transpire. Impatient, agitated, the prince feels that he can remain no longer in his apartment without becoming insane. He is suffocating.

In the hotel of the Caucasian ambassador there was a large apartment in which Madame de Mineleko painted. She had a very fine amateur talent. It was there in that atelier, more spacious and more airy than the other rooms of the house, that Mineleko resolved to take refuge in order to be able to go and come without awaking his wife, whom he supposed to be asleep.

Shod consequently in slippers with cork soles, he ascends, groping to find his way. Like a thief, he holds a dark lantern, ready to turn it on the face of whoever he would encounter.

Arrived at the top of the stairs, he continues to guide himself with his hand until at last he reaches the studio. This large room occupies all the back part of the second story. Mineleko breathes at last. An icy temperature soothes agreeably the burning forehead of the jealous husband. No danger of any one surprising him here; he will be able then to circulate and reflect at his leisure.

He softly closes the door. Before pulling the cord which lowers the large window of the apartment, he listens again. No noise without. In the garden the watch-dog Nero, that the slightest rustling of a leaf causes to bark, lays outstretched, his noble head resting upon his fore paws. In the sleeping

house, not the least movement. All is tranquil. Then, his hands behind his back, his head bent forward, profoundly absorbed in his reflections, in his thoughts, he commences his promenade. Will it compose him?

Everything in this room recalls to him her whom he adores, and who will make him insane with jealousy; for he cannot rid himself of the idea that the king has come. The large low divans, the easels standing about, the palettes still furnished with paint, the half-finished paintings; all are impregnated with her. A canvas larger than the others turned against the wall attracts his attention.

He approaches it: what can that be? He turns it around and illuminates it with the rays of his lantern. There, living, so much it resembles him, stands the king, in full uniform. Mineleko, like Macbeth on seeing the specter of Banquo, utters a smothered cry.

“He! always he! He comes then to pose here, and I am ignorant of it!”

As it was continually happening to him, the unhappy man was deceiving himself, for this portrait Najeska Ivanowna was painting from a large photograph, and she had destined this work as a bridal present to the Princess Agusta.

Brought back to reality by the ludicrousness of his situation, Mineleko was afraid. If Najeska had heard him! In his confusion he does not perceive that a little side door giving on the other side of the studio is open. He was so much absorbed in the furious contemplation of this picture, which he felt was executed as much by the heart as by the brush, that he did not hear a dull sound like that of a muffled footstep approaching him.

Suddenly, a slender thread of light falls in the studio. The prince is dismayed. What vision is going to appear to him again? He holds his breath. He waits.

In the meantime the light is increasing, the steps are becoming more distinct. This time, he does not dream! At all events he will assure himself.

With his back turned to the door, his lantern closed, and himself concealed behind the portrait, it is impossible that any living being or phantom which comes may be able to see him; but, with a great presence of mind, he blows the lantern entirely out and goes quickly and crouches behind an immense tapestry which conceals one of the entrances of the atelier.

The footsteps stop; a hand pushes the door open, and a woman, the princess, clothed in a long white dressing-gown, her hair unconfined over her shoulders, advances, lighted by a lamp which she holds in her hand; she walks softly, with precaution, as if seeking a lost object. She searches everywhere, examines all the corners of her studio; nothing! She goes toward a secretary where she generally writes, and of which she alone possesses the key. All the papers, all the drawers are minutely examined. At each unsuccessful search, a genuine despair manifests itself; before this fruitless inspection real sobs escape from her parched throat:

“My God! my God! it will be dreadful if I cannot find it!” cries she at last.

Mineleko, whose arteries are beating almost to bursting, anxiously awaits the termination of this revealing scene. Now he trembles more than ever at being discovered, for he feels that he touches the key to the enigma; his impatience is difficult to

restrain; a violent desire to run to her, to question her, takes possession of him.

After having searched all the rest of the apartment, Najeska Ivanowna directs her steps directly toward the place where he remains on the watch. Suddenly she espies a paper upon the floor which has hitherto escaped her observation; she utters a cry of joy and hastily springs forward to pick it up. She is saved!

In a minute Mineleko's resolution is taken. Noiselessly he glides toward her. Absorbed as she is in the contemplation of her happy discovery, she does not hear him. Suddenly she feels a warm breath breathing on her shoulder chilled by the icy air of this room. Her light is extinguished, and a burning hand alights upon her arm and snatches the paper from her. The promptitude with which this was done, the terror which possessed her, paralyzes her strength; the cry which she wishes to utter remains strangled. Nevertheless, the power of action returns to her; she struggles, she seeks this invisible enemy whom she wishes to overthrow; but in the midst of the dark night it is only in groping that she can hope to seize him. Vain efforts! like a slimy reptile, he slips between her trembling fingers and her hands only beat the empty air.

Her aggressor has gone then? No—he is still there, perhaps. In this absolute darkness, he is going to seize her, to assassinate her! Her teeth chatter, her limbs bend under her; what is going to happen to her?

Like a statue of fright, she remains immovable, petrified; she tries to persuade herself that she has had a bad dream, that her timid imagination alone delineates; undoubtedly the midnight air penetrat-

ing by a half-open casement, must have at the same time extinguished her light, and drawn from her hand the precious paper. She stoops, she hopes to find it; vain hope!

It seemed that death, grimacing hideously, was beside her. In the over-excitement of her senses, she imagined she heard a dull confused sound, reverberating rapidly like the percipitate beating of a terrified heart, and this sound augmented intensely. Then she knew the paroxysm of terror.

Suddenly midnight struck slowly, dolefully. At the last stroke of the bell, she heard footsteps running up the stairs; some one, opening violently the door, introduced a bright light in the room. It was one of the old servants of the princess.

In making his round in the garden he had seen a light in the studio, ordinarily always dark at this hour of the night. This light being extinguished, it was only after having finished his inspection that he had decided to ascend to ascertain if all was in good order there. As soon as the princess perceives him, her nerves abruptly relax at the sight of this unexpected deliverer, she throws herself upon him and clings to him in such a manner that the man believes that she has become insane.

“What is the matter with you, Madame la Princess?”

The young woman turns in every direction her eyes that terror renders immoderately large.

“Hush! hush!” said she. “Listen—there is some one here. A man has come, he has extinguished my light, he has snatched something from me that I held in my hand, then he has disappeared.”

The fingers of the young woman stiffen desperately on the arm of the old man, and while speaking

she continues to cast terrified glances around her. Her body shakes with convulsive trembling, breathlessly she resumes:

“Listen—but listen then! There is some one here, I tell you, some one who breathes. This respiration I hear distinctly. Save me, Wladimir Wladirmiro-witch, save me! I implore you!”

“Come, Madame la Princess, calm yourself and come with me. I am going immediately to call the police and search the whole house.”

“No, no!” cried the princess, seized suddenly with fright on thinking of the lost paper and alarmed at the idea that an interposition of the police might perhaps reveal all that which she wished to conceal.

“No, Wladimir, I was dreaming. I am mistaken, there was no one here; only reconduct me to my chamber. It is in the delirium of terror that I have spoken unreasonably.”

CHAPTER XII.

“OH, INFAMOUS CREATURE!”

As soon as he had seized the paper snatched from his wife, without thinking of her terror, the prince, trembling with fury, descended to his room.

Arrived in his chamber, he locked and bolted his door and in great haste he opened the note. It contained only these words in a disguised hand:

“When will you grant me, then, the rendezvous which you have promised me? I cannot, I will not wait much longer.”

A date, that of the morning before the murder, but no signature. It was after this letter that the assassin had entered.

Mineleko, his eyes riveted upon these few lines, was as if magnetized. The concentration of his regard seemed to desire to draw from this inanimate object the name of him who had traced them. Like those of a tiger athirst for blood, they all appeared by the fire alone which escaped from their orbits, ready to annihilate this accusing paper which his contracted hands were crushing. Suddenly, a frightful spasm disfigured his countenance.

“One does not burn the proofs of the culpability of his wife!” cried he, with rage. “Oh! infamous creature, who has played comedy so excellently to me this morning! How thou deceivest me! and wherefore? For ambition, for venality to become the mistress of a king! Wretch! wretch! and perhaps a homicide.”

And like an intoxicated man who essays vainly to stand up, at each of those exclamations, he made

a tottering step. It was in stumbling that he reached his secretary; like an inert mass, he let himself fall upon a chair; his head struck heavily upon the marble shelf, and, from that shock, a terrible sound re-echoed.

Then, as if he had become mad, frightful laughter, atrocious sobs escaped from his breast.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLANS TO DESTROY THE KING.

When, on the next morning, after that terrible night, Najeska Ivanowna arose, she was very pale. Her nerves had suffered such a great shock that she was still very tremulous. Should she speak of this occurrence to her husband?

Notwithstanding the denials of the princess, Wladimir, with the other men and the police, had carefully searched all the corners of the house and the studio, and nothing suspicious had appeared to them anywhere. The old man had come to render an account of this visit to his mistress; but, in spite of the certainty of having found no one, the brave man had remained none the less frantic with disquietude, and had he not occasion for being so? A crime committed the day before; a man leaping out of the window and seen by his master; and, now, his mistress declares that an unknown person, after having extinguished her light, had snatched a note which she was holding in her hand; all that was as frightful as mysterious.

Najeska Ivanowna was tortured by a fixed idea: if this unknown was her husband! Then, the few words so compromising were in his power, something a thousand times more terrible than if they had fallen in the hands of a thief. My God! what to do to regain possession of that letter?

The princess did not know what to decide upon. If she was silent about this incident to the prince, and if it was he who had surprised her, the circum-

stance would appear to him ambiguous and he would pass from suspicion to certitude. It was more prudent then to tell him all. She decided to do so, and immediately sent Glascha to beg the prince to come to her.

If Najeska Ivanowna was pale, Mineleko was livid. He had reflected a great deal during the night. The author of this anonymous letter and the murderer was without doubt the same person; but to deliver this letter to the magistrate was a positive peril for Najeska, if, by a frightful hazard, she was the accomplice of the murderer. What an atrocious disgrace, both for her and for him!

Although tortured by the thought that he was thus deceiving justice, and was allowing the murderer to escape unpunished, on account of his wife, whom he would shield at any price, he could not act otherwise.

His anger against Najeska was terrible, but, however, the more it increased the more his passion and his love for her increased.

When he entered, although self-contained and very courteous, his wife was perturbed; she had the presence of one of those misfortunes of which the expectation alone freezes you.

“You have sent for me? What do you want of me, dear Najeska Ivanowna?” said he, with a diabolical smile.

Madame de Mineleko, frightened by this insane conduct which, in spite of the very evident desire of her husband to subdue, was manifested in him, felt dying in her throat the words which she wished to pronounce; she was only able now to look at him with terror.

“It seems to me, madam, that you have something to communicate to me?”

“Madam!” He called her “madam!”

Najeska Ivanowna still kept silent.

For the third time her husband reiterated his demand. Then, making a great effort over herself, she decided to speak.

“Last night, my friend——”

She could not say any more.

“And what took place, last night?”

“Last night——”

She was silent again before the strange looks of her husband. At last, she took an irrevocable resolution. He must be told all. Without subterfuge she revealed the different episodes of that doleful night.

“And what did this man do? What did he take out of your hands?”

Najeska Ivanowna, in spite of her habitual presence of mind, was confused by this question, for which she had not prepared an answer.

“Has he stolen money or jewels from you?”

And the piercing eyes of the prince were immovably fixed upon those of the trembling young woman.

“Bless me!” said she, at last, “I do not recollect very well. I believe that I had nothing very important in my hand.”

“Ah! who knows?” said he, sneeringly.

Impatient, provoked, Najeska Ivanowna cried:

“Begone! you horrify me!”

But, after all the anguish, the alternations of the preceding day, being no longer able to restrain herself, she melted into tears. Notwithstanding his fury, sentiment born from his love and from his jealousy, at the sight of his wife's distress, Mineleko

was, in spite of himself, drawn toward her by an impulse of tenderness and pity. Loyalloy he extended his hand to her; but she obdurately repulsed it. Then he looked at her a long time, then, turning his head, he gained the door and left her alone.

An indestructible barrier had just risen between them. Alone at last, Najeska Ivanowna hastily dried her tears, for she felt that, for the present, she required all her strength, and that weeping weakened without relieving her.

No longer a doubt, it was indeed her husband who had so badly frightened her the preceding night, it was in his hands that the letter was to be found which fortunately remained without a signature. Was there an immediate determination to come to? Although the ambassador would not be able to devine from whom this missive came, it would be for him a positive proof that she, his wife, was guilty—guilty at least of receiving clandestine letters from some man, if not the author of the crime.

Najeska Ivanowna foresaw well that the suspicions of her husband would rest immediately on the king! "The king," who had so little dissimulated his love for her that the most blind, the most benevolent husband, had not been able to mistake it!

The princess knew the violence of Mineleko. She could foresee the terrible designs that were fermenting in that passionate head? Who could say if, in spending this day at home, she was not incurring a great danger? for a jealous husband is a madman, almost irresponsible for his acts. Tracing back the facts of the preceding evening, she imagined that her husband was spying on her, that he had followed her from the time she had left her chamber,

This conduct was a proof that the suspicions of the ambassador were aggravated.

While she was thus buried in those profound reflections, the bell rang, announcing the arrival of a visitor. Jumping up hastily from her easy-chair, she saw one of the royal carriages stop in the court of honor. Could it be the king? the king who came sometimes thus to visit her. Dear me! but then, Mineleko will believe more than ever that he is the man to whom the letter belongs! Trembling, she allowed herself to be dressed by her maid, in order to be ready for any event.

A light rap was discreetly given at her door.

“Who is there, Glascha?”

“Madame la Princess, they come to inform you that their highnesses, the young royal princesses, are waiting.”

Like all enthusiastic young girls, fascinated by the charm and the grace of Madame de Mineleko, the two august fiancées adored her. Najeska Ivanowna, strict observer of court etiquette, hastened so as not to keep their highnesses waiting. A few minutes after, she joined them in the drawing-rooms.

“Dear madam,” said the eldest princess, “my father sends us to earnestly entreat you to join us this afternoon. We know what terrible circumstances have occurred here, and the magistrate, my father says, does not know what to think of all that, for his researches remain unsuccessful. But it is not necessary for you to remain constantly immured here, meditating over these horrible events, and during the fine weather which we have, we have projected a picnic excursion to the Augusta-Hutte.

His majesty invites also the Ambassador of Caucasus."

Najeska Ivanowna was disturbed at the name of her husband, but a royal invitation is a command; she could not refuse it.

"The ambassador, like myself, will be more than honored by the command of his majesty," responded she.

Then the three ladies, abandoning the stiffness of ceremony, commenced a more familiar conversation upon every-day topics. There are moments where nothing seems more delightful than the few hours snatched from the forced etiquette of the court, for it is in vain that one is of royal blood, one cannot always keep oneself hoisted on the stiff and affected diapason of convenances. The ambassadress was astonished at the pleasure which she experienced from this visit. She was surprised to be able to talk so gaily, won by the contagious felicity of the young girls who, in order to change the current of the gloomy thoughts of the ambassadress, conversed on every subject. They spoke of the new Ambassadress of the Netherlands, arrived the day before; of the ridiculous costume that the old grandmistress had worn at a recent reception. Approaching a subject which was dear to her, the eldest princess especially talked a great deal, for she had much to say on this subject, of her adored fiance, George of Pattenpouff, a fiance who, after long deliberations between the king and his mother-in-law, the tyrannical Empress of Hindustan, had been granted to the young princess notwithstanding the inferiority of his rank—a son born of a morganatic marriage.

The Emperor of Babylon had made many objections against such a misalliance, but love, and also

the scarcity of other royal applicants, had prevailed. While the Princess Augusta was inexhaustible upon the subject of her "George," the Princess Aline remained silent about her fiance. That great dolt, that northern barbarian that they had given her seemed to have in nowise touched the heart or the imagination of the young girl. She was really very beautiful, the young Princess Aline. This day, the costume of English cloth which she wore in such an elegant manner, became her wonderfully well; the little otter cap set upon her slightly-frizzed bronze hair, gave to her charming features a little refractoriness that her large soft meditative eyes tempered. Whence did she derive this constant melancholy? One would have been able to suppose that this young heart, made for love, had already suffered; the habitues of the court sought, but in vain, that which could produce this depth of sadness in this young and lovely child, who was believed to know as yet, only the pleasures of life.

When the princess had taken leave of the ambassador, the latter, not wishing to go and seek him herself, transmitted to her husband, by her maid, the invitation that they had received from the king. When Glascha ascended to her master's apartment, she found him with his head buried in his hands. Seated before his secretary and although surrounded by a great number of notes, and administrative papers, Mineleko was not writing. He seemed to be absorbed in a cruel reverie.

The next day, they were going to inter Kassan, and notwithstanding the activity of the police, the investigation had not advanced a step.

Mineleko, who occupied himself but little with domestics, did not observe that Glascha feared to

approach him. This girl was not one of the Parisian ladies maids, never taken unawares, having always upon the end of the tongue a lie which they deliver like gospel verse; she was a coarse Caucasian peasant, who for money would have sold her soul; a veritable feminine rustic, with sufficient apprenticeship she would have quickly accustomed herself in the methods of the lies and treasons of her class. It was not the evil instincts that were wanting in her, but simply the practice of profligacy. She had not yet had the opportunity to grow acute. Glascha once gone, Mineleko could at last abandon himself entirely to the frenzy, the indignation, the grief, which were alternately rending him. The king dared to invite him—him! whom he had perhaps so abominably betrayed!

Alas! colossal Bluebeard, yoked to his refined and nervous wife, he had perhaps been guilty of great wrongs toward her; these wrongs, he excused by the innumerable tortures that his jealousy had made him endure. Poor woman, how often he had abused her without cause! But this bear, accustomed to drink hardily, to command rudely, this Don Juan habituated hitherto to frivolous manners, to facile mistresses, this indefatigable Nimrod of the icy steppes of his country, could he ever hope to raise himself to the heavens where this sensitive creature hovered, whom he adored without comprehending. Certainly, his manner of loving, almost bestial, taken all and all, was not that which would have been necessary to Najeska Ivanowna, whose lively and exalted imagination had dreamed of the poetic songs of a delicate troubadour sighing unceasingly near her. How far from the ideal of the romantic young girl was the reality of her existence to the

young married woman! But she had always remained faithful to him, however; never until the accursed day of their arrival in Thessaly had she failed in the solemn engagements of her marriage. But this passionate king, poet and accomplished gentleman, was making a profound impression on her heart. "All in her," he said to himself, "was changed; her lips, chaste from all lies, had not feared to boldly deny the fault, perhaps the committed crime. What art she had displayed to dissuade him from that 'supposed vision!' Oh! the king! the miserable king, traitor, thief and probably assassin, how he would avenge himself!"

Mineleko, after having allowed his rage of the savage beast to evaporate, commenced to reflect on the means by which he would be revenged on him who was taking from him happiness and tranquillity, on him who had perhaps drawn his wife in the complicity of a horrible crime. He wished to strike in such a manner that, in his turn, this sovereign would be punished according to his deserts, and that he would feel all the torments which he himself was enduring. To punish a king!—that is not an easy matter! But a jealous man is a resolute man; the ambassador will struggle until his last breath; his perseverance will never slaken; it will be as long as his life. How much a man is to be feared who awakes in the morning with the same fixed idea with which he has gone to bed the day before. His strength is invulnerable. It will even destroy a king.

The kingdom of Thessaly, small as it was, included a great number of malcontents whose complaints were added to those of the unfortunate. This state of affairs was not unknown to the ambassador. It

is in this quarter that he will direct his attention. What might he not expect from a rebellion which would dethrone this king, this "infamous king" who makes it his occupation to alienate wives from their husbands. It has been said that the King of Albania, neighbor of the King of Thessaly, is covetous to unite to his kingdom a province of Thessaly. Ah, well! he will avenge himself in embroiling politics in this direction.

Ah! this Thessalian majesty has disdained him! Has alienated his wife's affections! Well! like a terrible Nemesis, he is going to redress himself, and he will be the arbiter of his destiny.

All these fantastic plans, some more insane and improbable than others, passed alternately in his head in a perpetual state of effervescence.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN APPOINTMENT.

The hour for the rendezvous appointed by the king arrived at last.

Najeska Ivanowna, her long slender fingers imprisoned in irreproachable gloves, had been ready for some time. While waiting for her husband, she had retired in one of the saloons where, in order to conceal her emotion, she was pretending to read attentively. She wore an elegant costume which, in itself alone, had been sufficient to make the reputation of her tradesman, one of the first tailors of Paris. Almost entirely clad in white, she disappeared under a thousand little gauzy puffs which enveloped her like a fleecy cloud. Her round and white neck alone appeared, escaping from some ruches which surrounded it.

Mineleko felt a strange sensation of rage wring him at the thought that all those charms, those of "his mistress," the "mistress of the king," would rejoice the heart of the latter. "And what avails this empty rage?" said the reason of Mineleko to the ever-increasing anger which invaded him, "it is a *sang froid* reflection that he requires in order to accomplish something which might destroy the happiness of this criminal king whose satisfied smile he would like to quench in blood, in order to replace it by tears and despair." At this thought "to make a martyr of a king!" he uttered, in his hope of vengeance, a cry similar to a wild beast when satiated.

While the carriage was conveying them at the

rapid trot of four magnificent English horses, Najeska Ivanowna was far from suspecting all that which was passing in the head of her husband. On seeing the apparent calm of the prince, she rejoiced that the tempest was allayed and that all the horrible impressions of the last days seemed to be effaced. Arrived at the royal palace, the ambassador and ambassadress were immediately introduced in the saloons where the court were already assembled.

The palace of King Charles Ferdinand XVIII. of Thessaly was situated on Parade square.

It was very large and was comprised of several bodies of buildings erected at different epochs. The most ancient part, dating from 1568, had been constructed by King George. It embraced, among others, the imperial hall (Kaiser Saal) and the chapel of the chateau, which were both restored in 1842 in the Renaissance style. Contiguous to this wing is that which incloses the famous building crowned with numerous belfries from which, at each hour, is heard the chimes of the famous bells manufactured in Amsterdam. This edifice was erected, in 1664, by Louis VI. Since that time, twenty-four times a day, the Thessalian residence has heard the music of those chimes, which vainly attempt to arouse from its monotony the little sleepy town.

The more modern part of the chateau was built in 1717, in the French style. To this part a second palace was attached, called "the little palace," a wing of the first to which it was joined by a glass gallery. Around the inclosure of this monument a wide and deep moat extended which, in its day, had been filled with water, but in which now the brush-

wood and grass grew luxuriantly. Over this small ditch, three draw bridges were thrown to give access to this species of fortress, whose black mass recalled the old strong chateaux of the Middle Ages.

As the carriage of the ambassador and ambassadress was passing over one of these arched bridges in order to enter into the avenue of the chateau, Najeska Ivanowna, without being able to account for it, experienced a slight shiver which startled her; at the same time, and also involuntarily, the visage of the prince became suddenly pale.

As we have previously said, all the court were assembled in one of the drawing-rooms of the ground floor. The young princesses and Walpurga de Heiligenthal had surrendered themselves entirely to the pleasures of this *fete*. The young Count Waldemar was also there. He was somewhat pale. He was asked if he was not ill.

“I have had, during two days, an atrocious headache,” said he, and his eyes, while thus speaking, rested boldly on Najeska Ivanowna. At the arrival of the princess, the young man had already endeavored to approach her; but the very evident attentions of the king rendered his game impossible. Under this look she felt herself grow pale and lose countenance. Very fortunately, the little Princess Helene of Thessaly, running to her, put an end to her embarrassment.

“We have had horses put to the great char-a-lane,” said the little girl, “and all of us children are going in it together. You, Madame l’ Ambassadrice, as an official personage,” and her little royal highness smiled, “will be obliged to go very properly and fatigue yourself in a carriage.”

Some moments after, all the company having assembled, they set out.

There could never have been a more charming day chosen. The sky without a cloud was of an intense blue; the atmosphere, not too warm, was embalmed with the perfume which exhaled from the blossoming trees.

“How good it would be to live,” thought the sad Najeska Ivanowna, “if, like the stings of gnats, so many cruel cares were not there to constantly torment you during this short life! Ever since the assassination, that rigid corpse was before her eyes. She appealed loudly to every distraction that was able to deliver her from this besetting vision.

At the Lenisen-Waldchen everybody alighted from the carriage. In the middle of the woods was a large sheet of water upon which swans and wild ducks majestically glided, wrestling with grace and rapidity with the boatmen who, by the means of some white oars, were riding in elegant little wherries the amateurs of navigation.

All around this pond a green and tufted grass was growing; flexible weeping willows and many other trees cast their lengthened shadows in the mirror of the water, as smooth as glass. The light skiffs were all anchored in a little bay situated in the middle of the pond.

“If we could have a boat-ride!” suddenly cried the oldest betrothed couple.

The Princess Aline and the Grand Duke Ivan Alexandrowitch remained silent, this proposition not appearing to absolutely enrapture them; but the king seized the ball at the bound.

“That would be charming, Agusta,” said he to his

eldest daughter, "and we will have out all the boats."

Hardly had the idea been expressed, before the king put it in execution. He said something in a low tone to his chamberlain, who, approaching an old boatman, communicated to him the orders of the king.

Mineleko, whose jealous eye lost none of the acts and gestures of his majesty, remarked that among the little boats that they were bringing, there was several of those long and slender wherries which could contain only two persons. Now he knew that the king, skillful in all the exercises of the body, was an emerited rower whose passion had been, during the life-time of the late queen, to row during the evening entire hours upon this silent pond. There, listening tenderly to the sweet voice of his companion singing his favorite airs, he rowed slowly and enjoyed with pleasure one of the best pastimes that the cares of royalty left him. These narrow boats had been constructed for those *tete-a-tete* promenades; the king never desiring a third party between himself and wife.

All the preparations of the boatmen being completed, they prepared to embark.

"Prince," said the king, smiling, "will you intrust to me, during a half hour only, the life of Madame le Ambassadrice. I will answer for it to you with my own, and I swear you that nothing grievous will happen to her."

What response is there to a royal command? Is it not an order? The Prince de Mineleko, suffocating with indignation, could not speak; he bowed his head silently and this profound inclination was an affirmative response. The king entered the wherry

first, then, extending his hand to the ambassadress, he seated her opposite to him.

The jealous husband, losing his presence of mind, was preparing to enter quickly in a second bark, which was to follow near the first, when the master of ceremonies stopped him.

"This wherry is prepared for the Princess Agusta and her fiance," said obsequiously and very politely the chamberlain to the ambassador.

Where and with whom was Mineleko put? Perhaps he would never had known, for all his attention was concentrated upon the light bark which was bearing away the king and his wife, if feeling a hand falling upon his shoulder, he had not recovered consciousness. It was that of the young Count de Heiligenthal, almost as dismayed as himself. Instinctively, the prince felt that the heart of this young man was filled with as much bitterness as his own.

Why does jealousy render the perceptions more acute? In truth, with the first glance of the eye cast on Heiligenthal, the ambassador saw to what an extent this man loved his wife; he divined that he also was, equally, tortured by the attentions of the king.

What were the sensations which took possession of the unhappy husband, between his jealousy against the king, and that which Heiligenthal inspired in him?

"They appear very gay, very happy!" the young count said, bitterly, to the prince.

Mineleko did not answer. He was thinking—which, of those two men, like him adoring the perfidious woman, could he strangle with the greatest

pleasure? Such was the only thought which was absorbing the ambassador.

The picnic was prolonged. The evening was far advanced when they thought of returning. Woe to Najeska Ivanowna! for, creeping toward them at a moment when Madame de Mineleko and the king believed themselves alone, the Count de Heilighenthal surprised the following conversation:

“I must see you alone the day after to-morrow,” murmured the king.

“That will be very difficult, your majesty!”

“No; nothing more easy, more natural, if you will follow my instructions. The day after to-morrow will be Thursday; that day your husband dispatches the principal courier of the week, and at three o’clock the government messenger must be ready to set out; it will be impossible then for him to accompany you on your morning ride. Ah, well! let us profit of this propitious moment, and let us meet on the lawn which is at the back of my Parc-aux-Cerfs, near the pavilion that I am desirous to show you.”

“Since your majesty commands, I am really obliged to obey, but——”

“There is no ‘but,’” said the sovereign, quickly. “The king commanding,” added he, smilingly, “you become irresponsible for this slight infraction. I alone will be culpable.”

“And what hour does your majesty select?”

“I will take the hour which will suit you the best.”

“At half past ten, then.”

“That is well. The day after to-morrow, at half past ten,”

CHAPTER XV.

REPULSED.

The interment of the assassinated Kassan, attracted a considerable crowd to the palace of the embassy. On seeing the sad convoy depart, Minleko was haunted by the thought that this bit of paper which he had in his possession might perhaps set justice upon the track of the criminal, while he, in spite of his search for vengeance, was obliged to spare him who had probably been a nocturnal lover of his wife, in order to save her. But, let us anticipate a little in order to put an end to this lugubrious incident.

The investigation was still pursued during the several weeks, and although one or two useless arrests of people who, for want of evidence had been immediately released again, had been made, they were obliged in the end to abandon the affair. The whole budget of papers was filed in the registry office. With a weary sigh, the magistrate was obliged to conclude that here again was one of those crimes which justice would never unravel. The clerk inscribed the number and disposition upon the cover of the said budget, and the journals speaking no longer of it, the affair gradually fell into oblivion.

Now, let us return to the day in which Najeska was to meet the king. In Thessaly, this year, the spring was far advanced and admirable. Each day arose more beautiful and sunny than its predecessor. Najeska Ivanowna, far from suspecting that Heiligenthal had surprised the request of the king for a

rendezvous, and seeing her husband tranquil, in appearance at least (he had not made any scene since the day before), felt reviving in her the pleasures of life, so quickly youth forgets even the most terrible impressions. Bless me! what happiness, if this jealousy, which since the day of her marriage had left her neither relaxation nor repose, would quiet her, at last, and would permit her to enjoy a little peace and tranquillity.

“Will you ride with me, this morning, my friend?” asked, a little hypocritically, the trembling Najeska Ivanowna, on Thursday morning.

Was she pleased or annoyed by the attentions of the king? Did he interest her a little as a man, or simply on account of his prestige as a crowned head? The whole night she had asked herself these questions; for half-frightened, and half-flattered by this interview which he had imposed on her, she did not seem to be able to define clearly that which was passing in her. Seized by a vague uneasiness, she was for a moment upon the point of confessing all to her husband. To a husband less jealous, less violent, she would have certainly done so. But, alas! she knew what each confidence had cost her! He had always refused to admit the entire accuracy of that which she had related to him, and his suspicious character, his ill-balanced nerves, led him to believe that she concealed from him half of the truth.

For him all proceeded from her; if such avowals had been uttered by her lovers, it was because she had attracted them by her frivolity, her coquetries.

He remained convinced that she exaggerated one part and abridged the other; when, on the contrary, the lively and inconsiderate character of

Najeska Ivanowna made her the most veracious and most natural person in the world. Without any diplomacy, she had inclined to confidence and ingenuousness, without foreseeing the consequences of her disclosures, it was necessary that she related all that which she knew, all that which happened to her.

Recalling the scenes of the past, she said to herself, that to avoid them there was only one means, to be silent!

The king was right. Her husband was too much the slave of his duty, to neglect the affairs of his government and go out before having dispatched the courier with the most important dispatches of the week.

Followed by her groom, she set out, then, at ten o'clock precisely; for in order to arrive at the Parc-aux-Cerfs, it required fully half an hour. Since the murder of poor Kassan, she had, notwithstanding the elasticity of her youth, become very nervous, and this terrible episode was mingled with all her thoughts.

The interment of the previous day had affected her very much; but, gradually, this cruel remembrance and all the uneasiness which assailed her was dissipated by the invigorating air of the morning. After all, what harm was she doing? The king had not requested anything very serious of her.

And while, the bridle upon his neck, she was letting her horse guide himself, she dreamed now no longer of the king, but much of the man. There was no use to deny it; the man was exceedingly fascinating. That was a gentleman, full of intelligence, filled with tact and magnanimity.

It was truly very flattering to be noticed by such a personage! but—she was not going to love him, at least! Oh, no! no! Had she not sworn before the very altar of Christ to preserve an inviolable fidelity to her husband? Then, by a sudden transition, there appeared to her the contorted face of her husband, such as she had seen it in the scene in which he had given latitude to his furious jealousy. Near him, as if in contact, the grave, but however, smiling countenance of the king, came and placed itself, filled with a tender interest for her. Yes, the king, so imposing in his gorgeous white uniform of the cuirassiers, was really handsome!

One could easily love him, and love him for himself.

Continuing to muse thus, she arrived at the Parc-aux-Cerfs. Sometime before reaching the lawn, near the little pavilion that the king had designated, she perceived the groom of his majesty. Resting upon his horse, he was holding that of the king by the bridle. The monarch had already arrived, then? She really saw him, at some distance, seated upon a secluded bench. At her approach, he arose quickly and came to meet her.

“How kind it is of you to have come, Madame le Ambassadrice!”

Najeska Ivanowna responded, smilingly, “that a desire of the king ought to be a command for her.”

“Well! allow me to aid you to alight, for I seriously and honestly wish you to visit my little pavilion, and admire the panorama which is unfolded before its windows.”

Najeska Ivanowna obeyed. Light as a feather, she fluttered to the earth, her hand in that of the king.

“Could you, without too much fatigue, ascend this hill?” demanded his majesty, “for it will be necessary for us to take a very steep little wooded path.”

“I fear no bodily exercise,” said the young woman, smiling.

As long as the king felt the indiscreet presence of the two grooms, he was the courteous gentleman, very correct and very ceremonious with the princess. But hardly had he disembarrassed himself of all external shackles, then, taking the arm of Madame de Mineleko, he passed it lovingly under his own. The contact of this round and lovely arm made the heart of the king palpitate, and Najeska Ivanowna felt also a strange and new happiness within her. They scarcely spoke, as if an agreeable embarrassment had taken possession of them. Is it this absorption in each other which hinders them from hearing the rustling of a step in an alley, parallel to that which they are following? Or did they take this slight rustling for the warbling of some birds, who were mysteriously cooing in the branches?

A good half-hour before the king and Madame de Mineleko had arrived to the Parc-aux-Cerfs, a cavalier had entered, all alone, in the wooden alley which bordered upon the pavilion. Dismounted from his horse, which he had tied to a tree, he appeared to wait for some one.

But the king and Madame de Mineleko, in this moment of happiness, were thinking nothing of spies!

But this young man, however, whose soul was overflowing with hate and jealousy was a spy, and a very formidable one. Thus, this woman whom he loved to idolatry, this woman who always repulsed him, each time that he made advances, preferred

the king to him—the king, twenty years older than he! A terrible sentiment was making his heart beat and was impelling him to vengeance and crime! Ah! his vengeance, he held it now!

In a trice, he would be in the town; he would send immediately a letter to the husband of the unfaithful wife. He would tell him where and with whom, at this moment, he would find his wife.

Written, since the evening on which he had surprised the conversation of the king and the ambassador, if he had not yet sent it, it was because he knew how many things can prevent a projected rendezvous. This morning even, he had not acted as soon as he would have liked to, because he wished to assure himself first, that the guilty parties would come to the little pavilion. It is, there, shut up all alone, that he will oblige the jealous husband to surprise them.

Heiligenthal, seeing them happy, felt himself goaded by the greatest excitement to crime. Stifling the last scruples of his conscience, he became the infamous informer.

A spoiled child, to whom all his caprices had always been granted, he recognized, at present, neither faith nor law; his base and evil passions were his only masters, those to whom his very will was subservient. So, this woman, because she had complete empire over the king, believed that she could, with impunity, play with him the elegant, the *recherche* habitue of the saloons of the capital! All puffed up with pride, she dared to jump with both feet upon the heart which he had gone to offer her! Well! she should see, the imprudent woman, what it would cost her to have for an enemy a Waldemar of Heiligenthal, twice betrayed by her,

the first time when she was his fiancee, and now, as the wife of another.

The king and Madame de Mineleko were continuing silently to ascend the sinuous and narrow path, which conducted them to the object of their promenade. Entirely absorbed in the pleasures of this precious *tete-a-tete*, they were abandoning themselves, without reservation, to the delights of this spring morning, whose warmth, perfumed by the odoriferous scents which were escaping from the gigantic oak, as well as from the least blade of grass, was enveloping them in a voluptuous happiness. For them, the word no longer existed; life belonged to them alone; thus were they far from thinking of that furious hate, which was brooding so near them, and whose effect was soon going to be felt in such a terrible fashion.

The tall grass, enameled with flowers, which was growing under the close arches of the trees, was more velvety than the softest plush. The shade was so dense that only when a rare vista was made through the trees, one could perceive, in the distance, the meadows where the stupid cows were grazing, upon whose muzzles, the flies that the warmth attracted, were alighting by thousands. The wind was as if extinguished or dead. The leaves remained immovable even under the breath of the fiery sun. The heat, already canicular, was weighing heavily upon this hot spring day.

The king stopped very often; it seemed that he wished to enjoy, slowly, the delight which he was experiencing. Madame de Mineleko, her heart filled with a delicious confusion, but quite timid, quite intimidated, however, allowed herself to be submissively guided by him.

“How happy this promenade makes me!” said the king, suddenly, as if coming out of an agreeable reverie. “Are you fatigued, madam?”

“I have told your majesty, that I am rarely fatigued.”

This affirmation was so much in opposition with the frail and delicate appearance of the young lady, that the king, whose heart was very easily affected, gently pressed her arm, and said to her, lovingly:

“I fear very much, princess, that your great self-forgetfulness often deludes you about your strength, about your faculty of enduring everything without complaining. You always affirm that your health is good, and a smile always beams upon your lips, but, however——”

Fearing to have acquainted her too much with his thought, Charles Ferdinand XVIII was suddenly silent.

“But, however what?” demanded the young woman, tranquilly.

“Well! since you force me to speak, I will explain to you all that which this ‘however’ signifies. The heaviness of that chain, which rivets you to that jealous man—who must often make you tremble—is a mystery to no one. Everybody knows how violent and passionate he is; he is so much so, that one may often be unjust in respect to him. But, then, if it was not for the testimony of Geheimrath Schlotz, who administered the opiate to him, the same night as the murder of your domestic, he would have certainly incurred a terrible danger, ambassador though he is.

“Sire, sire! you are not going to suspect my husband of being an assassin?”

“Certainly not. No, I simply state that incident, and I make no allusion to the anecdotes whispered about Mineleko, since your marriage. Thus, during the time that we are walking here, without thinking of forfeiting honor,” continued the king, “who knows if the terrible specter of this new Othello will not spring up from some of these trees, and, taking us unawares, will not turn upon us the muzzle of his revolver, and pull the trigger without even thinking to listen to us.”

“Ah, sire! they have exaggerated the truth to you. My husband is jealous, it is true, but not to that extent. And in order for your majesty to speak thus, they must have told many tales about us before our arrival.”

“They always talk much about an ambassador whom they expect, as of his wife, whom they desire,” said the sovereign, very gallantly, avoiding thus to respond to the direct question that the young woman asked him.

“And of lesser personages, also; is it not so? But will you permit me to be very frank with your majesty?” said she, suddenly, summoning up all her courage. “If it is true that I am the wife of a man, such as you portray my husband; if it is true that you have, as you make me forbode too well, conceived some affection for me—then, on account of this mistrustful and unhappy character, in consideration of your ‘sympathy’—do not be, thus ostensibly, so amiable for me.”

At these words, at this prayer pronounced in a tone which was not to be mistaken, the king grew pale.

“That means, then, that you think that I begin to pay you a little too much attention?”

“A little—yes.”

“And that displeases you?”

“Oh, no, sire!—no; I did not mean to say that.”

“Then, what do you mean? Notwithstanding all the happiness that I experience to be thus absolutely alone with you, if it is necessary for your tranquillity for me to leave you, I will immediately withdraw. I am ready to do so, whatsoever it will cost me; but, do not ask me to cease to pay attention to you, to cease to endeavor to please you, in order to attain to making myself loved as much as I love you! That, dear heart, is beyond my strength. I could promise you it, but I could not keep it. Ah! that I were your brother, your father even, or a friend so intimate that I might defend you, against one and against all, in every circumstance of your life, so agitated, so unjustly unhappy!” cried, suddenly and passionately, the sovereign, allowing free course to the passion which was consuming him.

None of those atrocious and so often repeated scenes, which she had had to submit to from her suspicious husband, had agitated Najeska Ivanowna, as much as the burning words of the amorous king. Had she gone too far with him? or had she permitted herself to be too much carried away by the novel sensation which was entirely usurping her? In this moment, the king appeared so noble, so chivalrous, that her isolated heart, so avaricious of a sure and devoted support, commenced to enjoy all the charm which the fervent language, the expression of the king's emotion was kindling in her.

“How good you are!” murmured she, very low. “But, why do you speak thus of defending me? Do you believe that I have need of a defender? Is calumny, then, much incensed against me?”

A profound sentiment of bitterness was perceptible in the voice of the young woman. Alas! she knew, only too well, how many enemies her beauty and the wealth of her husband, had created among women, and even among men, especially among those, who, provoked by their repulsed homages, had wished to avenge themselves, by endeavoring to attack her in her life, to abase her in her reputation. Although young, she had paid to know how many of those fables a venomous tongue had quickly invented—fables, which skillfully whispered, penetrate everywhere, infectious miasma, casting thus to the ban of society, a woman of a pure and unblemished reputation! How many times had she been wounded in her pride, in her dignity, without having deserved any other blame than that of an innocent inexperience which enters, head foremost, in the snares with which the demon of evil surrounds it!

In spite of some immaterial indiscretions, of no consequence save for those who had advantageously used them, Najeska Ivanowna had remained the bravest of little women, guarding faithfully her honest principles, and the oaths sworn before the altar. Did not the king remark the poignant bitterness which, like a black and heavy cloud, came suddenly to obscure this young and lovely brow? or did he intentionally pursue the conversation? He still continued, thus:

“If you have need of a defender! But, can a beauty like yours dispense with one? - Are you ignorant, then, of the rage which it excites in the hearts of other women?”

“Then, sire, if before having seen me, you have

heard nothing but calumnies about me, you can hardly desire my presence at your court?"

"Much to the contrary! I am always sure, when I hear evil spoken of a woman, that she merits admiration, and this hate, excited by jealousy, incites in me an eager desire to know the accused."

"May I, without being indiscreet, ask you what they have been able to say against me?" replied the princess, essaying a sad smile.

"What! you desire me to recollect all?"

"Oh, no! that would be too much, perhaps! But endeavor, at least, to recall a part," insisted the ambassadress.

"That which you demand, princess, is very delicate."

"Truly, that is one reason the more why I am eager to know more."

"Well!—they say that your husband is constantly obliged to have duels on account of you," responded the king, with an ever so little embarrassed air, who perceived too late the mistake he had made in entangling himself in so delicate a subject.

"They spoke falsely, sire."

"But, however, this duel with H——, in the capital of Flanders?"

"Has been a very lamentable assault, it is true, owed to a fit of jealousy unexpectedly aroused in my husband."

"And you did not love this young man?"

"Not the least in the world; I had never even thought of it; I confess, however, that I have been afflicted by his death."

"And you have never loved any but your husband?"

“Sire,” the princess haughtily replied, “I have been educated to know that, during her life, the love of a woman belongs only to one man alone—him whose name she bears—and if she cannot give her heart to him, she must at least keep it whole and pure, and not surrender it to another. Then, your majesty, do not occupy yourself with me. Misled, by the calumnies distributed about me, you have taken me for another woman than that which I am. I bear you no ill will for it, but if, notwithstanding the principles that I have just expressed to you, it would please you to continue an attention that hereafter I should regard as an offense, understand well that alone, without any assistance whatsoever, I would know how to make myself respected, and make you remember, sire, the respect that every man owes to a woman.”

While speaking thus, Madame de Mineleko abruptly withdrew her arm from that of the king.

Bare-headed, for Najeska Ivanowna, friend of the air, had long since removed her hat, she was so beautiful thus, in her revolt of womanly pride and purity, that the king, as if in ecstasy, could not remove his eyes from her; he was ravished, and more and more subjugated. The sun, as if wishing to confirm the noble words issued from those rosy lips, was playing graciously in the great knot of her chestnut hair, and making a brilliant halo around this brow, completely covered with the crimson of indignation.

Oh! if Mineleko had seen her thus! if it had been permitted him to perceive this woman, standing proudly before the king, who was now ashamed of the desires which a moment ago had had possession of his mind, he would have comprehended, at last,

the great confidence which he could repose in this lovely, noble creature!

With her kind, her habitually indulgent insouciance, the ambassadress quickly forgot that which had just taken place.

They had now arrived at the pavilion. The king gently pushed the door open, and Najeska Ivanowna entered into the little marble temple. As if she had divined a peril in remaining alone with this enamored man, the beautiful amazon, light as a hind, sprang from an open window from whence the landscape was visible.

“Goodness! what a magnificent view!” cried she, enraptured by the splendor of the panorama which was unfolded before her.

Indeed, there was nothing more beautiful than the site chosen for the Parc-aux-Cerfs. In this little hunting-seat all was marvelous. How radiantly, in the presence of this grand and magnificent universe, the purified soul was borne toward the limitless regions of the infinite. This pavilion, constructed at a great expense, upon a high elevation, had a vast horizon, in which the sight was lost, confounding together the sky and the earth. From this culminating point, they embraced the whole deep valley wherein, similar to a lovely jewel escaped from its casket of verdure and of hills, was nestled the little capital city, whose massive towers, whose slender and elegant belfries were so many black points, detached from a clear sky.

In the distance some mountains arose, forming thus a half-circle around the Thessalian capital, vigilant sentinels, posted by nature, whose gigantic mass seemed to oppose on all sides the invasion of an enemy as well as the irruption of a malevolent

wind. At the bottom, the little River Saave, with its clear and tranquil water, was meandering quite blue, in the diaphanous atmosphere of this splendid May day.

Arrived at the apogee of its course, the day-star was in the height of its splendor; the intense heat of its rays, falling almost perpendicularly, was tempered by a light zephyr, whose gentle breath was driving fleecy clouds in the infinity of space, which, like flakes of cotton, were softly arising from the base of the chain of mountains, and were disappearing as if to surrender a passage to these bristling summits, menacing the heavens even.

The valley and the sides of the mountains had surrendered to the labor of man; that conquest was his work. What perseverance had he not indeed displayed, in order to succeed in converting this sterile and inhospitable earth into the rich and prosperous country which was spread out under the eyes of the two spectators! The struggle certainly had been great, but great also was the victory; it had been difficult to say which excelled, whether the gigantic and imposing spectacle of this privileged spot, or this admirable and abundant vegetation, plucked and conquered by the will and genius of man.

Like the squares of a chess-board, vast tracts of cultivated fields were delineated on all sides, whose different colors formed a mixture as picturesque as original. There were enormous patches of colza, whose rich harvest of blossoms imparted their color, yellow as that of a topaz; here, immense fields disappeared under the deep violet leaves of the mangel-wurzel, veritable amethysts of the fields; farther still, all was white; it was the abundant harvest of

potatoes in blossom, coming to give to the disinherited of society the assurance that they should feel no hunger. All this landscape was animated by the coming and going of peasant men and women, who, to the melancholy sounds of their sweet and rhythmical songs, zealously applied themselves without relaxation to their labor.

The revival of spring was regenerating entire nature; it was a general festival. The blackbird, in his black robe; the bullfinch, in his red dress, were warbling joyous trills, adding, thus, their gay and harmonious notes to the concert offered by the Author of all things.

“How beautiful it is!” said the king. “Can one, on such a day, suffer the trifles of life to affect him?”

Najeska Ivanowna, struck by all that splendor, by all that brilliant light, was dazzled. The king, feeling himself a little in disgrace, was very humble.

“Confess to me,” said he, softly, “that in the presence of this lovely nature, the little indignation that I have quite involuntarily but just now excited in your heart is now appeased, and that you pardon me.”

“One only pardons the guilty,” responded the princess, graciously.

“And have I not been so, a little, in speaking as I have done?”

“This time, I have imitated the example of my husband.”

“How so?”

“In growing angry with your majesty, I have only followed the impulse of a lively irritation, provoked by the persistent malignity of other women against me.”

"Then you confess that it was not through my fault that your indignation was aroused?"

"I always willingly confess my errors."

"Then you do not detest me, you do not hate me, as that pretty little burst of indignation, with which your eyes and voice were quite full, have made me fear so much?"

"I cannot hate your majesty, especially if you consent to reflect upon that which I have just told you."

"Which is equivalent to saying, that in consideration of the suspicious nature of your husband, I must conduct myself like a good little dog in leash," said the king, maliciously, "and never pay any more attentions to you."

"Yes, honestly, loyally, it is that which I mean. It is indispensable that, hereafter, you do not occupy yourself with me."

At these words, a vivid blush covered the face and neck of the young woman. Never had she appeared so fascinating to the king, more deeply smitten than he had hitherto believed himself.

Taking in his own, the little trembling hand of Najeska Ivanowna, he murmured, almost in her ear:

"You are, then, very much afraid of me?"

"Yes, on account of my husband."

"Dear, trembling one!" said the king, with emotion, and he endeavored to place his lips upon the lovely arm, at the place where the short glove of the equestrienne ceased; but she, on seeing the dangerous and increasing emotion which was gaining on him, gently disengaged herself.

"I pray you, permit me to depart! I wish to return!" said she, perturbed.

“Not before telling me when I could see you again.”

“But do I know? You have spoken yourself of the jealousy of my husband——”

“Go, then! the happiness of everybody must be sacrificed to——”

“To him whom I have no right to betray.”

“This is exaggerated! What have I done, then, for you to make such a cheap disposition of the pleasure which I experience in your society? I must see you again, and alone. I implore you, do not refuse me! I detest nothing so much as to perceive you in the midst of a crowd, where you belong to every one, when I would have you only for myself. Yet once more, I entreat you!”

“Well, then—come,” she hesitated.

“Say—say quickly! When? Where?”

“Here, next week.”

“Next week! eight whole days! Oh! no—to-morrow; say to-morrow.”

“To-morrow? that is too soon. You may come when the first quarter of the moon will have appeared in the heavens. And now, sire,” (already she commanded without thinking), “reconduct me to my horse. What time can it be? Oh! eleven already? I have only time to hasten.”

And, like a mutinous child, sure of her empire, she darted forward, descending quickly the path so painfully climbed a short time ago, closely followed by the king.

Immovable, almost side by side, the two grooms were waiting in the tall grass of the forest.

Thus, as he had removed her, an hour before, it was the king who replaced the charming equestrienne in her saddle.

“Adieu!” said she, and giving a light blow of the whip to her horse, she disappeared in the depths of the tall forest.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WHIP.

At eleven o'clock, the Prince de Mineleko was entirely absorbed in the dispatches of his government. From his secretary, like the general of the army, he was directing his secretaries, who, under his haughty surveillance, were actively employed in the expedition of the weekly courier. This certainly was no small or slight labor, this work of Thursday; during its duration, the ambassador, who rarely laughed, severe upon himself, became terrible for the others if they had the misfortune to commit the slightest error. This day, the door of the cabinet was strictly forbidden to every one. The silence, however, is suddenly interrupted; it is the faithful Vassili, who, after having softly knocked at the door, enters noiselessly.

It was the same hour in which Najeska Ivanowna was with the king, in the pavilion of the Parc-aux-Cerfs.

“A very urgent letter, but this moment delivered for his highness,” said Vassili.

“Who has brought it?”

“I do not know, monseigneur.”

“Do they wait for an answer?”

“No, monseigneur, but the person has said that it was so urgent, that they entreated your highness to read it immediately.”

“It is well!” and, with a gesture, the prince dismissed Vassili.

Hardly had the latter quitted the apartment before the prince opened the note. This is what he read:

“If you wish to know where the Princess of Minleko is at present, go, without losing a moment, and rejoin her in the hunting pavilion, in the Parc-aux-Cerfs; there, if you make haste, you will find her in the arms of his ‘majesty.’ ”

No signature to this letter, traced by a hand skillful in counterfeiting its writing. The paper, smooth and white, such as you may buy anywhere, had no distinctive mark which might have set one on the track of the author.

A cloud, quick as a flash of lightning, abruptly obscured the sight of the ambassador; his heart, bounding under this terrible blow, commenced to beat so in his breast, that he believed that it was going to break.

Without reasoning, without reflecting, listening only to the fury which, like an immense wave, was chasing all logic from his mind, he took an extreme resolution. Did not the letter say that there was not a moment to lose, in order to surprise the guilty parties? Then why delay in hesitations; he should act. Ringing violently:

“Saddle ‘Enfer’ immediately,” said he, briefly, to a domestic who appeared.

He was so bewildered that, for a moment, he forgot his lofty functions as ambassador. Recalled to a sentiment of reality by the entrance of his first secretary, he, the man so autocratic, so despotic, said to him quickly, seeking, if one may say so, to excuse himself, for this precipitate departure at such an important moment:

“Gairatinski, be not surprised at this urgent ab-

sence, which cannot be of long duration. I will be back before an hour, and we will still have all the time necessary for the courier at three o'clock."

This phrase, calmly delivered, was the result alone of the routine and the force of his diplomatic habits; notwithstanding the empire which this man of iron exercised over himself, the secretary, a very close observer, divined immediately that a great trouble was agitating his master; for, whatsoever effort he made to conceal it, his mobile physiognomy was betraying him.

It had been agreed, between the king and Madame de Mineleko, that in parting from each other, she should take the direct road leading to the city, while he would take the one to the right, a little more circuitous.

When she was alone, Najeska Ivanowna began to reflect seriously on the delicate and almost dangerous position in which she found herself with the king. Letting the reins hang carelessly upon her horse's neck, who commenced to walk tranquilly, she followed the course of her thoughts. "What would be the issue of this labyrinth, in which her beauty, her imprudence perhaps, had so unconsciously thrown her? How much had she not borne, to regret this amiability, this graciousness with which she innocently attracted everybody? Why could she not, like another woman, cling to the evasion of an obligatory departure, which would compel her to leave this court, this palace where, she felt only too well, that great misfortunes were hovering over her! But no! all was escaping her, even the most ordinary means; the abyss was there, yawning under her feet; each day it was hollowing

deeper. Yet, a few hours more, and she would be engulfed in it.

Thus, because she was Princess of Mineleko, Ambassadress of Caucasus, she was obliged to go forward to meet the danger, which she felt was inevitable, implacable.

“My God! why did she not understand, like others, to show her preferences, her aversions? Why did this affability, suggested by her heart, fearing to wound, to afflict, give her that enchanting smile which, like a sunbeam, shone equally on all?”

What reproaches had she not already received from her husband, who, in spite of his whims was, theoretically speaking, generally right.

How to change her character? her individuality? Had she not often labored at it? What had been the result? Always the same difficulties, always the same vexations.

Entirely lost in the labyrinth of her contradictory reflections, she did not hear the precipitate steps of a panting horse which was coming toward her.

She had yet seen nothing, perceived nothing, when already, like a menacing specter, the Prince of Mineleko arose before her in the middle of the road, obstructing her passage.

“Ah! I find you at last, madam, this is truly fortunate!”

These words, pronounced with a smothered rage, withdrew her suddenly from her thoughts. Raising her head quickly, Najeska Ivanowna vaulted in her saddle. Her husband, pale, livid, was facing her.

“From whence do you come?”

“From whence—from whence——”

The aspect of Mineleko was so terrible, the con-

science of Najeska Ivanowna so disturbed, that the words expired in her throat.

“Ah! you hesitate, madam? Know you well that it is only criminals who dare not respond! Ah! well, I will spare you the trouble of speaking, and I will tell you myself from whence you come. You come from an assignation with the king, an assignation which has taken place, with closed doors, in the pavilion of the Parc-aux-Cerfs.”

During the furious ride which he had just taken, the anger of Mineleko had kept augmenting. Each phrase of that vile and servile anonymous letter, was humming unceasingly in his ears; he was so desperate with fury that he did not even see in the apparently deserted road, the little groom of Najeska Ivanowna, who had stopped respectfully at fifty paces from his mistress. So the ambassadress, paralyzed by terror, did not answer.

“Will you deny it?” demanded the prince, in a terrible voice, excited by hate.

“No!”

A strident laugh escaped from the lips of Mineleko.

“And you accuse me of making jealous scenes on account of chimeras! You must be past mistress in this sort of shameless life, to which you appear to me to be accustomed, Madame le Ambassadrice! Have you fallen low enough? After having received the king in your apartment, in my house, at night; after having been his accomplice, perhaps, in an assassination, you consent to come here to a love appointment! It is no longer he already who discommodes himself! Do you run enough after this insipid beauty? Where, then, do you expect to

stop? When will you decide that the measure will be sufficiently filled?"

He remained faithful to his fixed idea that the king had come, during the night, to the embassy.

Najeska Ivanowna, stunned, terrified, by all these terrible accusations that her husband was accumulating upon her, instead of defending herself was silent. What response could she have made? Although she had been able to speak, would he have believed her? This silence was, for the infuriated husband, irrefutable proof of the culpability of the princess.

What fury and revolt passed in the heart of this man, arrived at the paroxysm of madness? Alas! did he ever render an account of it to himself?

Furiously mad, he approaches the poor trembling creature:

"Wretch! miserable creature of perdition!" he roared, with rage, his whip raised over the head of the young woman.

"Ah! not that—not that!" implored she, seeing his menacing gesture.

"Not that?" Mineleko hisses, through his closed lips.

An intense redness blinds him. In his brain boils the breath of vengeance; his hands are agitated by those nervous contractions which produce tremors, the precursors of crime.

A terrible cry has suddenly resounded; the echoes of the forest are moved by it. What has happened?

Rapid as lightning, the ambassador's whip has risen and fallen three times, and has just ignominiously cut the face of Najeska Ivanowna. In this terrible moment, the stricken princess believes she is lost, for she can no longer see. Then,

under the shock of this outrage, much more than under that of the physical pain which hurts her, the unhappy creature, her face seamed with bloody cuts, was seized with a nervous attack, then, with one cry, followed by another, escaping from her breast, she flees.

All this had passed very rapidly; the groom, with the inattention, the indifference peculiar to his class, had, from the beginning, paid no attention to this encounter between his master and mistress. When he wished to hasten to the assistance of the princess, it was already too late. At the cries of Najeska Ivanowna, her mare, a very nervous beast, moved by a sudden terror, became excited, and galloping giddily, was running with the blindness of terrified horses.

Mineleko, after this extravagant paroxysm of rage, was quickly recalled to the reality and the infamy of his conduct. The unhappy man, in whom all sense of probity and duty was still paralyzed, did not perceive that the mare of the princess was bounding; she also, under the insult of the unjust and ignominious chastisement, had set up, and was running madly to a danger where she and her light burden were risking death.

Persuaded that Najeska Ivanowna was herself spurring her course, in order to put a greater distance between the executioner and the victim, the ambassador quickly plunged in the thick coppice-wood which was offering itself as a refuge. What terrible moments ought he to pass, thus alone with his conscience, whose voice was not quite stifled!

The groom, with more *sang froid* than his master, was desperately following in the wake of his mis-

tress, endeavoring to rejoin her, to prevent, thus, an irreparable disaster.

Although half-fainting from the loss of blood, which was flowing from her face, the princess was clinging instinctively to the pommel of her saddle. She had reached thus, without hindrance, a long straight road leading directly to the city; unfortunately, at this early hour, this part of the forest was completely deserted. It was only at the entrance of the residence that some courageous pedestrians, flinging themselves at the horse's head, at last succeeded in stopping her.

Najeska Ivanowna, her face smeared with red stains, was unconscious when they lifted her from her horse. Carried into a pharmacy, not far distant, she received there the first cares indispensable to her condition.

At the sight of the blood with which she was covered, they believed her much more dangerously injured than she really was. One of the blows had fallen above her eye; the other on the temple; and a third, back of her ear. This last had been so violently struck, that the whip, rebounding on her shoulder, had upon its passage cut the little narrow collar of her habit.

Under the ablutions of ice-water, which they first applied, the young woman recovered consciousness; her eyes were scarcely opened when the poor groom arrived, breathless and trembling.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOTE FROM THE KING.

His breakfast finished, the king was just retiring to his private apartments when his Intendant Wolff, who, at this hour, was the first to make his report, entered.

After communicating the official news, instead of taking leave of the king, the Intendant seemed to solicit the command to remain and speak.

“Is there anything else that you desire to acquaint me with?” demanded his majesty.

“Sire, the whole city talks of the accident which has happened to the Ambassadors of Caucasus.”

“An accident happened to the Ambassadors of Caucasus!” cried the king. “But, this very morning, I have encountered her on horseback, and in perfect health; she appeared to be going toward the forest.”

“Exactly, sire. It was on her return that they found her half-fainting, her face all covered with blood, clinging to her horse, which was running away.”

The king was so profoundly troubled by this news, his heart so eager for details, that, notwithstanding he did not wish to betray himself to this man, he quickly commanded him to relate all.

Wolff expatiated upon the accident which, according to the report, had already happened two hours ago; for the breakfast of the king and the princess was always prolonged a little.

Scarcely had the Intendant retired before the king rang.

An officer of the service appeared. Charles Ferdinand XVIII gave him the order to go immediately and command his chief physician, Geheimrath Schlotz, to come to the palace. He knew that this man was also the physician of the Minelekos.

The impatience of the king was great until the arrival of the Geheimrath Schlotz; nothing could distract his anxious waiting. He was losing himself in conjectures. What, great God! all this had been able to happen to Najeska Ivanowna! They were positively speaking of blows of a whip struck on her face. But who could have dared to lay a hand upon the Ambassadors of Caucasus?

The arrival of Geheimrath put an end to the multitude of questions that the sovereign was asking himself. The doctor had, indeed, just left the princess, and confirmed in every particular the recital of Wolff.

There remained, no doubt, about the kind of wounds received. The beautiful equestrienne had certainly been brutally struck with a whip. But that was not the strangest part of the adventure. The princess, not being able to deny the blows, whose marks were flagrant, positively refused to name the person who had inflicted them. She pretended not to have recognized him.

"That, your majesty," concluded the Geheimrath, "is inadmissible; for, since the ambassador has still had sufficient presence of mind, after the outrage, to cling to her horse, how can we admit that, having been struck three times, she would not have recognized her assailant?"

The king remained mute. For him, the report of

the Geheimrath gave to this event quite another character than that which it could have for the generality of the people

If Najeska Ivanowna thus refused to name him who had struck her, it was, then, because this being bore a respectable name that she wished to defend against public indignation; was not this man, whom she wished still to spare, in spite of all, her husband? Oh! noble and devoted nature! how well he recognized, then, his well-beloved!

“Monsieur de Mineleko must be in a frightful state,” said the king, suddenly.

“He will be so, surely, when he returns.”

“What! he is not at home?”

“No, your majesty. He went to take a ride nearly an hour after Madame la Princess, and he has not yet returned.”

“Ah! This is astonishing!” thought the king, who did not forget that it was precisely on account of the prince being absorbed by his weekly courier, this day, that he had chosen it for his assignation with the ambassadress. But the king, judging it in nowise proper to share his suppositions with any one whatever, dismissed the physician.

So, the doctor had said, that Monsieur de Mineleko had gone out an hour after his wife. On connecting this strange detail with the obstinate refusal of the princess to name her enemy, the king easily reconstructed the scene which must have taken place between the husband and wife. No longer a doubt, the husband, having had some suspicions, had followed his wife, and a violent scene had occurred.

If Mineleko had not yet returned to the embassy, it was because he feared to return there. Oh! for his tranquillity, it would be necessary for him to

know all. It was no living to remain in such an uncertainty, a thousand times more terrible than the truth!

To write to Najeska Ivanowna would be very dangerous; to go there, still more so.

Attached to the person of Charles Ferdinand XVIII, was an aide-de-camp, on whose discretion and fidelity he could rely.

This favorite was that same Adlersward, whom we have seen, one morning, conversing with Mineleko.

The sudden assault upon the ambassadress was the sensational news of the day; nobody in the city was ignorant of it, thus nothing would seem more natural, more obligatory even, than the visit of one of the king's aide-de-camps, coming to inquire after the interesting invalid. To act thus, was it not, moreover, to pay respect to the sovereign of the country represented by Monsieur and Madame de Mineleko?

Count Adlersward received, then, the order to repair to the ambassadress. Furnished with a letter, which he was only to deliver to Najeska Ivanowna, if he saw her alone; in the event of his not being able to approach the invalid, the messenger was to content himself with simply obtaining, by adroit means, as many details as possible about the tragical assault of the morning.

When Count Adlersward arrived at the hotel of the embassy, the running to and fro which follows a great event, the excitement which accompanied it had not yet subsided.

The astonished secretaries were obliged to confess that Monsieur de Mineleko had not yet returned. Upon confirmation of the prince's absence, Count

Adlersward asked if he could see the ambassadress, and present to her personally the condolences of the king.

"I will go and inquire," said Prince Gariatinski, the first secretary, who had received the king's aide-de-camp.

Najeska Ivanowna, enveloped in a light dressing-gown, was extended on a couch in her boudoir. She had not wished to be put to bed; perhaps she had not even felt herself strong enough to support being entirely undressed. When Prince Gariatinski rapped at her door, the young lady was alone with her maid; her head encircled by bandages, she appeared half-asleep. With her acute sense of hearing, she heard the following phrase which Prince Gariatinski was whispering to her maid:

"Monsieur le Ambassadeur having not yet returned, Count Adlersward comes, in the king's name, to inquire if he can be received a moment by Madame la Princess."

The maid approached the invalid and repeated the request.

"Tell Count Adlersward to enter, and retire until I ring for you."

When the aide-de-camp penetrated into the darkened room, he received a shock, on seeing the white specter stretched out. Could this creature, so pale, be the same as that young, brilliant woman, with the carnation of a beautiful full-blown flower, whom he had seen so radiant but a few hours before.

Najeska Ivanowna signed to the king's aide-de-camp to approach her.

"Madame la Princess," said he, on presenting the sealed note of the king to the ambassadress, "his

majesty entreats you to read this, and to give me verbally your response, or, if you prefer it, to send it to him by writing, as soon as you have strength to do so."

Najeska Ivanowna broke the royal seal.

The note contained only a few words, evidently written with great precaution, for fear of its falling into indiscreet hands, it might still aggravate her situation.

"Madame la Princess, I pray you to let me know when I can come in person to express to you all my regrets. If, as soon as you have the strength, you will write to me and relate the facts which I deplore, without knowing them, you will allay a very great disquietude.

CHARLES FERDINAND XVIII."

After having read it, Najeska Ivanowna said to the count:

"Thank his majesty for the interest which he shows me, and tell him that at present I would not dare to write, feeling myself too feeble; but, as soon as I shall be able, I will do so immediately."

"You have been exceedingly gracious, Madame le Ambassadrice, to have been willing to receive me. I hope that you will not suffer long from the effects of this frightful accident," Count Adlersward responded.

The aide-de-camp attempted still, by adroit means, to obtain some details, but the ambadress remained silent.

The messenger of the king was forced to retire without having obtained the slightest explanation.

Although it was two o'clock and the courier of the Caucasian Empire was to depart at three, the Prince of Mineleko had not yet reappeared at the embassy.

"Hum! this is significant," Count Adlersward said

to himself, on coming to render an account to the king of the mission with which he had intrusted him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FLOWER GIRLS.

The stupefying news of this assault committed on an ambassadress, ran, like a train of powder, through the little Thessalian city, scarcely recovered from the excitement produced by the violent death of Kassan. They thought no longer of anything but this event; they spoke of nothing else. Boudoir scandals, new politics, all paled before this history, which remained a mystery for nearly every one.

The young Count de Heiligenthal, his head supported on his hands, was seated in his office, apparently absorbed by an interesting study, when his sister Walpurga, fluttering like a breath of air, entered, in order to relate to him the sensational event.

At that recital, Heiligenthal became livid.

“What! the Ambassadress of Caucasus has received blows of a whip? She has been the victim of an assault?”

“Yes,” said the mischievous Walpurga, negligently. “They even say that the blows are so severe that there is every reason to apprehend cerebral fever which, if it should declare itself, would endanger the life of the princess. It is a pity! Such a lovely, charming woman!”

One may perceive that Walpurga was one of those rare feminine creatures who do not allow themselves to be blinded by jealousy, when it is a question of rendering justice to a more beautiful woman.

Whatsoever he may do, a man is not absolutely wicked; there is a sentiment of pity at the bottom of his nature. On learning the terrible accident which happened to the unfortunate Najeska Ivanowna, a frightful remorse invaded the heart of the young man. He was conscious of his infamy; the words expired in his throat, paralyzed by shame. "My God! it was he, then, he alone, who was the cause of this misfortune; the outraged husband, constituting himself a judge, had thus half-killed his wife!"

"Think, then," added Walpurga, "of the rage which will seize the ambassador when, on returning, he will hear of the assault! Monsieur Haller, whom I have accidentally met, has told me also that the chief of police, fearing the indignation of the prince, has just set the whole force at work in order to unravel, as quickly as possible, this dreadful affair, which would lead one to believe that a 'vendetta' weighs upon all the inmates of the hotel of the Caucasian Embassy."

When he was again alone, Waldemar de Heilighenthal let his head fall heavily upon his hands, and bursting into sobs, twice there escaped from his overburdened breast strange incoherent words.

Walpurga de Heilighenthal spoke the truth. Grossmann, the chief of police, was in his element. Since the hour in which the accident was reported, they were coming in troops to his office, to demand details about the news which was agitating the whole city.

The reporters of the *Nouvelliste*, those of the *Echo of Thessaly*, the two largest political journals of the city, and the editors of the most insignificant papers, repulsed at the embassy which they had invaded at

the first rumor, and learning nothing but what the town already knew, were making an invasion on the police, where, eager for details, they were noisily declaiming, and giving vent to their dissatisfaction at the incapacity of the police. Neither Madame de Mineleko, nor the groom, would consent to speak; both were unanimous in declaring that they had not been able to distinguish the features of the assailant. Upon her return to the embassy, notwithstanding her great feebleness, Najeska Ivanowna had sent for her groom. Alone with him, she had made him swear, upon the most sacred oaths, never to reveal who was her assailant. The young servant, upon whose mind the beauty and the kindness of the princess had made a lively impression, promised all, and Madame de Mineleko, from this moment, appeared calmer and more tranquil.

Unhappily their pious silence was to be useless, and the curiosity of the town was going to be most fully satisfied.

Two little girls had been involuntary spectators of the sudden horrible attack on the ambassadress. According to their custom, they were peaceably gathering, on the borders of the forest, some strawberries and flowers, destined for the lovely, dainty worldlings of the city. These two flower-girls, by their frequent visits in the royal park, were acquainted with the by-ways and the frequenters of it. From a distance, they had seen the princess pass, who, musing, was allowing her horse to follow its own caprices. This young woman, as good as beautiful, was winning all hearts; the simple flower-girls were quite proud of the amiable bow with which the elegant Amazon had responded to their profound courtesies. While prattling about the

grace and beauty of the equestrienne, they had followed her with their eyes. Suddenly, they related, a gentleman, whose face and figure closely resembled the Caucasian Ambassador, had approached Madame de Mineleko, and had entered into conversation with her; then a formidable cry was heard. Foreboding a disaster, they darted forward; but, when they arrived upon the scene of action, it was too late; the horse of the ambassadress, in its frantic course, was hastening to the entrance of the city, while that of her assailant was rapidly penetrating in the thick coppice-wood of the forest. Then at full speed, there passed near them, a little frightened groom, who was uttering convulsive exclamations, endeavoring to increase the furious gait of his horse; the unlucky servant was flying to the succor of his mistress.

The evidence of the flower-girls was so serious, that the reporters received a formal order from the police, not to mention it in their accounts. "A gentleman, closely resembling the Caucasian Ambassador," the two young girls had said. That was overwhelming—but they might be mistaken.

In the afternoon, the king received a summary of the inquiries made about the terrible accident of the ambassadress. He was not only very uneasy for the health of Najeska Ivanowna, but also much frightened at the consequences that this affair might have. In thinking of all this, his indignation against the husband of his well-beloved, was augmenting more and more. "What a brute!" to have dared to raise his whip on so much loveliness, so many charms! What to do? to defend, to avenge her, was to destroy her; was she not the wife of this madman? And did it not follow that, as am-

bassador of a country as powerful as Caucasus, he would escape the chastisement which he merited!

Alas! is it not always thus? Impunity, is it not for the powerful of the earth? who, knowing well how unassailable they are, imprudently give themselves free-rein in their vices.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WAGGING OF TONGUES.

When Mineleko's horse stopped before the steps of the palace of the embassy, it was just striking six. After the terrible events of the morning, all had very nearly returned to a relative calm.

The prince appeared pre-occupied and uneasy. He had hardly taken a step in the house where, according to the express order of the physician, an absolute silence reigned, before his chief secretary, Prince Gariatinski, accompanied by Doctor Schlotz, came to meet him. The condition of the princess was agitated. Geheimrath Schlotz had deemed it prudent to renew his visit.

The physician, putting a finger upon his lips, said:

"Hush!—make no noise, your excellency. Madame la Princess is very ill; a violent fever, resulting from blows which she has received, has just declared itself. With your permission, we will enter the little boudoir to the left; then, we can acquaint you with all the events of this terrible day."

Monsieur de Mineleko, like a veritable automaton, entered, followed by the two men who related to him his assault in its least details; he was obliged to hear all.

"The chief of police has set all his best detectives at work; they will surely succeed in discovering the criminal. But that which renders the inquiry very difficult, is that Madame la Princess affirms not to have recognized the man who struck her, and the groom says the same."

“Ah! she has not recognized this man?” said the ambassador, slowly, “that is truly unfortunate!”

“Unquestionably, for your excellency knows the severity of our laws in this respect; if we could put our hand upon the criminal, he would have, at the least, two years in prison, and your highness would be revenged.”

“And you say that the groom, also, has not recognized the man?”

“No, your excellency. He, as well as Madame le Ambassadrice, has not been able to furnish the least indication in that respect.”

“Ah!”

“Before retiring, one word more, prince.” This time, it is the physician who speaks. “I earnestly entreat you, if necessary I even command you, not to enter in the chamber of the invalid. Two nurses are with her; they are reliable women, I answer for them. The maid will not even be admitted. I have forbidden it, for each new face seems to terrify Madame la Princess, who is in an alarming state of excitement. If my orders are not executed to the letter, I would not dare to be responsible for this precious life.”

“What! Madame le Ambassadrice is so ill as that?”

“Yes, your excellency. One of the blows has severely wounded one side of her head and temple. All three have been struck in places where they could be fatal. After the first dressing, Madame la Princess was getting on well enough; but, toward five o'clock, a violent fever, accompanied with delirium and excitement, has manifested itself, and it is only with great difficulty that they have succeeded in keeping her in her bed. I have had to

employ very powerful soporifics; it is only some minutes since she rests quietly. This sleep is priceless, we must respect it. But, perhaps, your excellency would like to speak to the groom, the only witness of the scene."

"Later, later—I will see; but, at present, I am so shattered, so annihilated by all this which you tell me, that it is necessary that I take a little rest. I really have need of being alone."

Gariatinski, however, was preparing to follow the ambassador, intending to give him some details about the expedition of the courier; but the prince made such an imperative gesture while ascending the stairs which led to his chamber, that the first secretary was compelled to desist.

"This is a very astonishing day," said the three secretaries of the embassy, when Gariatinski returned and imparted to them that which had just taken place.

"Did the prince appear very indignant when he was informed of the infamous assault?"

"Bless me! no, I thought him rather too calm."

"What a singular nature! He flies into an ungovernable passion for nothing, and at such an event, well calculated to kindle the indignation of the most phlegmatic, he breathes not a word. What does this mean?"

And all their tongues wagged.

Here, as elsewhere, the husband's tyranny had not been able to escape the secretaries, who admired as much as they pitied the charming ambassadress.

CHAPTER XX.

A SUMMONS FROM THE KING.

Mineleko, however, had hastened to be alone. Never in his life had he been harassed by so many contradictory emotions. It was very bitterly, very sincerely that he was repenting of the cowardliness of his passion. This blunder which he had committed was placing him in a very disastrous position; he might, by a single stroke, lose both his wife and his situation, but what did his career signify to him, if his Najeska Ivanowna remained to him!

He knew that the princess had noble and magnanimous characteristics; she would never betray him. But would it be the same with the groom, this miserable salaried canaille? If he was silent to-day, he might speak to-morrow! As long as he should live, he, a Mineleko, would be at the mercy of his valet, who would, perhaps, grant a silence which he should have to purchase, in order to save his honor. And although, even after having well paid him, would he yet be sure of not being betrayed some day?

Had not his anger once more blinded him odiously enough? But that anonymous letter spoke the truth, however, since Najeska Ivanowna had not denied anything.

But, calmer now, he commenced to reason, which instead of following, should have preceded his folly; nothing astonishing, then, if this infamous anonymous letter was an ignoble calumny. His young wife might easily have been with the king,

but was that a reason to suppose that she had descended to dishonor? She had entered the little pavilion, the vile informer had added. What was there so compromising in that? From that height the view was magnificent; Najeska Ivanowna, of a meditative nature, a lover of the beautiful, had been capable of repairing to this promenade which promised her such a sublime spectacle. When, filled with the remembrance of the admired and forsaken beauties, she had seen him brutally spring up before her, was it singular that dismayed, suffocated, she had not been able to explain her meeting with the king?

By interrogating the little groom, and threatening to kill him if he did not tell the absolute truth, he would know immediately how long a time the king and the ambadress had remained alone together. But would he dare now to call this valet? Alone with this wicked scoundrel would he not cast this in his face?

“It is you, you alone, infamous assailant of your wife! I hold you in my power, and if you dare to threaten me, I call! They will come at my cries, then I will tell them the truth, and you will be cast into prison, like the worst of blackguards. And, after this scandal, prepare for your disgrace, for a recall from your government, for a long exile in the heart of Asia, where you will go and share the sad fate of the many unfortunates that you have sent thither.”

All these terrible thoughts were clashing against each other in the brain of the unhappy man. If he had been able to see, at least, Najeska Ivanowna!—to learn from her lips that she would once more pardon this infamous brutality! Oh! never, never

more was he going to allow himself to commit any more!

He would swear it to her; that this cowardly one, more terrible than the preceding, should be the last. What had he thought, then? to whip this woman whom he loved more than his soul, more than his life! What had he done in that horrible moment with his reason, with his heart? Alas! what had he not suffered, when reflection, predominating over the tumult of his passions, had resumed its empire in his soul! Why had he not, in his despair at the crime committed, dashed out his brains against one of those trees, the witnesses of his odious cowardice? It was in the solitude of that sublime and imposing nature that he should have died; those magnificent trees, silent spectators of his guilt, would have grown and would have buried him under their branches, protecting forever this body purified by repentance.

Shame seized him, remorse pursued him, he had not been able to resolve to leave that calming solitude. He had been afraid to re-enter this little town, where tattle would run quicker than lightning. Jealousy, despair, repentance, alternately created in him a terrible tempest which rent him.

The whole afternoon he had wandered, like a soul in torment, and on his return he was obliged to renounce seeing Najeska Ivanowna!

To see her alone a moment! to hear issue from her lips these precious words:

“I am innocent—thou hast been unjust!” Oh! for this sentence he would have given ten years of his life. But no, they would not admit him to his wife’s chamber. Was she really so ill? or, fearing that he would indulge in a new paroxysm, had she

entreated those who cared for her not to allow him to enter?"

Here, they were all conspiring against him, his only hope they were taking from him. Was this already his chastisement? or was she really as dangerously ill as the physician pretended? But, if she was going to die, what would become of him?—him whose jealousy, after having poisoned this young existence, had terminated it by a crime!—by an assassination!

He was so exasperated against himself that he did not hear the reiterated raps which they were discreetly knocking at his door. Who dared, then, to disturb him thus? Had he not absolutely forbidden their coming to disturb him?

It was Gariatinski again.

"May your highness pardon me, but one of the king's aides-de-camp is down stairs. His majesty commands your highness to go immediately to the royal palace, having something very urgent to communicate, this evening, to your highness."

When conscience is not at peace, everything is a matter of terror to us. A secret uneasiness seized the ambassador. This summons of the king, at this hour, and after the events of the day, was very unusual. "A good pilot, however, is best tried in a storm," and the ambassador, after having remained alone some moments to collect himself and reflect, set out for the chateau.

CHAPTER XXI.

OBEYING HIS MAJESTY.

When the Caucasian Ambassador entered the king's presence, several persons were with his majesty; among others the chief of police, whom the Prince of Mineleko recognized.

"I desire to remain alone with his excellency," said Charles Ferdinand XVIII, dismissing all the other visitors with an imperative gesture.

"Monsieur le Ambassadeur, take a seat, for the interview will be somewhat long."

"At the injunction of the king, the Prince of Mineleko sat down. Summoning all the resources of his *sang froid*, he endeavored to conceal the terrible emotion which was torturing him.

When they were entirely alone:

"Monsieur le Ambassadeur," commenced the king, "if you believe me, to-morrow morning, under any pretext whatever, you will leave Thessaly, if not forever, at least for some weeks."

Although, in reality, Mineleko was not surprised; he endeavored yet to make a gesture of astonishment.

"I surprise you, do I not? Well! take this report, and I doubt not, that after having read it, you will at once interpret the advice, the order, even, that I see myself compelled to give you."

Mineleko extended a hand which trembled slightly, and the king gave to him the examination signed with the names of the two little flower-girls who, from a distance, had witnessed the assault.

Mineleko, simulating great attention, affected to read very slowly, but in reality he was endeavoring to give himself time to reflect. Those flower-girls really said, "a man resembling Monsieur de Mineleko;" but, after all, they did not affirm in a positive manner, that it was he. What should he do? Ought he to deny it? or to confess all to the king? Thinking of the terrible consequences that for a man of his eminent position such a confession might have, he adopted the first resolution.

With a violent effort over himself, Mineleko, raising his eyes to the king, said:

"That is strange! What man here can resemble me to that extent?"

A very significant smile wandered over his majesty's lips; this movement did not escape the ambassador.

"We will have to seek for this man!" cried Mineleko, whose anger, with great difficulty allayed, flashed like lightning on seeing the mocking air of the king.

"That is what they have done, Monsieur le Ambassadeur. But, it is my painful duty, I acknowledge it to you, to warn you, that during the first days which will follow this incident, and in spite of your innocence, (his majesty emphasized these last words), your sojourn here might occasion you great unpleasantness which, perhaps, might not be without leading to strained relations between the two powers of Caucasus and Thessaly, if indignation, misled, should create for you here painful difficulties. These difficulties are the more probable as the mysterious assassination committed at your embassy, and of which they have not been able to find the author, has already excited a good many

suppositions, and your testimony that, after having seen a man leap out of the window, you had tranquilly returned to bed, instead of giving the alarm, has, in spite of the testimony of Geheimrath Schlotz, awakened many unjust suspicions against you."

The furious lightning which flashed in the eyes of Mineleko, at those words of the king, arrested, for a moment, the words upon his majesty's lips.

What! the king! the murderer himself, the ambassador was thinking, dared to speak thus, to him, the innocent man! But he was too much accustomed to the habits of the court to interrupt the king, even by a syllable, until he had finished.

Then, only raising his head and looking the king full in the face:

"Is it seriously," said he, "that your majesty can (ah! how he emphasized this last word!) suspect me for a second of being the author of the murder of one of my most faithful servants, of a man who had been entirely devoted to my father?"

"Certainly no! a thousand times no!" quickly responded the king, "but you know as well as I what the journalism of to-day is. Nothing escapes it; the least detail of our private life belongs to it, they immediately seize upon it, and an account is given and delivered to the commentaries of everybody. An article, unfortunately turned, might inflame minds more ready to believe falsehood than the truth, and then——"

"Your majesty forgets that I cannot absent myself without the permission of my august master, the emperor."

"I have obviated that difficulty. It is scarcely half an hour ago since I sent a dispatch to my

cousin, the emperor. The response will be here to-morrow morning; you may travel this evening, then, without danger. Recognize in this prompt action a proof of my lively solicitude for you, and the fervent desire that I have to remove from your highness all the complications which might arise."

"A point, still more important than all the rest, escapes your majesty. The princess, (on pronouncing this name, Mineleko's lips trembled, and an intense suffocation contracted his throat), since some hours, has been seriously ill."

The king, who was ignorant of the danger in which Najeska Ivanowna was, could not conceal the emotion which wrung his whole being on learning this detail.

"Has the condition of Madame le Ambassadrice grown worse, then, since this afternoon? When I sent Count Adlersward, at two o'clock, to inquire about her, she appeared to be as well as her terrible accident would permit."

With all his gracious thoughts, the ambassador was scarcely listening:

"If I set out to-morrow, as your majesty commands me, it is possible that I—that I may never see my wife!"

The unhappy man was really so afflicted, that the king, who, however, was suffering also, and for the same beloved object, was seized with sudden compassion for the unfortunate man.

"When did this terrible change take place?"

"At five o'clock."

"You were, doubtless, at home?"

"Alas, no! I only returned at six o'clock." Again the king looked strangely at the ambassador.

"Permit me to tell you, Monsieur le Prince, how

much this absence, very involuntarily, I wish to believe, is against you and delivers you to the malignity of the public. You went out, and you did not return until quite late, and precisely on a day in which you yourself would consider it an impossibility to leave the embassy."

Mineleko did not answer. He realized how conclusive these circumstances were.

"You see, it is urgent that your excellency should go away. I could certainly use my influence, which you have acquired; but, if I succeeded with the police, who are subject to my orders, I would most certainly be prostrated by the press, which I myself am obliged to listen and submit to."

Mineleko endeavored to defend himself.

"But I have done nothing."

"Nevertheless, there weighs serious accusations against you. This evening and to-morrow morning they cannot yet do much, but afterward, even holding you to be innocent, I cannot answer for that which will take place. Your groom has undergone a preliminary examination. At first, he faltered, then entangled himself, and at last he gave some very incoherent responses. This fellow, on reconsidering, may change his tactics—he may accuse you. Oh! I like to believe that it would be infamous, unjust," added the sovereign, on seeing the prince's gesture of denial, "but I am not the only master; there are judges in the residence. And, now, you will comprehend why your absence for some weeks becomes an absolute necessity."

Mineleko was compelled to acknowledge that the king was a thousand times right. If he remained, he would inevitably fall into a labyrinth from whence he would not escape with his honor. The

investigating magistrate, with all his skill, would abstract from the groom the confession that the fellow had yet been able to elude to-day; and then, in what a position would not the ambassador find himself!

“I will obey your majesty,” said the Prince of Mineleko.

The king made a haughty inclination with his head which meant: “Then, your audience is terminated,” and Monsieur de Mineleko backed out. A moment after, he descended the wide steps of the staircase of the chateau, and found himself alone in the night air.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STOLEN PAPER.

On leaving the royal audience, the prince's mind was so much absorbed by the multitude of reflections which agitated him, that the jealous husband had completely disappeared. For a moment, the anonymous letter, the cause of so much evil, was forgotten; the illness of his dear Najeska Ivanowna, his probable disgrace with his government, alone occupied his thoughts. What were the other calamities in comparison with these real perils? Why had he always acted thus? Would this lesson correct him? Would he know how to profit by the counsels which this rude school was giving him? Alas! the suspicious, vindictive nature of the ambassador was soon to resume its sway.

Hardly had he left the king, hardly had he crossed the last drawbridge of the palace, before Mineleko commenced again to think of that infernal missive. From whom was it? A woman, wounded in her pretensions, could alone have put such subtilty in her vengeance.

But who, who in this city, could thus detest Najeska Ivanowna, his dear treasure? It is now, that he knows her to be ill, in danger, in great danger, perhaps, that he realizes how dear she is to him. He is terrified at the thought of losing her. What is it which predominates in him at this moment, is it love or egotism?

"I will know the truth! though I die for it!" he said to himself. "In order to succeed in it, I will

put this business in the hands of an agent of the secret police, and though he move heaven and earth, he must discover the author of this infamous letter! But, this research, about a letter addressed to myself, will it not be to avow that it is I who have committed the assault?"

All the same; he will risk it!

Precisely, by one of those strange coincidences with which life is so often strewn, there had arrived from Caucasus, the preceding night, a detective, with the object of watching very closely a conspiracy which they knew was then secretly plotting. He was to search for the members of a secret political society, plotting to overthrow the Caucasian government, and which, after its denunciation, should have elected, as one of its most important seats, the capital of Thessaly. The sojourn of this detective in Thessaly ought to last several weeks at least; perhaps even several months. This employe had, a long time since, given evidence of being a skillful spy, if ever there was one; several nihilist plots had already been intrusted to him, and, although the Caucasian empire was infested by this society, he had each time come out with honor.

This man had known the prince since a long time, and was devoted to him, body and soul; without fear he could confide the truth to him, and, far from betraying him, he would assist in shielding him, him the criminal in the eyes of all. Fate had overthrown him, but, before he would depart, he would intrust to him the task of seeking the coward, who had forever shattered his happiness.

On re-entering the hotel of the embassy, Mineleko sent for Dimitri Feodorowitch Bolski, the celebrated detective. As soon as Bolski had arrived, the prince

closing and bolting the door, laid the anonymous letter before him.

The detective was from thirty to forty years old. He had one of those heads which especially astonish you, by the quite remarkable penetration of the two deep black eyes, which, placed upon you, seemed to desire to scrutinize the most secret recesses of your being.

“Dimitri Feodorowitch,” said the ambassador, “I am obliged to depart to-morrow for Caucasus, and I do not wish to go without leaving behind me a reliable person, who will discover from whom this accursed letter has come to me, this morning.”

Bolski took possession of the letter. We have said, that it appeared to have no distinctive mark. Mineleko was eagerly following with his eyes the mobile countenance of the detective. After having bent a long time over the note, which he was fixedly regarding, Dimitri Feodorowitch approached the lamp. He studied the paper at first with the naked eye, then, taking from his pocket a magnifying-glass, which he always carried, and placing it over the characters, he recommenced his researches with a great concentration of mind. Then, raising his head:

“Your highness may depart in peace,” said he, “I will discover the author.”

“But how to succeed in it? The paper is such as one may purchase anywhere, and the writing is very skillfully disguised!”

“I have accomplished more difficult things, your highness, than to arrive at discovering the truth in this case. A letter, although it may be written in the most disguised manner, is one of those clues which never fails to become one of the most trouble-

some accusations against a prisoner. But here, prince, two things must be done immediately. first, I must interrogate the domestics, in order to learn which one has received it, and who has given it to him, since it has no stamp; afterward, you must give me a specimen of the writing of every person who has any correspondence with you. Do not neglect to submit all to me. The least word written upon a card may be a valuable indication. The moments are precious; may your highness be pleased, for greater security, to sort your papers yourself, while, for my own part, I am going down stairs to interrogate the domestics.

Monsieur de Mineleko felt his confidence revive, by the contact of this experienced person. Inspired by the energy of this man, he set diligently to work. Opening his secretary, his drawers, ferreting in all the places where he preserved his papers, he collected specimens of each of his correspondents. This occupation made the time appear to him very short, in which Dimitri Feodorowitch was employed in his researches down stairs.

It was without much difficulty that Bolski found again the person to whom the urgent missive had been delivered. It was the gardener's little boy who had received it, the father being occupied elsewhere.

“What kind of a person was it who brought this letter, little Jacques?” Bolski said, drawing the child gently to him. “Try hard to recollect, for it is very important.”

“It was a nurse.”

“A nurse?”

“Yes.”

“Wouldst thou recognize her? Couldst thou, if necessary, describe her to me?”

“To describe her to you,” said the child, “would be very difficult for me, for all nurses resemble each other.”

Dimitri Feodorowitch smiled at this ingenuous remark, correct enough, however.

“But if thou wast to see this woman?”

“Then, I would recognize her, perhaps.”

“But what did she say to thee?”

“That it was necessary that this note should be given to Monsieur le Ambassadeur without losing a single instant. It was even because she insisted so much that, to arrive more speedily in the vestibule where Vassili generally is, that I had no time to look at her closely.”

“Did she appear uneasy—agitated?”

“Oh, yes! she came running; she was even so breathless that she could scarcely speak.”

“And when thou hadst taken her letter, what did she do?”

“She fled like an arrow; that astonished me very much.”

The commencement of this inquiry, of no importance to any one but Bolski, was a good deal to him in informing him how many difficulties he would have to encounter. He had hoped that the bearer of the letter was a porter, the ordinary messenger in such cases; and, then, it would be very easy to discover the author. The number of hired porters, wearing badges, was restricted in the residence; while there were many nurses in the city! But it was all the same, even in this labyrinth of girls of the lower classes, he would attain his object. Then he had not only this string to his bow. The most

valuable source of his information would be the examination of the writing which the ambassador was now collecting. When Bolski returned to the prince, he was hard at work.

“Let your highness give me those which you have already selected,” said he.

Taking from a little table the whole mass of papers which he found there, he established himself before a candelabra, whose bright, clear light, fell fully on the tedious anonymous letter; thus installed, he commenced his duty of comparisons.

Each letter was, with him, the object of an examination as minute as if he had to decipher some Egyptian hieroglyphic. Not one, which was not examined with the magnifying-glass. While he was engaged in this pursuit, Mineleko, for his part, was passing and repassing, scrupulously continuing his researches.

“Prince,” said Dimitri Feodorowitch, suddenly, “there has been a murder committed at your house, lately. Whom do you suspect of it?”

Mineleko, at first, did not dare to respond to this question. We know that he was not far from accusing the king.

“Prince, conceal nothing from me. Who knows how useful the least word from you would be to me about this affair.”

Knowing that he could not conceal from Bolski that which he was determined to know, Mineleko frankly told him his suspicions.

“Your suspicions astonish me, and I cannot share them, monseigneur,” the detective responded.

“Then, what do you think, Bolski?” Mineleko replied.

As if he desired to change abruptly the conversation, Dimitri Feodorowitch suddenly said:

“Prince, do not forget to visit your basket in which you throw your waste paper. I recollect how, in a trial for murder, the head of a great lady fell under the knife, although they had lost all hope of discovering the assassin, only because a bit of torn rose-satin paper found in the waste-basket, set them on the track of the criminal. Ah! the women! the women!”

Was it by accident that the piercing eyes of Bolski were then fixed upon a photograph of the ambassadress?

When he was speaking, Mineleko started. There was a letter which he had not shown the detective, that which he had snatched from the hands of his wife that memorable night in the atelier. A struggle was taking place in him, a struggle which he surmounted in the end.

“Dimitri Feodorowitch,” said he, suddenly, “I have forgotten to show you this.” And he extended to the agent of the secret police the piece of paper stolen from the princess.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PRINCE SEES HIS WIFE.

The whole capital of Thessaly, still under the shock of the drama of the previous day, learned, with stupefaction the next morning, on awakening, that, notwithstanding the serious condition of the ambassadress, the Prince of Mineleko had departed for Caucasus.

“Urgent business, dispatches of the greatest importance,” he had alleged, in order to account for this precipitate departure, which resembled a flight.

At the office of the chief of police, this voyage thwarted them very much, for, then, they designated the assailant. Very privately as yet, while waiting until they dared to speak more openly, they were freely uttering the name of the prince himself.

Everybody was coupling this strange event with the murder committed at his house, and they even blamed the government for having allowed this man to depart, who was unquestionably the assailant, and very probably, the assassin besides.

Vague suspicions, excited especially by the evidence of the flower-girls of the forest, were already propagated in the town. They were recalling the monarch’s very remarkable attentions to the beautiful ambassadress, wild rumors were reported since then, about the deposition of the prince, and, from all that, each one drew his conclusions.

How true facts will percolate in spite of all! What is this impalpable exhalation which disengages itself of an event which one would desire to mysteriously conceal, and which, whatsoever one

may do to stifle it behind a wall of discretion, ascends slowly but surely to each class of society which it penetrates, increased still by the unwholesome infectious filth of calumny. That which is certain, is that truth, that enormous force, comes to light anywhere in spite of and against everything. They were whispering here, very secretly, that which had really happened. Several persons, who were accustomed to ride at an early hour, had the same morning of the assault, alternately encountered the king and Madame de Mineleko, going in the same direction.

Madame de Mineleko, thanks to the influence of the powerful soporifics, had passed quite a peaceful night.

The ambassador was able, with many precautions, to enter her chamber to contemplate her once more before his departure. She was in a state of great weakness; her prostration prevented her from perceiving the presence of her husband. This was, in every respect, a great blessing. Besides, had she been less stupefied, the princess would not have been able to see him, the nurse, in order to guard the patient from all emotion, having placed the prince behind the curtain of the bed; in this manner he could see without being seen.

It was with a very heavy heart, and with a strange presentiment of misfortune, that the prince quitted the residence city.

CHAPTER XXIV.

INDIGNATION OF THE KING.

During the first eight days of her illness, Madame de Mineleko's condition was so alarming, that they sent two or three dispatches a day, to the despairing husband. The king, very uneasy, on his part, sent several times a day to inquire after the invalid. Sometimes, he came alone, or accompanied by one of the young princesses, to inquire in person about the progress which the ambassadress' physician said she was making. After terrible sufferings, the ninth day brought with it a perceptible change for the better; the fever abated, and the convalescent recovered her lucidity, and she was soon in a condition to see her friends. The king was one of the first who requested the favor of being received. He wrote to Madame de Mineleko, "that he had some serious things to tell her."

Charles Ferdinand had really reflected a great deal, during the long days in which the life of this woman, whom he loved with a genuine and deeply-rooted love, had been in danger.

Thinking of his last interview with "that brute" (it was thus that, in his thoughts, he entitled the husband), he asked himself if this young woman could ever live again, in contact with such a man. As soon as Najeska Ivanowna had appeared at the Court of Thessally, the king had interested himself in this existence that everybody said was so unhappy. By all the questions which he had asked, here and there, it had been easy for him to conclude

that this household was not happy. "As for the rest, he is the best of men," the indifferent said, in speaking of the prince, "but with a temper!—with a temper! In fact, was it not for his superior intelligence, for his diplomatic qualities, he would never have retained the important positions which were intrusted to him.

The history of his duels, of his jealousies, of his brutalities, were all known to the king. If all the young men smitten with the young lady's beauty, and coming like bewildered butterflies, to flutter around this brilliant light, were not dead, it was certainly not the husband's fault, who would have ardently desired to lodge a bullet in the bodies of all. Was not that notorious scandal, with the unhappy H——, scarcely extinguished, before a second, of the same character, this time with a royal prince, had been upon the eve of breaking out. For this affair, the government had given the ambassador a severe rap on the knuckles, and had sent him to another post, for change of air. But he remained the same everywhere; the Prince of Mineleko was incorrigible. Several times already, the ambassador had tried the favor of his imperial master. If they had closed their eyes to his conduct, it was only on account of the high rank, the great capacities of the prince. Caucasus needed intelligent men, to represent it in foreign parts; besides, in this country, where they are accustomed to bears and boors, do they not treat the people and their inferiors, like beasts of burden?

Knowing how to take Mineleko, his intimate friends understood how to frustrate the most of the conflicts, in which he engaged so audaciously. All were pleased to pity and admire the beautiful

Najeska Ivanowna. Although she supported her unhappy fate, with the resignation and the patience of an angel, the hearts which were interested in her, could not cease to be uneasy, in thinking of the sad future which perhaps awaited her.

“No!” said the king to himself, “this flower is too fragile for one to leave it in the heavy claws of this tiger, who, one day, in a moment of intense jealousy, will break it like a glass.

For the king, for the police, as well as for everybody in Thessaly, it was really the ambassador who had whipped his wife and strangled his servant.

The secretaries of the embassy, the servants of Mineleko, even those who were a long time in his service, were also secretly whispering it.

Whatsoever side they turned, all doubts were dissipated.

Indignation and rage arose in the heart of the king, at the thought that knowing the truth, and being able to prove it, they had been obliged to arrest the inquiry of the police, and allow this man to go in perfect liberty, because he was an ambassador, and that it was necessary to avoid creating unpleasantness with an allied power as powerful as the Caucasian Empire.

CHAPTER XXV.

PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

What became of Heiligenthal, during the young woman's illness? Alternately rent by remorse, anxiety, and shame, he thought, at certain moments, that he would lose his reason. He wished to flee from this city, the witness of his infamy; but, alas! inexorable duty retained him. What excuse would he be able to give, to obtain a dismissal from his chiefs, he, who had but just obtained this government position, so short a time before the arrival of Mineleko, in Thessaly. His life was now passed in trembling, that a day would come in which they would discover that he, considered as a man of honor, was the author of such a cowardice as an anonymous letter. He did not dare to attempt to again see Najeska Ivanowna; besides, the poor lady was too ill for him to be able to think of penetrating to her. He must wait for convalescence to come and terminate a work which it was slowly commencing.

When Najeska Ivanowna was at last in a condition to receive, the first admitted was the king.

On the morning of the day of his majesty's visit, they had removed the bandages from the patient's head.

Pale, emaciated, almost transparent, with deep black circles under her beautiful languishing eyes, the princess was extended on her couch.

Yes, Najeska Ivanowna was sad, pre-occupied. Although she had preserved, with very great dig-

nity, a sacred silence as to who had struck her; although she thought herself able to count upon the discretion of her groom, of whom she had commanded absolute silence, the princess was fearing that the truth would come to light. But, nevertheless, in spite of herself, she felt in her heart a new indignation against her husband, who, she said to herself, was becoming a coward through his jealousy and brutality.

She was thinking with dread of the future. Would it be possible for her to remain fettered to this man in whom the brute was aroused at every suspicion, even the most fugitive? Notwithstanding all his promises, all his desires, he would never change! Can a being, arrived to nearly fifty years, still modify his character? The habits are too firmly set.

At the sight of the dear invalid a great compassion seized the king—a compassion which inclined his heart to love her with a more complete, a more energetic tenderness than it had hitherto done, with all the fires of his passion. Yes, at any price, he would save this woman from a future yawning with dangers which was opening before her.

His majesty was so affected by the circumstances of this second *tete-a-tete* that he could scarcely speak.

“How happy I am to see you again!” said he, suddenly approaching the couch on which the convalescent was reclining.

Najeska Ivanowna signed to him to be seated.

“You are still very feeble?”

“I have suffered much, sire.”

“I know it, and believe that I have felt the repercussion of each of your sufferings,”

“You are good, sire!”

“No! only I love you!”

Najeska Ivanowna felt frightened, disturbed. She had wished to lead the king to more platonic sentiments.

“I love you. I may tell you so, without failing in honor, for I come to ask you to be mine.”

Madame de Mineleko, for a moment, believed it an insult; she grew pale.

“Oh! do not mistake the sense of my words!” said his majesty, quickly. “You told me, the morning of that terrible day when—when this strange accident happened to you—that you would never belong to another man than your husband. Well, this is what I came to tell you; your husband, instead of being a protector, is a constant danger to you; his jealousy continually on the alert, is a menace of death suspended over your head. Although you have maintained the most profound silence upon the name of your aggressor, no one is deceived. The whole residence knows that the blows which you have received, have been the work of the prince.”

“Sire?”

“Do not say ‘no!’ Your conduct undoubtedly is magnanimous, noble; you endeavor to defend the father of your children. But you will not succeed in it; everybody knows that it is he. Well, you must leave this—this brute who has dared to strike you!”

“Ah! your majesty, do not continue. I can hear no more,” cried Najeska Ivanowna, anxious still to defend Mineleko. “Yes, my husband is jealous, yes, he has faults; but his qualities are great!”

“Yes, I know—I know all that,” interrupted the king; “but, I entreat you, do not excite yourself thus. You know as well, and even better than I, that hereafter you cannot remain with him. Who

can tell what he will dare some fine day! Do not forget the death of Kassan!"

"Sire!—sire! you become unjust, and I will dare to tell you so; almost insane!"

"That is all the same, allow me to continue. He is of an unequaled violence, and he will never change now. One easily bends a reed in the direction wherein we desire, but what impulsion, other than that which it has taken, can we give to an old gnarled trunk?"

The king was speaking the truth; already in her own mind, Najeska Ivanowna had often thought how many moments of her past life had been horrible; these painful reminiscences brought her back to the day in which she had seen her husband for the last time. It was with a shiver of terror that she recalled his contorted face at the frightful moment when, whipping her as one chastises a dog, he had so ignominiously outraged her, her, daughter and wife of a prince! This offense would be always an indelible stain for her, which nothing could efface.

"Listen to me," continued the king, very gently. "You must demand a divorce."

"But my children?"

"Your children? They will be given to you, for it is he who has been to blame. It is he, who in the presence of a witness, your groom, and seen from a distance by two flower-girls, who have testified against him, has inflicted an outrage on you, more than sufficient for you to gain your cause."

"But what is the situation of a divorced woman, sire?"

"When this divorced woman becomes the wife of a king, do you believe that any one would dare to cast a stone at her?"

Then, then only, Najeska Ivanowna comprehended all. The king wished to marry her! For a moment she was dazzled. What a change would be made in her existence! She would go from the arms of that jealous brute, to fall in those of this patient, noble, and gentle king, great lord to the tips of his fingers, who, like an impregnable fortress, would defend her against all tempests.

But, strange thing, notwithstanding all the allurements this perspective might have, Najeska Ivanowna was not happy.

“Sire,” she suddenly responded, as if she had possessed the gift of reading the future, “leave me to my husband! With him I am in my element; I feel instinctively, only too well, I am not born for happiness. Would you like to know what a Bohemian told me one day in telling my fortune? After having minutely examined the lines of my hand, these are the words which she uttered:”

“‘Child, one day, a handsome king will cross your path of life; he will love you, and will want to set his royal cross upon your brow. But the crown will only hover over your head; it will always remain suspended there. Flee from this king—flee from him as you would flee from a pestilence! The only dowry which he will bring you, will be shame and death!’ ”*

“Ah, sire! pardon me for relating these things to you, but the impression which they have left on my mind, is one of those which cannot be effaced. In spite of all, I have remained a little savage of the borders of the Black Sea. Whatever my French instructresses may have done, I am still that which I

* This prophecy was really made to the unhappy woman whose history is recorded in this true romance.

was at my birth; my head crammed with superstitions. No, sire! I will not demand a divorce. I do not wish to become your wife!"

"Why?" demanded the king.

"Why—because I would excite too much indignation!"

"No, it is because you do not love me!"

Najeska Ivanowna was silent.

"Oh, no! you do not love me!" pursued the king. "Otherwise, could you reason thus with so much serenity, with so much tranquillity?"

Najeska Ivanowna was trembling like a leaf agitated by the wind. And this was what the king called being tranquil! She remained, however, obstinately silent.

"I still insist, Najeska Ivanowna! I will say more; I exact the truth from your lips. Why, on that hallowed morning, when I was alone with you in the pavilion, did you tremble at my touch? Why, but just now, at my entrance, this emotion that I believed I observed, if you do not love me? Najeska Ivanowna, I pray you, answer me; see you not that your silence makes me mad?"

The king was so handsome, at this moment, his manly form was breathing such a passion of expectation and of love, that Najeska Ivanowna felt a voluptuous thrill run through her veins; strange emotions, such as those that Charles Ferdinand, and he alone, in her life, had already several times excited in her, filling her heart with a sweet and tender admiration. Yes, she loved him!—loved him with all the strength of her young soul; nevertheless, she still hesitated.

If only, in that moment, she had listened to her hesitations! If, instead of allowing herself to be

fascinated, blinded by the charm that the king's presence was infiltrating in her, she had resisted! Did the king see? did he divine the conflict?

Suddenly a joyous cry escaped from his heart. In a moment his arms infolded this beloved woman, and delirious kisses, which he could not restrain, rained upon the princess.

"Thou lovest me!—thou lovest me! Ah! do not defend thyself!—do not say no! Thou lovest me as I love thee; I inhale it in the sigh which exhales from thy breast, in the breath of thy lips, in the humidity of thy beautiful eyes! Thou shalt be my wife, dost thou hear well? my wife! the well-beloved wife of thy king! No more objections; I have thought of all. I have written to the Emperor of Caucasus, praying him to change the post of the Prince of Mineleko. My demand has been accepted; Mineleko will return here no more. To-day even, thou shalt enter at the bar thy plea for a divorce, and thy door will be forever forbidden to this man!"

"But, if you should cease one day to love me?"

Like a sorrowful sigh, this phrase escaped from the lips of Najeska Ivanowna, that those of the king held hermetically sealed under his own.

"Will the sun ever cease to shine?" responded he, softly.

Najeska Ivanowna was for a moment in such a state of intoxicating happiness that she could no longer resist! There, holding her pressed against his heart, the king, in fervent words, painted her future, this always ideal future when it is represented by the glowing words of love, but which reality never attains.

Before the departure of his majesty every question was decided. The princess would send for an advo-

cate that the king recommended to her; she would see Mineleko no more, "and this was yet too light a punishment for him," the king said, "for, if justice had followed its course, the penalty had been two years in prison, and consequently the complete annihilation of his whole career, that his cowardly outrage would have brought him, without speaking of the murder of his valet in which, with or without reason, justice believed to see the hands of the prince who, in his paroxysm of rage, became a dangerous and even criminal madman."

Najeska Ivanowna angrily wished to interrupt him.

"Do not excuse him!" the king said to her, closing her mouth with a long kiss, and assuring her by the most explicit oaths, that he would marry her as soon as the time imposed by the law should have expired, after the sentence of divorce. Besides, the case of Madame de Mineleko was so clear that there would not be a shadow of difficulty in seeing her demand granted.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DIVORCE.

Monsieur de Mineleko, the fifth evening of his arrival in the Caucasian capital, and consequently the ninth after his departure from the Thessalian residence, did not receive the customary dispatches in regard to his wife's health. Some very grave affairs retained him, which annoyed him very much, for his trunks were hardly unstrapped before obliging friends, always eager to propagate bad news, had very privately informed him that the King of Thessaly had solicited and obtained from his cousin of Caucasus, the recall of his ambassador. They were already even designating his successor. Whatever Mineleko did to learn them, he could not find out the reasons alleged by the Thessalian court!

This was not only making him very uneasy, but, for the present, was rendering his return to Thessaly impossible. His conscience on the alert was telling him the true cause of his disgrace, he believed the situation to be still more grave, for he knew that in Thessaly, where the autocracy is not absolute as in Caucasus, the tribunals were independent of the king. He was saying to himself that, notwithstanding the efforts of Charles Ferdinand XVIII, the flower-girls might have spoken in a more positive manner, and the groom have renounced his silence. His majesty would undoubtedly have much trouble to stifle the affair. On the other hand, he was acquainted with the customs of his country. He knew how, under a pretext of giving you a change of air,

if they found you offensive in high places, they quickly and easily dispatched you to the Pacific coast. He was thinking, then, that for the present, it would be more prudent not to inquire into it and to remain where he was.

Twelve days after his installation in Caucasus he received a shock, under the stroke of which he was felled to the earth.

“A large letter for his highness!”

It was Vassili again, the faithful Vassili, who, having followed his master in his disgrace, was speaking thus while handing him a letter which bore the official seal.

Why, at this very simple news, did a strange throbbing agitate Mineleko's heart?

Slowly he ascended the stairs, determined to open the letter only when he should be entirely alone.

Arrived in his chamber, he leaned for a moment against the frame of an open window; his forehead resting upon his large hand, his fingers buried in his thick hair, a veritable thick and black lion's mane which the wind was stirring, he was listening mechanically to the confused and distant murmurs which were rising from the drowsy fields, a harmonious concert of water, trees, and zephyrs, the evening song of grateful nature, in the divine language of starry and serene nights. The moon, like a silver disk, was diffusing a light which seemed to lighten his gloomy soul. To all those voices, to all those murmurs, the stings of a reproachful conscience were responding; the months, the weeks, the hours even of the first days of his marriage were crowding in multitudes in his heavy head.

How the little Najeska Ivanowna had loved the sublime and silent language of those nights! How

he had ridiculed these romantic ideas, then, which had traversed that pretty fantastic head, completely filled with the marvelous! He, in his turn, felt himself attracted toward these beauties which he scarcely comprehended. Ah! if it was given him to live the past over again! if he had known how to moderate his gloomy and jealous character, he would not find himself in this terrible labyrinth!

Suddenly he thinks of the letter received and yet unopened; he must, however, resolve to break the seal. Reluctantly he leaves the window, and goes sadly to seat himself near the table, on which a lamp is burning which Vassili has just placed there.

“Does his highness still want me?” asks the faithful servant.

“You may retire; I will ring when your presence will be necessary.”

Vassili bows profoundly, and Mineleko then opens the letter.

Presently, a terrible imprecation is heard. The prince stands tottering, with the letter in his hand; looking around him his immoderately dilated pupils perceive nothing—nothing but the terrifying news which he doubts still.

The message apprehended was the princess' demand for a divorce, very clearly drawn up by her advocate; “this demand,” the lawyer added, “has been already sent to the ministry.”

For more than an hour, with that stupid look which embraces all and sees nothing, the ambassador remains nailed there, annihilated in his easy-chair. One thought alone survives the catastrophe which overwhelms him.

“Ah! it was for this, then, that the king had dismissed him! It was to more effectually delude the

young woman—his wife!—his Najeska Ivanowna!—the life of his life!—that he had so hastily removed him. Ah! scoundrel!—monster!—thou shalt pay me for it! I swear that thou shalt pay me! Though I perish with thee, I will kill thee!”

The fury of the prince, that insane fury which always was impelling him to commit extravagant deeds, was re-awakened with all its savage violence.

Vassili was waiting in an apartment near to that of the prince. Since a long time, the devoted servant was not mistaken in the precursory symptoms of his master's paroxysms of rage. But, having rocked him as an infant, he understood him so perfectly that he knew positively that if he was violent, he would at least never descend to crime; so when at that time all were suspecting him of the assassination of Kassan, an interior voice was imperatively saying to the brother of the victim that it was impossible, impossible that this master, who wept for the servant almost as much as Vassili himself, could be guilty!

On the contrary, at the time of the assault in the forest, he had not hesitated to believe that it was Mineleko who had committed it; the disgrace which had so closely followed this violence, had not surprised him.

While listening to the irregular and precipitate steps in the prince's apartment, which succeeded the profound silence of a short time before, Vassili suspected that something abnormal was occurring. He was frightened.

My God! if he only had some influence over the ambassador! if it was permitted him to enter and say to him, “Master, my master! listen to a man who is entirely devoted to you! Instead of acting

under the influence of an impotent passion, calm yourself! compose yourself!"

But the unhappy man dared not. Nevertheless, not being able to restrain himself, and fearing an irreparable catastrophe, he at length decided to knock gently. At first he obtains no response; but he is not discouraged, and his perseverance is at last recompensed. An altered voice demands:

"Who is there?"

"Monsieur le Ambassadeur, it is I, Vassili."

"What do you want of me?"

"That your excellency will permit me to enter."

The door opens. The prince was so changed, so horrible to look at that the old man drew back frightened.

"My master! my dear master!" he cried, "I am only a beast, I know it, but a beast that is absolutely devoted to you. Calmer and more reflective than your highness, I implore you, since there is at present no other devoted person near you, to be pleased to tell all to your servant, and allow yourself to be advised a little by him."

Vassili must have had an all-powerful love and interest for his master in order to dare to speak to him thus. The broken hearted Mineleko was touched by this great proof of affection.

"Poor, courageous fellow!" said he. "Thou lovest me, then? thou lovest me in spite of my character, in spite of my brutalities? And they—"

He giggled ferociously, and showed that which he had just received and where the adjectives "brute" and "beast" were written in speaking of him. Vassili cast his eyes upon it; in a moment he comprehended all. He was struck.

“Monseigneur,” said he, “to-morrow morning it will be necessary to see an advocate, whom you must choose from among the most celebrated; for this evening, there is nothing to do but to endeavor to calm yourself, and go to sleep. Your ideas, after a rest, will be more correct, more lucid.

“Endeavor to calm myself! Try to sleep!” and Mineleko’s giggling increased again. “Couldst thou sleep, thou, if some one was plucking thy heart out?”

“No, monseigneur. I know you are unhappy, and I wish to do all in my power to assist you to recover your lost tranquillity. But, what at present, does there remain for you to do?”

The poor old man was right. With hands as tender as those of a woman he commenced to undress his master who, completely unconscious of that which was passing around him, suffered him to do it like a child.

Notwithstanding the fury which was rending him, Mineleko comprehended how culpable he had been. To whip his wife! a Princess of Mineleko! Was it astonishing that after that she demanded a divorce? We will expatiate no longer upon the unhappy man’s despair.

The next day the Prince of Mineleko sent for one of the most celebrated advocates of the bar of the Caucasian capital. There resulted from this visit, the same day, a summons sent to the address of Madame de Mineleko in Thessaly. By this summons the prince acquainted Najeska Ivanowna that although his recall from the position of Ambassador to the Court of Thessaly was not official, he was not, until further orders, to return to that country, and that remaining at present in the Caucasian capital, he summoned her to return to the conjugal domicile.

To this summons the next courier reported this simple response:

“Never!” signed “Najeska Ivanowna de Narish.”

Thus she was repudiating even the name which he had given her! Truly, all was indeed ended between them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PREY TO REMORSE.

The divorce of the Prince and Princess de Mineleko was quickly decided, and the case was won by the princess, who triumphed upon all the counts. The Supreme Court found on the chapter of brutalities and harsh measures, the most overwhelming charges against the ambassador. The guardianship of the children fell also to the princess, who had always shown herself worthy of it; the father had only the right of seeing them at certain epochs determined by the law, and then the interview could only take place in the presence of witnesses.

Those events did not occur as rapidly as we relate them here. All the formalities inherent to a lawsuit followed their course, and the suit lasted no less than three months. When all was terminated it was in the month of August.

The din of the "Mineleko scandal," as the affair of the ex-Ambassador of Caucasus was called, would have been extinguished by other news and divers other facts, if gradually, and in spite of the silence which the Caucasian journals had preserved, an extraordinarily incredible history had not fallen like a bomb in the midst of the Thessalian nobility. The thing was certainly very astonishing; and there was a great commotion in the residence city. This was the singular report. It was whispered in the capital of Caucasus, where the suit had taken place, that at this part of the interrogatory: "Who has written this anonymous letter?" a witness had

arisen, requesting to speak. This man was Bolski. Invited to explain, "Monsieur le President," said he, "here is this inauspicious note, the cause of so much trouble. I have discovered the author of it; it touches the aristocracy of his country very closely, for it is a Thessalian count. Am I to name him?"

This declaration produced a general stupefaction; they looked at each other astonished, dismayed.

Dimitri Feodorowitch had yet said nothing of his discovery. He feared so much the prince's violent and passionate character, that he had preferred to remain perfectly silent until the day wherein court should set.

As soon as Mineleko, on the first evening when he had sent for him, had shown him the missive snatched from the princess, Bolski had recognized that the anonymous letter and that note came from the same hand, although both were in a disguised chirography. He had based his inquiries upon that.

Mineleko, at the testimony of his agent, bounded like a lion under the lash of his tamer.

"I demand," said he, "that the name of this man may be delivered to public execration!"

The anxiety is extreme; they fear! they desire! Who is the vile lord who has not the courage to acknowledge his acts.

The clear and firm voice of Bolski cast then to the contempt of the public, a name hitherto respected, the name of Heiligenthal.

"It is Count Waldemar de Heiligenthal!"

"Then it is he!—he!—who has killed my servant!" said the prince to his advocate.

The prince had desired to pursue the affair, but they made him observe that although it was probable that Heiligenthal was the murderer, the letter

snatched from the princess proved nothing, absolutely nothing. He had asked when would she finish by granting him an interview. Was it proved that this interview had ever taken place? Nothing absolutely indicated it.

With the rapidity of lightning all this history came like a fulminating bomb, to explode in Thesaly.

Waldemar attempted at first to deny it, but that was impossible; Bolski had taken every precaution in order that Mineleko's vengeance might be complete. With the perseverance of a fanatic convinced of his cause, Dimitri Feodorowitch had succeeded in discovering the servant by whom Waldemar had sent the letter; the evidence of this girl was overwhelming. Waldemar's disgrace was terrible; none of his friends or comrades of the preceding day would give him their hand any more.

Walpurga was disheartened by the blow which crushed her brother; however, she did not lose her title of lady of honor. She was sincerely pitied, and the lucky and affectionate protection accorded her by the royal princesses, much grieved at the misfortune which had fallen upon her, averted from her head the shame and anathema which weighed upon Waldemar; but as to the assassination of Kassin, the idea that he had been the author of it appeared so absurd and so impossible, he being able with much facility to prove an alibi on the night of the murder, that this accusation was not credited for a moment. In order to demonstrate that Walpurga was more highly respected than ever at court, the betrothed princess had herself constantly accompanied the young countess.

Walpurga loved her brother tenderly; her

thoughts were equally divided at present between him who was disquieting her, and Conrad, whom she adored.

What was becoming of the poor outcast rejected by all? More affected than he wished to allow himself to appear, the disgrace which had overtaken him was troubling him.

His arrogant soul refusing to acknowledge how much repentance and confession rehabilitates the guilty, he was going about, asserting to everybody that this infernal history of the anonymous letter was only an odious machination, plotted by an ignoble girl of the lowest class, in expectation of pocketing some money. But, whatsoever he might say, no one believed him.

Despair had become his habitual guest; remorse was overwhelming him, he could not eat, he never laughed. As everybody, embarrassed by his presence, was ostensibly affecting to avoid him, he went out no more in the day-time. Awaiting the night like a noxious and malevolent beast, he frequented isolated roads, seeking to breathe the pure air of which his withered chest as well as his feverish head had such sore need. Notwithstanding all the poesy of the sleeping fields, notwithstanding all the fragrance of the hedges of elder and hawthorn, notwithstanding the perfume which was escaping from the full-blown flowers of August, notwithstanding the obscurity of the firmament all studded with a thousand fires, the unhappy man remained indifferent to these beauties. For him to walk was a necessity but a weariness also; to rest, a necessity as well as a burden; for, if he had been willing to undertake anything he would have found the same obstacles opposed to him everywhere; his felony,

his dishonor. A German proverb says, "He who digs a pit for another often falls into it himself." Was not this the case with the young man? He had sent that anonymous letter with the expectation of succeeding in awakening the jealousy of the ambassador against the king, and to also prevent Najeska Ivanowna continuing with the latter, what he termed her "infernal coquetries." And what had it led to? First, to a divorce, which was completely delivering her with whom he was so desperately enamored, to the king, a much more formidable rival than the terrible ambassador; secondly, his everlasting disgrace, an indelible stain with which his forehead would remain forever branded.

Although no one had been able to suspect that the king was going to marry Madame de Mineleko—Heiligenthal no more than others—although Najeska Ivanowna had lived in the most reserved and retired manner during the time of the divorce suit, a dull rumor commenced to fly about the city. It was said very privately, very secretly, that the king was more desperately in love than ever with the young and charming princess.

For Waldemar, who had nothing noble in his nature but the parchments of his ancestors, another cause, more serious for him perhaps than the remorse of his infamous conduct, was contributing no little to continue the disquietude with which his heart was rent. Like all of us, Heiligenthal clung to life; whatever may be the object which we propose to ourselves, whatever may be the road which we may trace for ourselves in it, to live is to live, the skeptics say, and the young count was of their opinion. But before Bolski had, in open court, sur-

rendered his name to universal condemnation, Heiligenthal was not ignorant that Mineleko had continually repeated to whomsoever would listen to him, "If ever I discover the cowardly author of this infernal letter—and I will discover him, though I move heaven and earth!—whoever he may be, whatsoever place he may inhabit, I will go and I will kill him!" The prince knew him now, and he was the man to execute his threat. He would assuredly find means to put his hand on Heiligenthal. Already, Waldemar believed he perceived that some time since, a man whom he recognized to have formally seen attached to the Caucasian Embassy, appeared to shadow him wherever he went.

He knew that through the influence that the King of Thessaly had been able to exercise over the Emperor of Caucasus, Mineleko having been sent in twenty-four hours after his trial, by his government, on a distant mission to the Celestial Empire, to decide a question about the frontiers, could not yet appear. Did the ambassador fear that Heiligenthal might flee from a country in which he was now in disgrace? Yes, certainly! and he had him secretly watched so that he might not escape him. But Mineleko had no need to fear. Waldemar, chained to his employment, too poor to travel, was obliged to remain.

The terrible ambassador would find his prey again, however late it might be.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REGRETS.

Ten months after these events, that is to say the twenty-second of June, the day fixed for the celebration of the marriage of the Princess Augusta to Prince George of Pattenpouff had arrived. The ceremony was to take place with great pomp in the chapel of the chateau. In order to mark its solemnity, not only the Empress of Hindostan, the august grandmother of the Princesses of Thessaly, with her inseparable daughter, the Princess Corysande was to assist at it; but also the Prince of Delhi, the hereditary prince of the crown of Hindostan, had promised to come accompanied by his wife and daughters. The Prince and Princess Imperial of Babylon and their children were to be present, as well as a great number of other personages of imperial or royal blood. Last, but not least, the Duke of Africa, was also observed there, since he was a marriageable hereditary prince, the eldest son of one of those petty opera-comique kings which arise in the East, become the hot-house which incubates quantities of those crowned heads destined by the surge of revolution and of war to live a day; as quickly carried away as the froth of circumstances has produced them, now become useless pebbles, following the pleasure and interest of great powers, so many spokes set in the political wheels of Europe, that they often derange.

All the women and the young girls of the city had

but one occupation, a very absorbing anxiety to learn the royal bride's trousseau, the magnificent present of the Empress of Hindostan. All other questions disappeared before this one. How many gowns has she? What are they? What are the number of chemises and petticoats? The more thrifty housewives, thinking more of the useful than the ornamental, and endeavoring to divine how many sheets and pillow-cases, gowns, etc., etc., the young bride would have.

Then there was the subject of jewels. This one, for instance, became inexhaustible for the imaginations of the young girls who only possessed some little cross or medallions of no value. They knew that the king was going to give a superb parure of diamonds. In the show-window of Knapp, the court jeweler, the diadem was already displayed, placed upon a cushion of sky-blue velvet, similar to a stream of liquid fire. How many feminine eyes, on seeing this marvel rested there amazed, envying the happiness of this fair daughter of the king! To this priceless treasure many others were added; there was a splendid riverie entirely of brilliants; farther on there were ear-rings whose fine pearls, real treasures brought from distant seas, were as large as wren's eggs; there were some loose flowers which, similar to a glow-worm whose light betrays it under the blade of grass, were soon to sparkle like scintillations of fire in the coiffure of the young bride.

All had been given the order to create master-pieces. The court dressmaker, Fraulein Schafskopf, was exhibiting some magnificent things in robes. How beautiful were those morning negliges! How could one help but love the woman who, clothed

thus, seemed to conceal at her pleasure charms which she permitted you to divine.

What tortures for Walpurga, obliged to accompany the betrothed princess. On all her excursions the poor young girl was thinking more of her handsome Conrad, whom she so desperately loved. But the intensity of her affections did not augment the chances of her marriage. Her father and mother, notwithstanding the disgrace of their son, remained insensible and implacable. Walpurga should never belong to a man, except one having rank in the nobility, whereas the ennoblement on which Madame Haller and her son counted so much did not advance.

As we have already remarked, Walpurga had confided in the two young princesses; she had related to them her whole love romance, with its hopes and its fears. The young confidantes had interested themselves in it, and had very often spoken of it to their father. But Charles Ferdinand remained inexorable. What reason had he to ennoble the Haller family? The little countess was certainly charming, and Conrad was a handsome cavalier; but that was not enough. "Is it sufficient that a girl of proud lineage may be desperately smitten with a commoner, in order that this commoner may obtain titles which are owed only to birth or exceptional merits?" the grim ministers, all of them old and more or less egotistical, had responded to his majesty when he deigned to submit the question to them.

The unusual circumstances which had just harassed the life of Madame de Mineleko had hindered Walpurga from seeing much of her, and also from becoming intimate enough with her to ask her

for her influence with the king. Besides, the very uncertain connection of the king and Madame de Mineleko, the slight doubt on the subject of her brother's relations with the ambadress which had arisen in her, even before the revelations of the divorce revealing Waldemar's role with the princess, had hindered Mademoiselle de Heilighenthal, with her exquisite tact, from ever addressing such a prayer to her. And now, after her brother's baseness to the ambadress, she could not congratulate herself enough for not having spoken.

Madame Haller was becoming more bitter from day to day. Her Conrad! her handsome Conrad! had he his equal in the king's guards? the select regiment of Thessaly. Who carried his head with an ease and grace as royal as he? Was he not always and everywhere remarked? Might not one easily have believed that he was a prince's son, rather than a commoner's child?

As for Madame de Mineleko, she only went out now between her two babies in their nurses' arms. It was a charming spectacle that of this mother so young with her beautiful children.

The princess had suffered no little during that time so filled with anxieties, and uncertainties. Contradictory sentiments were again struggling in her heart. In reality, she was often moved with pity about her husband's fate; the unhappy man loved his children so much! and hereafter he would see so little of them. And she? was not the very violence of the prince's jealousy a proof of the love which he had vowed to her? This thought, like an acute pain, wounded profoundly the tender heart of the wife, as well as that of the mother.

Far from him, having to suffer no more from his

brutalities, nor his passions, Najeska Ivanowna was now forgetting all her divorced husband's caprices, and only remembering his good and great qualities. Her compassionate soul was suffering with his sufferings. Now, in order to excuse him, the absent, the forsaken, she was seeking to accuse herself. Notwithstanding his unjust violence, his injurious reproaches, with how many devoted attentions and tender affections had he not surrounded her? This morose husband had sometimes the solitudes of a mother. She recollected that during the violent fever which she had on account of the duel in which he had killed H——, he had watched her during twenty days and nights, refusing to intrust her to other hands and obstinately refused to take either relaxation or repose, as long as his dear love was in danger. Her life, with those of her cherished babies, then unborn, was it not to him that she owed them? How much devotion then! How much kindness! But scarcely had she recovered, before the suspicions, the jealousies of the preceding life, were resumed in the minutest manner. Yes, he must suffer much, this lion with the pared nails and the filed teeth! Alas! if she was in his place, how unhappy, how desperate she would be. No more to see her dear children! no more, at any hour, at any moment, to clasp to her heart these adored little angels! what anguish!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE KING'S PRESENTS.

Some evenings before the day on which the Princess Agusta's marriage was to be celebrated, the king came to visit Najeska. He was radiant, for he was becoming more passionately in love. Since the painful events which she had just passed through, and over which her heart was still grieving much, Najeska Ivanowna had adopted as her colors black and white; were those not truly the only ones in harmony with the thoughts of her soul? alternately in mourning for a past perhaps regretted, or full of hope for a future sometimes apprehended.

When the king was announced to her, although she knew that he had come to fulfill the pledged promise, a slight sensation which she could not explain, traversed her heart.

The legal time after which she could marry again had just expired.

Hardly had the servant left the apartment than the king rushing toward Najeska Ivanowna, pressed her tenderly to his heart.

"Dost thou doubt me now, now, since I come to thee, happy to keep the plighted troth which is going to make the happiness, the joy of our lives?"

"Have I ever doubted your majesty?"

"Ah! let us break the vain formalities of rank and call me thy husband, thy slave, thy toy, for I will be all that! Everything combines to produce auspicious omens for us. My eldest daughter enters upon her new happiness in eight days, and we will

marry at the same time. Our marriage will be kept secret, however, until it is an accomplished fact, on account——”

“On account of the Empress of Hindostan, is it not?” exclaimed Najeska Ivanowna. “Yes, you are right—thou art right!” she added, more tenderly, gliding, full of confidence, into the king’s arms. “And when does the empress arrive?” Madame de Mineleko suddenly demanded.

“Day after to-morrow. I have just received a dispatch announcing this news. She wishes to be here several days before Agusta’s marriage.”

“But is it not her dearest dream to marry you to Princess Corysande?”

“Perhaps, but the heart cannot be thus commanded.”

“Oh! sire!” said Najeska Ivanowna, seized with instinctive fear, “consider well upon that which you are about to do before uniting yourself to one by the sacred ties of marriage; weigh everything well; there is yet time! I entreat you, do not engage yourself immediately—wait—let us wait. Who urges us? Ah! if some day you were to have regrets, to reproach me! If the world, if the royal family especially, were to blame me, to cast at me that I have been an intriguer, endeavoring to circumvent you! Oh! sire!—my king!”

“Reassure yourself, my best beloved, they will never cast that at your head.” And, pulling out a jewel-casket which he had hitherto kept concealed, the king offered it to the trembling young woman.

On pressing the spring of the casket, the cover immediately opened, and a splendid diadem all glittering with precious stones, appeared to the dazzled eyes of the princess.

“All the diamonds that you received from your first husband, you have delicately returned; the second does not wish to see you less adorned. According to the rites of the ceremonial of the *fete*, you must make one of the royal cortege which will conduct my daughter to the foot of the altar. In this imposing suite, I wish you to surpass all the other ladies in beauty and magnificence; here, then, is the diadem which will encircle your brow, oh! my adored queen!”

“You are good! you are generous!”

“Do not thank me, Najeska Ivanowna. The happiness that I will experience to see you thus, I have managed like a true egotist; I will enjoy it all alone; for if you pass unperceived by all the flatterers who surround you with their hollow and false compliments, you will shine for me with all the brilliancy of a star in the midst of a clear and translucent sky.”

“I do not wish you to commit any imprudent acts for me. Your wife will be content and happy to live retired. In no case must they believe that I have married you for ambition, for love of ostentation. My position will become so delicate that it behooves me to pay double attention to my slightest actions.”

The princess' divorce left her in possession of a very modest income. She had haughtily refused to accept the alimony which the law compelled the prince to give her.

Her father, in his later years, besides his losses at baccarat, had gambled on the Bourse, and a great part of his fortune had remained hooked to the thorns and brambles of speculation. The old domain on the shores of the Black Sea was now the

most valuable part of the young lady's fortune, and one can imagine the small income there would be derived from such a property situated in a place as isolated as savage; scarcely enough for herself and daughters to subsist on.

Madame de Mineleko (we will continue to call her thus) referred to all these details, but the king grew impatient.

"Oh! what is your fortune to me! all the circumstances outside of yourself are of such slight importance to me, that I do not wish to hear them spoken of. Your interest, henceforth, will alone concern me; leave me the care of occupying myself with it."

Some days later, the king sent for the notary of the royal household, and imparted to him, confidentially, the projected marriage.

"I wish to make a donation to my future wife," said he. "Draw up a legal deed."

The notary obeyed.

The king, who knew how far Najeska Ivanowna pushed her delicacy, did not at first mention the subject to her, fearing that she might refuse the gift. Later, when the king's marriage became a celebrated case, upon which all the tittle-tattle of silly, unoccupied minds alighted, each was pleased at least to render justice and homage to the absolute disdain for money which Najeska Ivanowna had given proof of.

Despite the envy which her lofty fortune brought on her, despite the malevolent tattle, the unjust reproaches which public malignity rained upon her, the princess remained impregnable upon the subject of disinterestedness.

In all these incidents, these conferences, the princess gave proof of an unique delicacy.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FEEBLE REED.

The Empress of Hindostan arrived on the day and hour appointed. The inhabitants of the little residence came in crowds to the depot to see the illustrious travelers disembark.

All the court carriages, freshly varnished, presented quite a fine appearance at the reception of the extremely rich Hindoos. The king, in a royal equipage, surrounded by his children, followed by the nobility of the kingdom, went to meet his mother-in-law.

The special train which was to bring the imperial family did not keep them waiting; it was signaled at the regular hour, and soon after, to the deafening accompaniment of whistles, the engine throwing jets of smoke and vapor, made its entrance in the depot. The locomotive had hardly stopped before the King of Thessaly advanced, gravely and majestically, toward the carriage which contained these eminent personages. As soon as the door was opened, and the foot-board was lowered, the sovereign and the young princess entered the royal carriage. After having saluted the Empress of Hindostan and her suite, the king, still solemn, descended the first and hastened to offer his hand to the sovereign. Short, stout and squatty, wearing her past sixty years well, she was entirely clothed in black. Upon her head she wore under her bonnet of English crape, a widow's cap in the fashion of

Marie Stuart such as our neighbors across the channel wear.

Before this little woman with the blotched red face, all the civil and military authorities of Thessaly came in gala costumes or magnificent uniforms, and bowed respectfully. An instant after, followed by that ravishing group of Thessalian princesses, came the Princess Corysande, a young woman of twenty-six, short and stout like her mother. She was not in mourning; she wore a pretty costume of navy blue English cloth. Then followed the ladies of honor, the aides-de-camp, correct and stiff, with all the phlegm of their race imprinted on their countenances like a programme.

Every one installed in the court carriages, the cortege moved again, and proceeded to the royal chateau. There was a crowd this day in the streets of the little residence; all the curious, and they are numerous here, as elsewhere, were out. The royal carriages filed promptly through the broad airy streets, so straight that they could be traced by a line. Their horses going at a gallop, they traversed first the large public squares lined with the most diversified modern monuments; then the long royal street, which must be traversed first upon leaving the depot; then, they filed through the Luisen-Platz with its eight corners, the most beautiful of the city squares. In the middle there arises the "Colonne de Louis," the most remarkable commemorative monument in the capital, erected to the memory of one of the founders of the dynasty. From a distance, this monument whose total height is thirty-five metres, has the appearance of a tower; it is the Column Vendome of Thessaly. As in that of Paris, one may enter and visit it; if one has the

courage to climb the hundred and seventy-five steps of a circular staircase, protected by a simple iron balustrade, he may enjoy there a magnificent panorama. On the south side the view is arrested by the Luisen-Platz where a second palace arises, of less importance than the royal chateau, but joined to it by a glass gallery. It is here that the hereditary Prince of Thessaly generally resides, when he is married. During her visit, the Empress of Hindostan was to reside there.

The royal carriages, emptied of their illustrious travelers, waited a certain time before the entrance of the little palace, wherein the empress was installed.

The king, after having assured himself that the royal "mother-in-law" wanted for nothing, retired, followed by his youngest children. The two eldest princesses remained with their grandmother. He entered his berlin, yoked to four horses, and they set out at a trot; although the two palaces were united by a glass gallery, the two entrance doors opened on two different squares.

The arrival of the imperial family of all Hindostan was going to derange this country truly patriarchal, where, during its sojourn, all the habits would be changed. The little private dinner which, this very evening, was to follow the reception of the old queen mother, had been deferred to nine o'clock. Now, for a court where a trifle becomes an event, this designation of inveterate customs would certainly make an epoch. Nine o'clock in the evening! That was the custom of the empress; it was necessary to conform to it! What was to become of all those stomachs which, each day, from one end of the year to the other, and that from time immemo-

rial, had seated themselves at table at five o'clock? For the residence city this innovation appeared extraordinary.

The king, profiting by the few moments which left him at liberty between the arrival of the old empress and the hour wherein it would be necessary to rejoin her, ran quickly to Madame de Mineleko.

"Perhaps I cannot come again this evening, my best-beloved," he said to her, sadly; "I am much grieved at it. Why must this heavy task of king and son-in-law keep me away from thee whom I adore and at whose feet I would wish to remain forever? But yet a few days, and I will leave thee no more; yet a few days and I will be thine, as thou wilt be forever mine! To be no longer an hour, an hour without thee! to live of thy life! Oh! this happiness! how slow it is in coming?"

After this short visit from the king, Najeska Ivanowna was entirely alone. Alone! was this really so? Oh! no, for was she not living with her recollections of the past, her thoughts of the future?

This evening she received a visit from her advocate. But just returned from Caucasus, where she had sent him to terminate all the business of her divorce, he came to give her an account of his accomplished mission.

"Princess, all is completed. You know that the Prince of Mineleko, before his departure, has at last, but not without difficulty, submitted to all the conditions decreed by the Supreme Court."

"The refusal which you have made to accept of the pension of which you were to make use for yourself and your dear babies, and which he has only learned on his arrival in the Celestial Empire, has been painful to him; his eagle head was grieved at

it, those have written to me who surround him. Ah! the blow which has struck him is too much, too heavy now for his rude nature; he is stricken by it!"

"At first, before leaving Europe, he wished to come here, to repossess you in spite of every one and take you far away with him, but some influences in high places have prevented; he has had to set out immediately. Then they made him comprehend that all resistance had become useless. The King of Thessaly has brought a lively pressure to bear upon the emperor. Notwithstanding the prodigious case that the Ambassador of Caucasus has made, his majesty has not hesitated to let him know that if he dared to re-enter Thessaly or to annoy you in any manner whatsoever, once his mission accomplished he would send him, not as ambassador to another European court, but as a governor in a distant station of the Pacific. You comprehend that such a terrible menace must have produced its effect."

"Is he much changed?" demanded Najeska Ivanowna, not comprehending herself what strange interest still attached her to this man. But he was the father of her children, of her little babies, and such a tie is not so quickly annihilated.

"Yes, he is much changed; at least, he was so, for I only saw him before his departure for his mission, from whence he will soon be able to return, for nearly ten months have already elapsed since that epoch. Really, it would grieve you to see him! He is nothing but the shadow of himself. I believe that the remorse which he experiences for the brutal action to which he owes his divorce, pursues him night and day. To be separated from you, without

any hope of return, seems to him beyond his strength. As to Monsieur de Heiligenthal, whom he designates the thief, the assassin of his joy, of his happiness, I should be much astonished if the ambassador, as soon as he shall see himself at liberty, did not find the means some day or other to make him pay dearly for his infamous cowardice. I dare to tell you this, madam, because I know you to be kind and merciful. I have left there and I return here with the firm conviction that Monsieur de Mineleko is forever dedicated to misfortune, for he loves you still."

Najeska Ivanowna remained the whole evening buried in a profound reverie. This man, alone, hereafter without wife, without children, since the law had taken them altogether away from him, occupied her thoughts almost exclusively.

"The prince has appeared to me disheartened by the severity of the tribunal which leaves him only the right of seeing his children on rare occasions," the advocate had said.

Najeska Ivanowna had been incapable of hearing more; an intense pain oppressed her heart. The unhappy man! what a chastisement was his! And bitter tears rising to her eyes, she wept over the sufferings of him by whom she herself had suffered so much. She also was about to leave her well-beloved children, her little girls, all white and rosy and already so affectionate. Oh! but not for long, she could not live without them.

During the short sojourn that she was to make with her royal husband in one of the remote chateaus of the capital, Najeska Ivanowna, for greater security, had decided that she would leave these dear little beings with their nurses, whom she knew

to be entirely devoted to them, under the protection of the Sisters of Mercy. There, in the shelter of that pious and inviolable sanctuary, she would have nothing to fear from the violent Mineleko, who on learning her absence might profit by it, perhaps, to abduct, to steal from her by the aid of a third party, since he could not act himself, her treasures, her only jewels.

The convent of Sainte-Marie de la Miserecorde was only a few hours distant from the residence. The village in which this asylum of piety and devotion was situated did not belong to the territory of Thessaly. Last in the rugged summits of environing mountains, it marked the first halting place outside of the frontier of the kingdom of Charles Ferdinand of Thessaly.

The few days, however, which still separated Madame de Mineleko from her marriage with the king passed quickly, too quickly, perhaps, to accord with her wishes.

This second union would soon be forever consummated. She was going to belong to the king forever! Mineleko also was soon to be forever in despair. The year passed in his society, a time so short but so fertile in events, however, would be no more than a remembrance. The reality—life such as her vivid imagination had made her desire, would it commence for her?

Alas! who will ever be able to fathom the depths of the human soul, and comprehend all its secret recesses!

This young and beautiful woman, born for happiness, on the eve of seizing it, commenced now almost to regret the combats fought, the delusions experienced; it was because she knew this past, and

in separating herself from it almost loved it. What was this future reserving for her, which she desired while apprehending?

The day before the memorable one in which Madame de Mineleko was to become the king's wife, he came at the customary hour.

"To-morrow!—it is to-morrow!" he said, while pressing Najeska Ivanowna passionately against his heart. "Yes, it is to-morrow, my well-beloved, that thou shalt be mine, thou wilt become my wife forever!"

In presence of so much effusion, of so much tenderness, Madame de Mineleko remained, however, agitated and disquieted.

"What will the Empress of Hindostan say, sire, when she will know—what will she do then?"

"When she will know, it will be too late. What she will do I do not even ask myself, for what is there to be done against the indissoluble ties which are going to bind us to each other?"

The brow of Najeska Ivanowna had been hitherto quite meditative; it cleared a little. "The king is right," thought she, endeavoring thus to reassure herself, to repulse the idea of misfortune which, in spite of her, was besetting her. In fact, what could the old sovereign do when the marriage was once accomplished?

Poor Najeska Ivanowna! if she had been able to know what a feeble reed this king was, upon whom she believed herself henceforth able to lean.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TWO OLD MAIDS.

The day, so much desired by the young Princess Agusta, arrived at last.

The sun, desiring to bring his offering also to the solemnity of this *fete*, had risen bright and radiant, and was copiously shedding his gold and purple rays upon the Thessalian capital. The sky was blue and clear; a small black speck, very distant still, alone was staining the horizon. The whole city was in commotion, for in this poor little court, starched with etiquette, the marriage of the king's eldest daughter, rendered more ostentatious still by the presence of the Empress of Hindostan and that of her august daughter, the Princess Corysande, was an event worthy of the annals of history. All the ladies of honor, the aides-de-camp, the masters and mistresses of the palace, were on foot. The royal ceremony was to take place at five o'clock in the evening, and all was to transpire with the greatest ostentation, like at the great Court of Babylon of which this little court was in every respect the absolute reflection. An imposing procession would be formed, and in order to present a spectacle to the guests, they would march like a long ribbon which unrolls itself and take a festive promenade through all the halls of the palace.

Deprived of their mother at an early age, the royal and charming princesses had received from their grandmother, the Empress of Hindostan, all the devotion and love of which death had bereaved

them. This austere woman had for her grandchildren an astonishing tenderness and gentleness.

When the late queen, her daughter, had been taken away from her, she had sworn to herself to pour upon those heads all the maternal tenderness that her heart contained; this oath she had fully kept; she loved her children, after the manner of savages without restriction, and without measure.

The king's marriage with Madame de Mineleko was to precede by a few hours only that of the eldest princess. Kept very secret, the ceremony was to be celebrated in the chapel of the chateau; the witnesses, among the number of which was Monsieur de Brandt, entirely devoted to his master, and two or three invited guests, had alone been initiated in the great mystery.

Despite the sun which was smiling, despite the bustle, the gayety which was agitating the residence, the morning of this great day had flown for Najeska Ivanowna, slowly and dully. Negligently reclining upon a couch, enervated by the excessive heat which was descending like a breath of fire from heaven, the young woman was indulging in a profound reverie; her whole being seemed as if rendered immovable by an interesting spectacle. Her large, lovely eyes alone were vaguely wandering from flags to garlands, from these to the tinsel which decorated or rather marred the city, in giving it the appearance of a gingerbread fan. What could be the subject of her thoughts? Who would have been able to divine them from the impassibility of her features, ordinarily so mobile, so expressive? An unexpected visit suddenly withdrew her from her thoughts. Although it was not her hour for receiving, the grandmistress of the palace requested to

speak to her. Dear me! what was the matter! Like the poor bird upon the branch, the nervous Najeska Ivanowna trembles unceasingly lest an indiscretion may come to reveal and hinder this marriage so desired, but yet so apprehended! Reassure yourself, dear timid creature! Madame la Comtesse will happily be the last to know of the event; a living gazelle, notwithstanding the immortality which she imposed on her daughters and the other ladies of honor, her sharp tongue would have quickly propagated it. She knows nothing, and, like everybody, will only know the truth when it will be an accomplished fact.

The Countess Langweilig came about a petty question of ceremonial. We say petty, but that is not exact, for it could not be futile for her, whose contracted brain was only filled with ideas of precedence and etiquette. She understood better than any one to admirably instruct all the newly arrived ladies of honor, to extinguish their minds and to make veritable manikins of them, moving only at prescribed days and hours. Nothing was to be done spontaneously before their majesties and the court, according to her; nothing equaled her science of muzzling or fettering all instincts which might arise.

The two old maid daughters of Madame de Langweilig, flowers very much faded and run to seed, and in whom she had stifled all personality, were the most perfect specimens of her instructions. Although the dots of Mademoiselles de Langweilig were very small, their mother did not despair of marrying them, she was constantly going about the world, seeking sons-in-law whom she could mold and educate. It might be at this *fete*, perhaps, where

she would meet the pearl sought hitherto in vain, and so ardently desired. It was a little on this account that she had come to Madame de Mineleko; it was the question of learning if, in the arrangement of the royal procession, she could not let her daughter Mina, march with Boris Volkarski, a very rich and distant connection of Madame de Mineleko, accidentally arrived a few days since in Thessaly.

“Ah! dear me! I am smothering!” said Madame de Langweilig, untying the strings of her bonnet, then she merrily fanned herself with a large fan which she always carried suspended at her side. “You will see, my dear princess, that there will be a storm, and a terrible storm, which will break this evening, just at the moment when the grand procession files off!”

“Yes, she is right,” poor Najeska Ivanowna was saying to herself with a strange terror, “there will be a storm—a storm of elements—a storm of passions which will clash furiously against each other.

When Madame de Langweilig, having arranged to her satisfaction the incident of Boris Volkarski, had retired, it was high time that the princess thought of dressing for the private ceremony of the marriage which was to unite her to the king. Najeska Ivanowna was strengthless; twice she came near being ill during the time that her maid was dressing her. Never had such an intense emotion possessed her. The immense glass wardrobe before which she was seated was reflecting her image entirely white, in her spring-like robe of mauve crape.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PRIVATE MARRIAGE.

The ceremony is about to commence. The king and Madame de Mineleko, both of them very pale, and much agitated, but in a totally different manner, are standing before the altar. A Lutheran clergyman, enveloped in his long black silk surplice, has commenced the prayers; the chants of the sacred rite which are all singing, all music, in a word all that which may penetrate without, has been carefully excluded; they conceal, they suppress. Since morning, all is ready for the *fete* of the evening. The high lancet windows, draped with ornamentations more luxurious than tasty, allow the daylight to penetrate with great difficulty which, thus filtered, diffuses in the chapel a somber and lugubrious aspect which is exceedingly impressive. Where then is that joy, that delight which generally accompanies all marriages arranged by love? The heat becomes more and more excessive, however, the atmosphere burns; they inhale fire. Suddenly, as the minister of the Lord is about to unite forever this husband and wife, a chain of lightning starts from the east and comes in long zigzags to rent the clouds and traverses through, if we may so express it, the large window above the altar.

Najeska Ivanowna, very much impressed by the storm which is unchained with so much fury, and affected also by a nervous trembling stronger than her will, violently withdraws her hand from that of the king. Presently, however, a wan, sad smile,

wandering over her lips, she surrenders it to him again, and forever. But hardly had the broad palm of the king imprisoned again this slender, delicate hand, trembling like the fragile petals of a rose ready to fall, than a second flash of lightning, this time redder and more terrible, glittered anew and like the powerful rays of an electric light illumines with its pale light the whole church; then, for a second it delineates long and inflamed the silhouettes of this group, who at the feet of the master of life and of death are trembling like criminals caught in a snare; it was sinister. Then obscurity reigns again, and annihilates this frightful vision. Then, predominating that of the angry elements, the grave and solemn voice of the clergyman is heard, and from his lips falls, one by one, the sacramental words: "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

Hardly were these imposing words pronounced, before a clap of thunder, long and terrible, like the clamor of a thousand cannons in battle, seemed to shake the sacred edifice from its summit to its base; a profound obscurity was reigning still. As in all Protestant churches there were no candles to give their soft light to enliven the ceremony; the few witnesses affected by the tempest which was raging without, remained immovable in their places, really believing that their last hour had come. The minister himself, despite his apparent calm, had been obliged to interrupt the course of the ritual. Madame de Mineleko, as if to support herself, pressed convulsively the hand of her royal husband, from whom she seemed to demand assistance and support.

Poor little creature! alas! what would she have felt if she had been able to foresee that the protec-

tion of this man upon whom she counted so much, was not to extend beyond this short and terrible moment passed before the altar of God! What would have become of her, the unfortunate one, if suddenly enlightend with a divine knowledge she had divined that the king, incapable of defending her, would not be ashamed to forsake her, the well-beloved of his choice, falling completely broken before the fury of an old raving woman; yes, to this crabbed and despotic empress, he would cowardly sacrifice her, without expressing even a complaint or a murmur.

While Najeska Ivanowna was tremblingly endeavoring to cower behind her new husband, another ray of fire traversed yet again the darkness. A nearer rumbling was heard; then, like a dike which breaks, they heard the splashing of great drops of rain which were violently beating the windows of the chapel. The storm was still increasing.

Now that they can see just clearly enough to enable them to distinguish the personages of this sad scene through the intense darkness, the minister solemnly resumes the interrupted ceremony. It terminated in the midst of an icy cold which, like a cold sirroco, had driven afar the sultry and oppressive heat under which the city had sweltered since morning. Najeska Ivanowna's teeth were chattering fit to break; this first round of the ladder of her happiness, was so long, so lugubrious!

When the last words of the religious ritual were pronounced, they were to separate with much precaution. The bride was to return to her home immediately, where the king was to rejoin her before an hour. The chapel formed a building by itself of the royal chateau; but in an interior court there

was a little lateral door which, through the halls of the ground floor, gave egress to the residence square.

Najeska Ivanowna, accompanied by Monsieur de Brandt, traversed the covered court-yard and the still deserted halls of the ground floor. When Monsieur de Brandt opened the little door before which a carriage was waiting for the young woman, such a gust of wind and rain lashed the face of the trembling Najeska Ivanowna that she was cut as if by the blow of a whip.

The storm was now at its height; lightning without interruption succeeded to lightning, the thunder precipitated its long and near peals which, like another storm, reverberated echo upon echo, the mountains, whose wooded semicircles inclosed the little capital, had become impotent to protect it against the tempest which, from minute to minute, was augmenting, increasing. The wind from the north was blowing furiously, the tall straight trees of the residence city bent to the earth under the force of the squalls; nothing could resist it. On all sides there was nothing but a sinister cracking similar to that of a ship which, dragging its anchors, is about to break upon an inhospitable coast; the loud roaring voice of the wind was howling in a deafening manner. Fragments of roofs and chimneys were flying in every direction carried like light feathers. Woe to him who had dared to face this frightful tempest; for if the houses offered but a very slight security, the streets threatened to become the tomb of those who traversed them.

Where now were those fields so flourishing but a moment ago?

What had become of this harvest so fertile, the

fruit of a painful labor? Alas! in less than a day, in less than an hour, all this labor of an entire year was annihilated.

The city presented a truly heart-rending spectacle; everywhere there was nothing but debris. The decorations so joyously erected for the marriage festivities of the Princess Augusta, were now hanging mournfully; it was no longer joy that they announced, but a grief universal, and difficult to repair.

“Oh! I cannot, I dare not go out in such a storm!” These words escaped from the pale lips of the king’s morganatic wife.

Monsieur de Brandt found himself in a very perplexing situation. He really could not expose this fragile and nervous woman to depart in such a tempest. On the other hand, she was in the royal palace, and if any one found her there at an hour when she would only appear there by an express command, it would give much food for conjecture.

“My God! what am I to do? he asked himself, embarrassed.

In short, since she was now the wife of his sovereign and since she would not and could not depart, it was necessary for him to consider.

Recollecting very seasonably that there was a little apartment which opened upon the corridor of the ground floor, he offered his arm to Madame de Mineleko and quickly conducted her to this apartment.

“Bolt the door, madam,” said he, “no one must see you, at any price, in the palace at this moment. I will go and notify my sovereign master, the king, of the place wherein I have had to conceal you, and I will watch that no one may come to disturb you.”

As soon as Najeska Ivanowna was shut up in the

chamber, Monsieur de Brandt went to seek an officer of the guard, and addressing some words to him in a low tone, he hastily departed to find his majesty.

By one of those ironies which continually cross each other in life, the apartment in which Monsieur de Brandt had introduced Najeska Ivanowna was precisely one of these little boudoirs that the poor late queen had had arranged for her convenience. During the last years of her life the queen had become so feeble that it was impossible for her on returning from her rides, to immediately gain her apartments; it had been necessary for her before undertaking this long journey to enjoy a certain repose. It was here, then, that she had retired. All here breathed of luxury. Upon an immense couch, a magnificent white bear's skin of the greatest value was negligently thrown. Although the Court of Thessaly was not rich, Queen Aline, reared too early to a love of self, had known how to surround herself with a thousand trifles that her refined and artistic taste grouped in a truly harmonious whole.

Najeska Ivanowna examined each object with profound attention; suddenly, a noise imperceptible to any but herself is heard; it draws insensibly nearer. This noise, that of precipitate muffled steps, makes her heart beat; she waits. A gentle rap and a beloved voice, that of her king, of her master, of her present husband, softly murmurs:

“It is I!—open.”

She turns the key; at first she only perceives Monsieur de Brandt who, like a vigilant sentinel, walks to and fro before the door of the large saloon opposite; but, under the heavy plush portiere a man glides; it is he, it is the king, all trembling with love. The door is discreetly closed. At last they

are alone this husband and wife, married only half an hour ago. How many subjects to discuss!

Upon her entrance in the boudoir, Najeska Ivanowna had hastily removed her hat.

It was a light capote of mauve crape, all ruches of lace, and upon the left side of it in a tuft of lilac plumes, a little roguish bird seemed to flutter. The princess' blonde hair was slightly disheveled, for she had not then thought to smooth her ruffled tresses.

The king, eager to make the acquaintance of a treasure that he had waited for so long a time, took her violently in his arms, and pressed her passionately to his heart. The warmth of the woman's body languishingly abandoning itself excited him; his arteries beat to breaking. All his desires, restrained by the heroic chastity of the young woman, awoke more ardent than ever. Najeska Ivanowna, resting upon this broad breast, felt the brutal shock with which each pressure bruised her firm white bosom. At each of the kisses which the passionate king deposited upon the wanton locks of hair on her neck, a voluptuous thrill ran through all her being and came to expire in her lightest ringlets.

"Oh! Najeska Ivanowna! lovest thou me? Say—say that thou lovest me as I love thee!"

"Thou lovest me much, then?" murmured she.

"So much, that I would have gone to seek thee even in the lion's mouth! I need thee, I thirst for thee! It is thou that I desire; that I desire forever!"

He did not speak; he stammered; intoxicated by the allurements of this pliant and beautiful body, he uttered, one after the other, words delirious with love.

"My passion and my love will fathom the most se-

cret recesses of thy heart and of thy senses, my cherished wife!"

Love overflowed in him. His heart throbbed with enchanting thoughts; he whispered low, very low, and entreated his dear trembling one, to be very humble. She, intoxicated in turn by the sorcery which enveloped her, surrendered herself to her husband's caresses.

Without, the tempest still continued, and Monsieur de Brandt was growing uneasy and impatient. To grow impatient is something that courtiers do not generally permit themselves; but Monsieur de Brandt was very devoted, very much attached to his master; he trembled at the idea of the scandal which would result from it if the king was found with this well-beloved woman. The time was passing rapidly, at five o'clock the grand marriage ceremony was to commence. The Empress of Hindostan was such a personage that they dared not risk keeping her waiting. For this narrow mind the slightest derogation from her prerogatives, the least infraction of the rules of etiquette, had been an offense which she would not have pardoned. Retired, in the apartments of the young Thessalian princesses, she was spending with the Princess Augusta the last hours of liberty which still remained to the young fiancée; a jealous mother to the last, she wished to have to herself alone this child who, however, was going to be nearer to her grandmother, Prince George of Pattenpouff having taken service in the navy of a country submissive to the powerful empress, and each hour of the young sailor's absence would be for her a complete and entire possession of the treasure which she was to take back with her. The old autocratic woman had weighed her reasons

well, time, a rare thing, egotism and love being in perfect accord, the marriage was decided on.

Nearly two hours had expired before the king could consent to withdraw from his wife's arms. Monsieur de Brandt was becoming angry. Since noon, the hour wherein the celebration of his secret marriage had taken place, the king had not appeared at court; this prolonged absence might be remarked by the mother-in-law. What plausible reasons could he give to explain it? And now three o'clock was striking! Charles Ferdinand, making a superhuman effort, came at last out of the boudoir of the late queen. Poor woman! she who had loved him so much and on whom he had lavished so many oaths of fidelity and of love! Her specter should have leaped in her tomb; the ingrate, upon the trembling breast of the new wife, had completely forgotten the cherished dead.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ROYAL PROCESSION.

At last! it is a quarter to five!

The whole court is already assembled in the grand saloon, in which the royal procession is going to be formed. Each guest has considered himself in honor bound to respond to the invitation of the king; everybody is present in full dress. The royal family of Thessaly and the Empress of Hindostan with the Princess Corysande alone are wanting.

The grandmistress, active as a horse-fly, goes and comes with much ado, much embarrassment; she hastily flings a word here, makes a new suggestion there, reprimands the ladies of honor who, with their heads adorned with feathers like perambulating canopies, rudely and ungraciously endeavor to crush each other. There was nothing so ludicrous as the rivalry of these gowns, whose long and flimsy trains proclaimed like their proprietors a rude and laborious service. To what lengths will not vanity go! more simplicity had been better taste, better policy, for it would have better dissimulated the penury which reigned like a mistress at the Thessalian court.

The chief chamberlain, Count Leerkoff, gives a last glance at the organization of this memorable *fete*. The aides-de-camp in full uniform, their breast decorated with orders, are standing behind the ladies of honor. Gods! great gods! what gold! what decorations! what tinsel! It is marvelous, dazzling, ruinous, frightful! But is it possible that

one man alone, in a single life-time, may have ever been able to merit so much! Who was this sovereign or Russian grand duke who once said, on regarding some breast thus decorated: "How many badly placed stars!" He would have been able to repeat this remark, so just, regarding this day, all those breasts, which disappeared entirely behind the nauseously prodigious number of stars, of crosses, of medals, of palms, of ribbons, etc., etc., which were glittering upon them.

The homely meager daughters of the grandmistress in nowise renewed the golden youth which they still had the pretension to possess. It certainly was to be much doubted that this *fete* was to become a day of triumph for them, but nevertheless what expense, what efforts! With a stiffness which they mistook for grace, they wore, pitifully enough, white tarletan robes over petticoats of onion-colored taffeta; the length of their trains extended so far, that they were obliged to keep their adorers at a very great distance. Their poor, shriveled, faded faces, were smothered under the immense weight of enormous crowns of apple-blossoms—oh! for once they had been lavish! Made by their own economical hands, they had not hesitated to fling away here a profusion of leaves and flowers; fruits alone were wanting; they had not dared. The day, so favorable to the beautiful, seemed incensed against these homely unfortunate creatures, penetrating in floods in the vast reception-room; it was pleasing itself like a malicious child, by revealing to indiscreet regards the wrinkles and the crow's-feet that the poor old maids had in vain endeavored to remove, in order to repair the irreparable ravages of time.

Madame de Mineleko, as ex-ambassadress, was

forming a part of this cortege which she alone had rendered resplendent.

The sunshine had succeeded to the storm. Still brilliant at this hour, on this June afternoon, it was penetrating by one of the large windows and was resting like a halo upon this brow radiant with happiness suppressed and shared.

Najeska Ivanowna, like a young bride, (was she not one, indeed?), wore an entirely white court dress. Her bronzed hair set off with its effulgent rays the ornaments which adorned this heavy golden fleece. Her shoulders, attached to her body, her arms still so youthful, so slender, but so deliciously plump that everywhere little dimples were to be seen in them, all in her was captivating. In the delicate marble of her bosoms, two slightly projecting globes, all rosy with emotion, the blood appeared to tremble with desire. The tempting beauty of her body, the subtle charm which emanated from her, was an intoxicating flame; in a word, the whole appearance of the Princess of Mineleko was replete with the bewitching impression of woman. Notwithstanding all these petticoats of tulle entwined with lilies and the heavy damask of her train she struck the senses as indelibly as a stamp marks its effigy, and aroused and awakened temptation in man.

She did not remove her eyes from the door by which her husband and her king was soon to appear. She was endeavoring to restrain the light of an intense happiness too ready to beam from her voluptuous languishing eyes, but, the lightning of that rapture of the heart was breaking forth, however, in spite of her, at each moment. She was radiant with it,

Suddenly, the large folding-doors in the middle open, and a Swiss strikes the sonorous pavement three times; and in a stentorian voice announces:

“The king!”

Charles Ferdinand XVIII appears. With his left hand he guides the steps of the august fiancée who, too majestic and not affected enough, disappeared under a long and vaporous white veil; her gown is of cloth of silver, the heaviness and the length of the train is such that two pages who strive to recall their predecessors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are obliged to support it; they seemed crushed by it; the crown of orange-blossoms, the inseparable accompaniment of this day, often very wrongly termed a day of happiness, sparkles all studded with diamonds which, in all this immaculate whiteness glitter from all their luminous facets. Behind, comes the fiancé and his parents.

Several minutes elapse; the Swiss' halberd is heard a second time, and a respectful silence is established. Then, solemnly in her morning garb, advances slowly, gravely, as all the dignity of so high a personage requires, the august, the illustrious Empress of Hindostan. Even on this day all festivity and joy, she had not wished to forsake this livery of grief with which her soul is filled since the death of her imperial husband; in this black toilet the veil and crown alone are white; it is almost a lugubrious contrast, which very fortunately comes to enliven a diadem of an unheard of splendor and richness.

Near the empress, on her right, was the stout and heavy Princess Corysande, whose features are the exact counterpart of her mother, with the exception

of the complexion, which is still not as blotched as that of the old empress.

On the other side of the empress is the Princess Aline of Thessaly, dressed as modestly as genteelly; the sight of her gladdens the heart, her presence is a pleasure. How much grace! how much gentleness upon this smooth white brow! She advances, simply and sadly as if already in her life scarcely begun, some serious and profound griefs had incumbered its course; a fresh and fragrant bud, scarcely opened, she droops meditatively on her long flexible stem. Of what is this young heart thinking? What awaits, then, in her life to come, this delicious flower?

At last, in the rear, the other royal personages arrive, the Prince and Princess of Babylon, the Prince and Princess of Delhi, then some petty kings and princelings of no consequence; then, the youngest of the Princesses of Thessaly, and the hereditary prince.

The cortege sets out, the master of ceremonies, at the head, opens the march, and they silently and religiously proceed to the chapel of the chateau.

What different impressions those ceremonies gave, consummated on the same day and in the same place! That of the morning, gloomy, almost lugubrious, performed in secret, some assistants merely as witnesses, executed to the rumbling of thunder, the flashes of lightning, in this chapel empty all except this little group of eight persons, trembling like malefactors before the altar; while that of this evening proclaimed gayety and brilliancy, resounded with a perfect harmony of joy and love.

At this hour all is bustle, animation, going and

coming. The frou frou of trains is heard essaying to make room in the narrow space which is indicated to them, the clicking of the gold lace of the uniforms and that of the sabers is joined in a music which lacks neither harmony nor originality. They arrange and disarrange chairs; at first, it is almost a confused noise, then order is gradually restored. Then all becomes radiant in this little sanctuary; in the light of the chandeliers, the flowers of precious stones, the diamonds of the princesses massed around the bride, before the altar, are glittering with a thousand fires.

The organ, this sublime instrument which, like the violin expresses all the moods of the soul, unites its deep and joyous voice to that of the loud flourish of trumpets and throws under the vault of the antique chapel the chords of a triumphant nuptial march.

Its sweet hymn gradually ascends in the silence at last re-established, its affecting modulations fill the vault of the chapel, the chords rise, swell, and the vibrations, more and more powerful, soon become formidable. The chant breaks forth in its turn; the souls, ravished by this sacred music, detach themselves from earth, to ascend toward God.

Suddenly the sounds die away, calm is restored, the Lutheran minister advances toward the young betrothed and the ceremony commences. The emotion of the Empress of Hindostan is at its height, she thinks of that sweet princess, her daughter, the most dearly loved of all, that a rapid and relentless disease has snatched too young still, from a husband's love, from the regrets of an entire family. The bride, forgets for a moment, also, the happiness which embraces her; she thinks of that place

which her mother should have occupied and which remains empty, very empty, although the grandmother has taken a long journey to occupy it and replace the absent mother.

But she whose emotions has no longer limits, is the Princess Aline. She bows her head, which is supported by a neck as white as that of a swan, and tears fall behind the fan that her trembling hands hold in order to conceal her face.

The ceremony advances. The minister has terminated, and the organ pours out anew its bountiful and sonorous sounds, while the bride, making a profound courtesy to the Empress of Hindostan, kneels before her and reverently inclines her head to receive the maternal kiss and benediction.

At this moment not an eye is dry in the church, for while the grandmother tenderly embraces her granddaughter, all hearts, even the most indifferent, are filled with the painful remembrance of the last great ceremony which has preceded this in this chapel; the interment of the young dead queen.

The procession is formed anew for the return and re-entrance to the royal apartments. The great festive banquet will soon begin. But the empress will not assist at it; she will retire in her apartments in order to dine with those of the Princesses of Thessaly who are still too young to assist at an official banquet, and also with the young Princesses of Delhi.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE EMPRESS' RAGE.

The grand banquet is at its height. On all sides the corks of champagne bottles are popping, whose sharp crackling noise closely resembles sky-rockets; heads grow excited, tongues unloose themselves. It is the solemn moment of toasts; they are upon all subjects and persons: the most brilliant, and the best delivered, are the least sincere. Each party is represented in his turn.

Meanwhile, in the palace, the crush of guests becomes immense; since six o'clock, the carriages arriving one after the other, form in line before the royal chateau and discharge their people in the grand gala portico.

All the king's servants are in state livery. Some halberdiers, grenadiers, cuirassiers of the guard, and some body guards, stand erect and immovable with drawn swords at each side of the large doors. The whole palace is open for the festivity.

At the side of the royal banquet-table destined only for the official and intimate guests, large buffets have been prepared where, standing, the persons of secondary rank come to regale themselves with delicacies.

The glassware, iridescent with brilliant colors, sparkles like precious stones of a thousand facets under the blazing lights. Huge covered pieces arise, in the midst of flowers, upon massive silver platters; it is a display of incredible richness, for the silverware at the Court of Thessaly, royal presents or

gifts of different cities and provinces, was one of the only really rich and beautiful things that this little kingdom possessed.

Succulent fruits arise in pyramids upon fresh green now.

Around the royal table, the princesses, glittering with gems, enveloped in clouds of lace, are in court toilets; the princes in full dress. The red uniforms of the king's officers predominate with their striking colors. It is a festival of men of all parties, of all nations, in a word, all the military and diplomatic Thessaly. But let us make a little tour in the salon. See, here, at the side of the Princess of Pattepouff, mother of the husband of the eldest Princess of Thessaly, is seated one of those petty kings who, in these latter days, commence to arise in the East and who, let us hope, may disappear without too many barricades and bloodshed.

The king, although a young and elegant bachelor, had already grown corpulent through the productions of a good chef, brought, at a great expense, from Paris, which for this majesty, was a terrestrial paradise offering all the allurements of forbidden fruit. At each opportunity he left his own country and came to seek, incognito, a compensation for the deadly fatigue which he experienced in his own capital, a hole with tortuous and badly-paved streets, and wherein the houris with almond-shaped eyes offered to his *blase* senses less charms than our flaunting Parisians.

A little farther on, at one of the buffets, old Prince Stanislas of Grassan was to be seen, with his morganatic wife, gorged with food, and whose immense gown could hardly contain her powerful frame.

This imposing person, whose value had been great

if appraised by weight, believed herself an exceptional wit. Forgetting that among the blind the one-eyed are kings, she was very proud of the opinion that the unsophisticated inhabitants of a little provincial town possessed of her, where, in her narrow circle she was held like a sovereign. This viper of colossal dimensions was the terror of all her surroundings; before her each one yielded, so great was the terror inspired by the venom distilled by her infectious slaver. Poor Stanislas, knowing that any wrestling was impossible with this shrew of base origin, submitted to his yoke with a resignation worthy of a better cause.

A little old man was conversing with her. It was the minister of foreign affairs. With impaired exterior, having neither teeth nor hair, but still preserving intact within him that subtle brain which understood so well how to embroil politics, and make his government fish in troubled waters ending the difficulties which he had excited elsewhere. He changed his opinion like his shirt. Generally leaning toward the right, nevertheless, he had permitted himself during a momentary weakness to become inoculated with republican vaccine. "A Conservative bitten by a Radical, what?" as a witty writer has said.

Farther on, young Sergius of Pattenpouff was to be seen, having drank at a great draught the little disencumbered money that his parents were able to give him, up to his neck in debt, and afflicted in the bargain with chronic bronchitis. Notwithstanding that, his hope of the future was firm, for it was based upon an intrigue, in an embryo state as yet in his mother's brain, an intrigue tending to put one day in his clumsy lieutenant's claw of the hus-

sars the plump red hand, filled with gold of the Princess Corysande, the last daughter of the Empress of Hindustan. He and his mother, expecting from the lassitude and discouragement, which this princess was experiencing on seeing her efforts constantly baffled to ensnare on the wing any royal prince whatever, hoped to arrive to making her descend at last the necessary rounds of the ladder to put her on a level with the Pattenpouffs.

Here, the witty Schmke, interested in several financial companies whose snares—pardon—whose headquarters were in reality the office of his journal, although, he had taken care very ostensibly, to announce it as being in one of the most sumptuous hotels lately erected in the city. It is he who, not sparing sonorous words and inordinate promises, launched bombastic articles about the new loans where the simpletons and the slender purses lost their savings so painfully acquired.

Many words, much ink, much paper, (those three things of the best quality), and that is all. No more gold or lead mines, no more canals or railroads, than in the hollow of the hand. He was walking, tripping along briskly, and smartly, all fluttering, at being for once—and once only—admitted in the salon of the court. He had on his arm the Countess de Horsteman, called the “*phylloroxera* of the buffets,” and this nickname was well-applied, for even as this horrible disease destroys our vines, in like manner, when the countess approached a buffet, it was found ravaged as if a pernicious wind had breathed upon it. Surreptitiously, with a dexterity which approached the marvelous, she carried away in her light fingers, much like the long nippers of crabs, all the portable provisions; she made

them disappear in a deep pocket made expressly for this purpose.

There also was the excellent chamberlain, Pulnitz, a good fellow if there ever was one, that they hastened to injure as soon as they had made use of him, and who nevertheless remained content with himself and everybody.

Every one was going, coming, talking, laughing, exhilarated by the gayety of a sumptuous repast and the profusion of the offered refreshments.

The crown-head who came from the East, very much excited by the champagne and the old Burgundy, emulated the lowset officer in gallantry. At this moment he was jesting smartly enough with a lively Parisian, very sprightly, *ma foi!* and who from time to time jumped with both feet upon the marriage contract, going from right to left like a squirrel, according to her caprices. Her husband, according as his wife stood at court (ought we not to say in the court-yard?) was at one time or another either minister or ambassador; these dignitaries sufficed his ambition and his happiness.

Then, our old friend, the ambassadress of one of the great kingdoms of the South, Madame de Alhambra. Let us not forget this one! she is visible from afar; her gown, of a very brilliant red, glares in a fashion but little in harmony with the subdued and quiet colors of her neighbors; they maliciously accused her in society of preferring gaudy colors, because she was deaf.

In an embrasure of a window, Baron Kochnitz, the famous financier, was standing. He had built for himself a magnificent chateau whose roof was entirely of gold (?) But, the veritable covering of this modern feudal monument, the malicious tongues,

were saying, since the last panic at the Bourse was only mortgages.

Farther on, Count Quertz, a partisan very much opposed to the present ministry, was jesting with Monsieur de Brandt and his colleagues. The Prince of H——, who went no longer to court since he had been deposed by the Emperor of Babylon, had come this evening on account of Prince Pattenpouff's father, who had been one of his most intimate friends, and who, through his son, was going to become a branch of the royal house.

No less gay than the formal festivities, was the dinner presided over by the Empress of Hindustan. The old queen and her grandchildren had conversed much, had laughed much; each one also feeling a heavy weariness, which courted a beneficent sleep. The repast, moreover, was near its close. The grandmother, embracing her dear princesses, was about to retire to her private apartments, when the chamberlain of the hereditary Prince of Babylon was announced. "What does he want of me at this hour, Black?" said the empress to her confidential Scotchman, who had just come to impart to her this unexpected visit.

"I do not know, your majesty, but he says that it is urgent; he comes on the part of the prince imperial, who has strongly recommended him to see your majesty immediately."

"Let him enter, then."

Count de Schade appeared, and bowed profoundly before the sovereign.

"What urgent business can bring you at this hour, Monsieur de Schade?" demanded the empress.

"Your majesty, his imperial highness, the hereditary prince, not being able to leave the banquet, has

ordered me to come to your majesty in order to learn at what hour, this evening, his imperial highness might have the honor of speaking to your majesty."

The empress appeared surprised.

"This evening! is it so urgent, count? I confess that being somewhat fatigued, I would prefer to postpone the business until to-morrow."

"Your majesty will pardon me if I dare to insist. The prince told me that the communication which he has to make to your majesty cannot be adjourned."

"Goodness! you astonish me! I will say you even frighten me, count! Has something extraordinary happened?"

Count de Schade was silent.

"His imperial highness desires to communicate it himself to your majesty."

And, bowing respectfully, the count gained the door of the imperial apartment backwards.

When the empress re-entered her private apartments, where she was going to receive the prince imperial, she became meditative, pre-occupied. What could the prince imperial have to communicate to her? She was losing herself in conjectures, not being able in anywise to imagine what it could be. Could it be some new betrothals? The third Princess of Thessaly, the gentle Mathilde, could she have been demanded for the Duke of Africa, who a long time since had been looking for a wife? Or, could this young man have fixed his choice on the second daughter of the Prince Imperial of Babylon?

The old grandmother's curiosity was much excited. At this moment, in spite of her haughty pre-

tensions to superiority, she was compelled to mentally confess to herself that she was but like other women, made of flesh and bone and also of weakness.

The time appeared enormously long to the empress, waiting over-excited her. The prince imperial was at last announced, his face was perturbed, agitated. On seeing him thus, he ordinarily so calm, so phlegmatic, the empress divined that something extraordinary had happened.

“Goodness, Fritz! what have you to tell me? You appear very much disturbed.”

“I am so, indeed, your majesty.”

The empress trembled.

“Has some misfortune happened? Is Agusta suffering?”

Her grandmother’s heart, twice a mother for herself and for the absent, had no other thought than that her granddaughter was ill; while thus speaking she arose to run to the assistance of her child.

But the prince imperial restrained her by a gesture.

“I entreat your majesty to be pleased to listen to me!”

“That is what I desire; but speak, speak quickly, I conjure you! Do you not see upon what burning coals you keep me?”

Notwithstanding this peremptory order, the prince imperial was silent. It seemed that the communication which he had to make to the empress was beyond his strength.

“My God! how uneasy you make me!” said her majesty. “But, I repeat to you, tell me quickly—very quickly—that which brings you here.”

“If your majesty will promise me to be calm, I will speak.”

The empress grew pale.

“It is a misfortune, then, and a great one, that you have come to tell me?”

The prince made an affirmative gesture.

“Who is it about?”

“The King of Thessaly.”

“The King of Thessaly! but I have left him in perfect health, scarcely two hours ago.”

“His health is as good as usual, and what is more, his Thessalian majesty is in a great state of beatitude.”

The empress regarded the prince attentively; it seemed to her that he had become insane. That which he was saying was so incomprehensible that she was really excusable in her supposition.

“That the king may be happy, very happy even, as I am, as we all are, in the establishment of his eldest daughter and at the brilliant marriage which is being arranged for Aline, that I comprehend; and I do not see anything in that which obliges you in such a persistent manner to defer a repose of which I have so much need.”

The prince, taking affectionately the empress' hands, said to her:

“There has been two marriages to-day, your majesty. That of the king has preceded that of his daughter by a few hours only.”

At first the empress was certain that the prince was suffering from an hallucination.

“You cannot believe me!” said the prince, astonished at the calm of the empress; “but Madame de H—— has discovered, through the minister's wife,

that Madame de Mineleko and the king were secretly married this morning.”

The Empress of Hindustan uttered a terrible cry.

“Madame de Mineleko and the King of Thessaly were secretly married this morning?”

What! he, the husband of her Aline, of her adored dead Aline—he had dared to outrage the memory of this gentle princess to that extent? To unite himself to a nobody! a private individual! but this was a sacrilege!

The empress was choking, rattling in the throat, she was in such a state that the prince imperial was completely terrified. The sovereign could no longer breathe; a yet more vivid redness was added to that which was habitual to her, and the blood, ascending to her head, provoked such a paroxysm of coughing that the prince feared that his mother-in-law might succumb to an attack of apoplexy. Bounding toward the bell, he was about to ring it; but the empress was quicker than he.

“Stop!” said she, in a commanding tone. “I am calm, and I wish to act; it is useless to interpose a third party in this affair. Answer my questions simply and rapidly. Is the *fete* terminated?”

“Yes.”

“Then everybody has retired?”

“Yes.”

“The King of Thessaly, also?”

“Yes.”

“Alone?”

“I do not know. He is in his private apartments, and has given the most explicit command not to be disturbed.”

“That order I will brave myself!”

“Oh! do not create a scandal, your majesty.”

“I will do anything! anything to break this infamous marriage! this accursed union!”

The empress' rage was so great that it had been dangerous to utter a word tending to calm her or to excuse the king; were it not for that the prince would have been able to ask what there was so infamous in the morganatic marriage of a widower with the woman that he loved, and in what he lacked more in respect to the dead queen than if he had been united, by policy, to a royal princess.

He was regretting his precipitation now; for he realized that no one in the world could hinder the old empress from making a frightful scandal.

Throwing her dignity to the winds, excited by fury, the empress precipitately opened the door and was going to rush out when the prince imperial seized her. A veritable struggle ensued between them. His physical strength at last predominating over that of the old enraged woman, he constrained her to listen to him. The only concession which he could obtain in the end was that the empress would not go herself to the King of Thessaly's door, but that she would send his chamberlain, to tell him that he must immediately present himself to her.

CHAPTER XXXV.

“YOU MUST EXPEL THAT WOMAN.”

It is certainly easier to conceive than to describe the impression produced upon the King of Thessaly, being lost in perfect felicity with his beloved wife on this first night of the wedding, when suddenly, despite the explicit orders which he had given, raps precipitately repeated on the door withdrew the two lovers from their beatitude.

Najeska Ivanowna, shivering, terrified, cowered yet more closely against the heart of her august husband. The king, as well as she, comprehended immediately that such an infraction of the rules of etiquette could only be caused by an unusual event.

In all haste, half-dressed, the king passed in the adjoining apartment, from whence, in an angry voice, he demanded who dared to come to thus disturb him.

It was his poor chamberlain, much frightened by the terrible message which he had to deliver.

At these words:

“The Empress of Hindustan insists on seeing your majesty this very evening,” the king felt a shiver run through his whole frame.

She knew all, then! This express summons to see him, without delay, proved to him alone how great was the old sovereign’s wrath. Surely, the scene would be frightful! terrible! But, as sooner or later it would have to come to that, perhaps it was better to explain himself immediately.

“Tell her majesty that I will be at her orders in half an hour,” said the king.

The chamberlain retired, and the king ran rapidly to find again his dear Najeska Ivanowna. When he imparted the truth to her the princess shuddered.

“Who knows if I will ever see thee again!” said she, suddenly, throwing herself, sobbing, on the neck of her royal husband.

“Come, child! what hast thou, then, to fear?” He was speaking in a reproachful tone, but tenderly, cajolingly, as a mother would do to her sick infant.

“No, I will see thee no more!” said Najeska Ivanowna, suddenly resuming a despairing tone. “If the empress summons thee at such an hour, it is to undo thee. We women possess the faculty of second-sight, we forebode misfortune! Hark ye!” and she touched her heart, “it is written here—my future is forever destroyed!”

She was frightfully calm, but that which she was suffering was plainly visible; the king perceived only too well the thrill which was causing all this adorable body to shiver. He threw himself upon her, kissing her eyes, her mouth, her bosom, agitatedly descending, palpitating through the foamy laces which covered the perfection of this body which was his property, his slave.

“The empress awaits you, sire!” said Najeska Ivanowna, with an agonized cry.

She is going to let you choose between expelling me! or to lose her good-will, her fortune, her friendship forever. What are you going to do?”

And the *sang froid* with which she had armed herself suddenly abandoning her, the ex-ambadress melted into tears.

“Do not forget that I have no one in the world but thee!” said she, with a sorrowful moan.

“Could I do it?—could I ever do it?” said the king,

who was still completely mad with the desire of always possessing this superb creature.

He must hasten, however. The empress was not accustomed to waiting, and woe to him who had dared to thwart her!

A half an hour had scarcely flown since the old sovereign's order, before the King of Thessaly was already in her presence. The Princess Corysande and the hereditary Prince and Princess of Babylon were with her.

"You must expel that woman! and you must expel her immediately, instantly, this very night!"

Such were the frantic words which fell precipitately from the baleful lips of the empress. In order not to allow the king a single moment for reflection, whose feebleness of character was, however, but too well known, Monsieur de Brandt, minister of the interior, and Monsieur de Werther, secretary of state and foreign affairs, had been sent for in great haste to come to their majesties and imperial highnesses. While awaiting the arrival of Charles Ferdinand, a decree of banishment had been drawn up against Madame de Mineleko; and there was nothing to do but to legalize it and put it in execution.

"Compose yourself, your majesty! It will soon be midnight, and you cannot honestly compel this unhappy creature to depart at this hour, alone, deprived of all. The blow that you wish to strike is too terrible; wait until to-morrow; you will be calmer and you will consider more wisely. Such a procedure would attract the censure of everybody upon you." the prince imperial had said to the empress, while they were debating together what it was best to do.

“No! no! it is immediately, at this hour, I tell you, that I want this woman, this infamous creature, to go away! Oh! great God! why can I not drive her away myself?” vociferated this old countess, with rage become a furious shrew.

We will pass over the terrible and undignified scene which followed. The unhappy Najeska Ivanowna was only too correct! her fate was irrevocably decided.

The king, surprised, caught by this unexpected avalanche, which descended suddenly upon him, had not the courage to open his lips. The “imperial mother-in-law” did not permit him to speak, only when she saw that he was frightened enough to swear to her, upon the most sacred oaths, that never would he attempt to see this “miserable creature” again, whom he had “almost in spite of her,” married this very morning and to whom, before God and before men, he had promised assistance and protection, love and fidelity! What an example for this son-in-law of a few hours! Where, then, shall we find good faith and honor, if it is not the habitual and even forced guest in the hearts of kings!

“Do not hesitate, sire! swear to me! or if not, I declare to you that I will forever disinherit your children,” raved the furious old woman.

Charles Ferdinand gave proof of but very little intelligence. With coolness and reflection he would have known that the empress, in spite of her indignation, her irritation, would never go so far as to put into execution the threat which a veritable insanity wrested from her. She to injure her grandchildren, whom she loved more than the world, the children of her idolized daughter? never! Her old hardened heart had only one virtue, her maternal

love; and she carried this to its utmost limits; even tigers love their young!

But the king was weak; he was afraid; man in name, cipher in fact, he could neither guard nor defend the unfortunate woman with whom he had united his destiny. Before the anger of his mother-in-law, stifling will and love, he basely cast her upon the highway, delivered her to merciless derision.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NAJESKA IVANOWNA'S COURAGE.

An hour passed, perhaps two, and the king did not reappear.

Eager to learn what has passed between the king and the terrible old empress, Najeska Ivanowna cannot keep quiet. She arises, and feverishly walks with a regular and continuous step, the limited extent of her chamber. The noise of her steps frightens her; she stops irresolute, her eyes dry, her manner frenzied, excited by anguish; at last, exhausted by fatigue, she throws herself upon her bed. She endeavors to sleep; in vain; it has fled forever. She will sleep no more, she says to herself.

To this horrible agitation an invincible torpor has succeeded; her head, supported on her burning hand, her body inanimate, she remains there immovable. All the life of this beautiful creature, but just now all trembling with love and ecstasy, is concentrated in her staring eyes, whose somber wild glance remains riveted upon the door by which her royal husband has disappeared.

A very long time passes thus, in expectation.

With strained ears, the unhappy creature starts unceasingly; at each moment she believes she hears the king who is coming back to her; but, alone in the silence of this dismal night, the tic-tac of the clock lets the minutes fall, uniformly and regularly, into eternity.

“My God! my God! he will return no more!”

Agitated, terrified, she feels as if a void is form-

ing around her. "Never, never more will she see him again!"

Is there not, with all those who love, with women especially, a sensitive and delicate flower, a sort of invisible power, a moral loadstone adapted to forewarn them of unknown dangers and secret snares? It is a species of second-sight, prescience, which is commonly termed presentiment.

And her disquietude, her anguish, recommences, with her despair and her fears.

The time passes, however, terrible in its rapidity as thunder and lightning; Najeska Ivanowna arises again, erect and stiff as a specter; she recommences her promenade, which she wishes to make as long as the night which surrounds her. But, at last, fatigue is stronger than anxiety, sleep with its inextricable nets, envelop her; her eyelids, reddened by watching and weeping, grow heavy; she becomes drowsy; she sleeps.

She was sleeping profoundly, when a second time repeated raps near her startled her out of sleep. Some one standing at the head of the bed, with a candle in hand, endeavors to make her arise.

Najeska Ivanowna trembles. Heavens! is it he?

Alas! it was only her maid.

"I beg a thousand pardons, Madame la Princess," said this girl, "but the grandmistress of the palace is in the adjoining room; she prays your highness to grant her a few moments conversation."

Najeska Ivanowna, terrified, feels that some terrible events are entangling her on every side. Unconsciously, mechanically, she answers:

"Tell Madame de Langweilig that she may wait until to-morrow; I will then give her the audience which she desires."

Under the influence of a profound irritation, she had spoken very loud, as if to make the grandmistress distinctly understand that now she was her queen, loud enough that these words might reach the ears of Madame de Langweilig.

The grandmistress was not there to jest. She represented the old empress, stamping with impatience, and keeping the King of Thessaly a prisoner until the departure of the post-chaise which was to take Madame de Mineleko away. Knowing that it was for her interest to act with celerity, she decided not to parley any longer and, pushing the door abruptly, she found herself in the middle of the chamber.

Najeska Ivanowna, more outraged yet than frightened by this violation of her privacy, found the courage to redress herself.

“Since when, madam, have you the right to penetrate at night in my apartment?”

“Madam,” said the grandmistress, with difficulty restraining an impertinence which she had cast with pleasure in the face of the detested and fallen woman, “I act by order of the king.”

“By the order of the king?—of the king, my husband?” cried Najeska Ivanowna, so stung to the quick by the insolent look of the grandmistress, that she did not hesitate to haughtily confess the truth. She believed she was thus establishing herself definitely in her new dignity, by recalling to order the disrespectful subject of her husband.

“Yes, madam, his majesty has just signed a decree of expulsion against you, and it is my duty, a very painful one, I assure you, to announce to you this news.”

Madame de Mineleko believed at first that the old

grandmistress had taken leave of her senses, or else that she herself had imperfectly comprehended her. Instinctively she raised her hands to her forehead as if to compress there her reason ready to escape her.

“I am, madam, under the necessity of entreating you, of ordering you even, to hasten. A post-chaise, harnessed to four stout horses, is before the door; it awaits you. You must dress quickly then, and depart.”

For a moment Najeska Ivanowna appeared crushed; but, suddenly recovering her presence of mind, she said:

“You pretend that it is his majesty the king who has given you such orders! the king who loves me more than his life! than his throne!” said she, with all the haughtiness of an offended queen. “Get you gone! get you gone immediately! I order you out; you are a miserable wretch, for you lie!”

For all response, Madame de Langweilig presented to the unfortunate woman the decree of banishment, signed by the king himself. This writing she was as well acquainted with as herself, her eyes could not deceive her!

My God! but was she losing her senses! was she the plaything of a frightful nightmare?

The unhappy woman, completely crushed, let herself fall upon a seat. Yes, this writing was really the king's! And, however, she was not dreaming when she recalled that scarcely an instant before he was here, beside her, passionately in love, entirely taken up with promises for a future which he wished to make delightful and happy!

By a superhuman effort she endeavored to recover from the terrible shock which she had just received.

The grandmistress, triumphant, a malicious smile in her eyes, was following ironically all the phrases of this conflict which was fought in the mind of the princess.

"You show me this paper; so be it!" said she. "But I am the king's legitimate wife; say, then, to those who have sent you, that I shall not quit this palace without having seen my husband again, without having heard from his lips that this decree is not a horrible fraud."

"The king has forseen all, Madame la Princess. I am also to respond to this demand that it is absolutely impossible for him to accede to your desire. An immense price is attached to this determination."

A strident laugh escaped from the distorted lips of the young woman.

"Ah, well!" said she, resolutely, "if he does not come to me, I will go to him!"

She arose to go out, but Madame de Langweilig intrepidly barred her passage.

"I am your prisoner, then? undoubtedly the victim of some infernal machination?" the king's wife violently cried.

"Madame la Princess, I explain the facts clearly to you; there is neither mystery nor treachery. There has been signed against you a decree of banishment to which under penalty of being compelled by force, you must obey, and that instantly. The thing to clearly establish is what is best for you to do," said the grandmistress, artfully, "it is for you to submit calmly, for the present, to that which is commanded you by a will stronger than your own."

Afterward, if you deem it expedient, you may attempt the steps that you may deem useful.

“Will you, if you please, since you are so clear and explicit, tell me for what crime they dare—do you comprehend me perfectly—they dare” (and she pronounced these words in a terrible manner) “to outrage me thus, me, an ex-ambassadress, now the wife of a king!”

Madame de Langweilig, although not very timid, had not the hardihood to tell her that it was precisely because she had not feared to accept the hand of the king, that this dreadful and unmerited chastisement was falling upon her; the terrible vengeance of the cruel and furious caprice of an old frantic woman.

“You are silent, and the king does not come,” said the young woman suddenly. “If that which you tell me is true, however, to what a coward, unjust destiny must then have united me!”

She beat her hands with despair and rage.

At this moment the rumbling of a carriage, the cracking of the postilion’s whip and the tinkling of the bells of the post-horses, were heard in the distance.

Najeska Ivanowna ran to the window, from whence she rapidly drew aside the curtain. It was a dark night without; the illumination of the residence city, never very marvelous, even in the beginning of the evening, was almost totally extinguished, even on this night on which all had been illuminated for the princess’ marriage. But, with the eyes of a lynx animated with indignation, the princess distinguished the outlines of a heavy post-chaise harnessed to four horses. It was advancing slowly toward the palace; the draw-bridge had already been crossed. Going straight ahead, the vehicle stopped under the very window of the rooms

occupied at present by Madame de Mineleko. Directly underneath there was a little private door, by which it had been agreed that Najeska Ivanowna should go away secretly in order to return home before the dawn.

Several shadows, scarcely visible for the regards of the indifferent, were standing about, huddled together, deliberating while awaiting the arrival of the vehicle. In the reflections of the helmets, in the glistening of the long sabers of polished steel, which were brilliantly delineated upon the dull colors of the dark uniforms, Najeska Ivanowna immediately recognized the profiles of several cavaliers and an officer, who appeared to hold themselves ready for a departure rather than for a night patrol.

The unhappy creature had no longer reason to delude herself; the hideous truth was clearly displaying itself in all its implacable reality. As she herself had predicted to the king, this marriage was the misfortune of her life! Oh! the prediction that had been made to her by that sorceress encountered in her tender youth was not long in realizing itself! And did she not know now from whom the misfortune came? Who, save the old empress, could have ever been able to plot such a treason?

She saw it, this odious plot which was enveloping her on all sides! "And the king, the feeble king, was undoubtedly the prisoner of his mother-in-law!" She had held the hand which had signed this iniquitous decree. A sovereign generally good and merciful, misled by anger, she had only acted thus against the princess because she had dared to take the place formerly occupied by the daughter of this mother, a roaring and howling lioness to defend the place of

the dead, that no one was worthy to occupy after her.

The grandmistress had said so, and undoubtedly she had her instructions, if Madame de Mineleko refused to depart of her own will and without disturbance, there would be a new outrage, force, which they would employ against her. This refined and haughty sensitive plant would be seized and dragged away by the rude and brutal hands of soldiers, of ignoble police; her aristocratic body would have to suffer those touches which, by themselves alone, destroy a woman. Alas! and she was only at the commencement of her calvary! A sublime resignation took the place of the revolt which had at first possessed her. Her decision was quickly made.

“Leave me an hour to dress myself,” said she, coldly, to the Countess de Langweilig.

“So be it; but make haste, I conjure you, for I exceed my orders.”

Madame de Langweilig was frightened at the strange *sang froid* which had taken possession of Madame de Mineleko.

“Will you allow me at least the liberty of being alone in my chamber, madam?” said she, haughtily, to the grandmistress.

Even this request could not be granted; the furious and exalted imagination of the old empress was rendering her unjust, almost indecent. Fearing that the young woman might escape her, Madame de Langweilig had been forbidden to lose the ambassadress out of her sight, though it were but a moment.

“Alas! madam, I have orders not to leave you, even for a second.”

“So, I am completely a prisoner,” said Madame de Mineleko, still with the same icy tone; “I must resign myself.”

Madame de Langweilig, commencing to be frightened by this brutal and iniquitous mandate which she had to fulfill, bowed her head almost with shame.

“I will endeavor to discommode you as little as possible, madam. I will be discreet.”

Madame de Mineleko, assisted by her maid, was quickly dressed, but in a complete silence. At each time that the details of the toilet caused the hands of Najeska Ivanowna to come in contact with those of her maid, the latter perceived that they were as cold as a snow-ball, hardened by frost; and then a shiver penetrated to the marrow of her bones. The frightful tranquillity of Najeska Ivanowna was full of menace, and despite herself, the grandmistress was disquieted.

When Madame de Mineleko was dressed, and some little articles that belonged to her were collected in a valise (we recollect that she had only come provisionally, to spend the wedding-night with her husband), she arose before the countess:

“Will you, madam, bear witness,” said she, “that I leave here the jewels with which the King of Thesaly has presented me. When wickedness and calumny are excited against me, which is inevitable and very near, for they stamp upon misfortune as much as they bow before success, when the most absurd and the basest lies shall be disseminated about me, I give you, madam, the authority to contradict them, if they ever dare to accuse me of cupidity. Now, I am ready; will you, I pray you, indicate to me the road which I have to follow to execute the orders that you have received.”

She uttered this phrase in a commanding tone, as if she was still the Ambassadors of Caucasus; and it was with the carriage of a queen, with the dignity which suited her misfortune, that she passed through this door which she had so joyously opened some hours before.

Full of respect and admiration for so many outrages so courageously supported, the assistants of this painful scene bowed profoundly upon the passage of the princess, who was going forever away from this place, the witness of her triumphs, of her love.

Apprehending a desperate resistance, several guards of the palace had been collected in the antechamber.

“So many men for one woman alone!” said Madame de Mineleko, with a haughty and disdainful bitterness.

There was scarcely any light in the corridors, and the immense monumental staircase was filled with shadows which imparted a thrill of terror.

Almost absolute silence reigned in the vast feudal chateau, from whence these people, at the commands of an old vindictive empress, were chasing this fragile woman so cruelly wounded in her modesty, in her wifely dignity and in all her sentiments of feminine delicacy.

Down below, a pale and flickering light was ascending, whose reflections were projected on the staircase, giving to the arabesques of the forged-in balustrade curves and fantastic lines which were delineated like a phantasmagoria upon the wainscoting of the vast walls. There, immovable and severe in their antiquated frames, appeared the glorious ancestors of Charles Ferdinand XVIII,

Their dull, wan eyes seemed animated, indignation and commiseration were alternately glowing in them. Is it possible that one of them, descending from their race, blood of their blood, has been able to forfeit honor to such an extent? A traitor and perjurer to his oaths, they reject from their number, this king weak enough to suffer this young and beautiful woman to be driven away, at night, by mercenaries, as if she had been guilty of the crime of high-treason.

As she was haughtily and proudly descending, the rays of the moon, hitherto veiled by thick clouds, suddenly penetrating through the large bay-windows, came like a silver nimbus, to rest upon the haughty brow of the Princess of Mineleko.

Najeska Ivanowna had till now remained calm and imposing in her misfortune. Feeling directed upon her, glances, some indifferent, and others interested in her disgrace, she had held it an honor not to evince anything of the chagrin which was overwhelming her; moreover, a last hope supported her still. It seemed impossible to her that the king, a short time since at her feet, could permit her to depart without coming, at the last moment, smitten by remorse and love, rushing to meet her and make of his arms an impregnable rampart for her. Upon the point of crossing for the last time this threshold that she had passed like a queen and that she was leaving like an outlaw, she cast, in spite of herself, a long and despairing look upon these inhospitable walls. But saw nothing!—nothing but the grand-mistress, her maid and some police officers who surrounded her.

“Is there a traveling rug in the carriage?” said

suddenly the voice of a servant-woman, running up at the last moment.

It was the old and faithful maid of the Princess Aline, who, sent under this pretext, came in reality to protest by her presence, against the injustice of the grandmother, and manifest by a salutation that she brought her on the part of her young and royal mistress, all the sympathy of the latter for the poor fugitive.

No! there was no traveling rug. In this unexpected and rapid departure, they had not had time to think of it. It was in a Scotch plaid belonging to the amiable Princess Aline that the police officers enveloped the icy feet of Madame de Mineleko, installed at last in the heavy post-carriage which was to carry her beyond the frontier.

“Her royal highness sends her dearest friendship to Madame de Mineleko!” cried the old maid to the princess.

Such were the last friendly words which reached the ear of poor Najeska Ivanowna.

In the cold and gloomy night which followed this stormy day, the raised arm of this woman waving her handkerchief as a sign of sympathy, the group of palace guards upon the door-step, watching her flight, such were the last visions of the princess on quitting the royal chateau. But no!—not quite the last—for, mechanically raising her head while passing before the little palace, she saw glued behind the panes of a window better lighted than the others, the disturbed visage of the king and that of the completely triumphant old empress following her, he with haggard eyes, she with her's glittering with hate and anger. Then all vanished, the massive vehicle bearing in the night to the cloister this

young woman, going to conceal far from the world her disgrace and her despair.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UNDER THE WEIGHT OF HER CROSS.

The post-chaise continued on its way as rapidly as its four horses could bear it. The coppice-wood of the little forest which extended behind the royal palace was quickly traversed. In the distance, already far behind, the immense edifice entirely dark, with its deep moat, its high walls, its turrets of the middle age and its slender spires, was disappearing from the horizon.

Now, they were traversing a great sheet of light that the moon was throwing like a long white ribbon, upon the thickly-wooded country which surrounded the capital of Thessaly.

The coachman's whip re-echoed, almost sinisterly, in the silence of the night; the vehicle dolefully crushed the leaves and the branches with which the morning's storm had strewn the earth.

The wind was uttering long sighs. The echo reverberated in the chain of mountains roundabout. It was night with its train of terrors; it was the solitude and the profound darkness of the midst of the country. The pebbles seemed to grind their teeth under the carriage wheels.

The sigh of the wind ran rapidly through the forest, which the unconscious traveler was approaching in spite of herself. The heavy wheels in passing noisily, awakened the broods of birds asleep in the branches. The voice of night was arising on all sides. The crooked forms of the high bushes which

ran along the road lighted by the pale stars, had the appearance of hideous gnomes whose bizarre forms frightened the shattered nerves of Madame de Mineleko.

The air became colder as the night advanced, but Madame de Mineleko, almost inanimate, in her corner, did not feel the cold which was benumbing her limbs. She was so confused, so absorbed by the rapid events of this inauspicious day, that she believed she was a prey to a frightful nightmare, she was even asking herself if she was not a fantastic personage of Hoffmann's tales, flying in this sinister night.

Long moments elapsed, sadly and slowly, in the jolting of this vehicle in which Najeska Ivanowna was alone with her maid. The arrival at the first relay, withdrew her from the torpor which had usurped her, and recalled her to the sufferings of reality. Now was about to commence the laborious ascension of these high mountains, whose rugged and sinuous road was becoming, while advancing, more and more painful to climb.

Madame de Mineleko, instead of going directly to the nearest frontier, had profited by the only favor which had been granted her, "provided that she promptly quitted the territory of the king." She was going, then, to Montaboro, the first town in the mountains which was no longer a part of Thessaly. It was there that her two dear children were in security, her two last consolations. Banished from the world, rejected by him who ought to be her aid and protection, she was going to demand of God that which men refused her. Madame de Mineleko, the daughter of a Christian mother, whose father, a Polish prince, had died in the defense of his faith

and his country, was herself a Catholic; it was then to the convent of the Sisters of Sainte-Marie de la Misericorde, a vast and gloomy cloister, that she was going to live at present, endeavoring in this quiet retreat to forget, if not to pardon.

In broad daylight an excursion through these mountains was a difficult thing; but, in the obscurity of the night this journey became almost impracticable. The order was explicit, however, and the detachment of police which, according to the wishes of the empress, surrounded the carriage of the fugitive, had received instructions not to interrupt the journey, under any pretext whatever, until the exile was out of the Thessalian dominions.

As it often happens in this life, when misfortune has entered a door it does not seem likely to leave it; it was to be thus for Najeska Ivanowna, who, as well through the road she was traveling as through her companion, had yet many annoyances to endure during this painful ascension.

The frightful tempest of the day had occasioned very great devastation, whose wrecks, scattered here and there, obstructed the road and made this sad journey longer and more fatiguing. On all sides there were nothing but enormous blocks of stone, entire trees uprooted by the fury of the storm, telegraph poles lying upon the earth soaked by the morning rain, and fallen rocks which it was necessary to remove one by one in order to be able to continue their journey.

The maid, a superstitious peasant, with her head crammed with mysterious apparitions of the devil and of saints, was becoming one torture more for the poor afflicted creature. It was necessary for her, she whose courage was so tried, to raise that of

this girl who, shivering, was making a multitude of signs of the cross in the presence of this landscape, whose terrible desolation was still increased by the darkness of the night, for in these densely wooded mountains the rays of the moon were hardly able in the shadiest parts to penetrate through the gnarled boles of the trees, whose interlaced branches were still loaded with heavy drops of rain that the least movement shed upon the ground.

In a miserable chamber of the inn, destitute of everything, the travelers were obliged to wait until the weary horses were removed and fresh horses harnessed again.

“May the Holy Virgin receive our souls!” whispered Glascha, approaching her mistress trembling and terrified; “for it appears to me that they are conducting us to Hapes.”

Under her wily appearance this girl concealed a vile and black soul that the princess, with her upright and candid character, would have never been able to divine. For a “yes” or a “no,” although extravagantly paid, she had abandoned her poor mistress to the danger of going away alone, in the dark night, intrusted to these strange coachmen who were continually changing at the different relays, and to an escort of police.

Madame de Mineleko, seated upon the only and miserable wooden bench of the tavern, remained plunged in a profound silence. She had refused to touch the poor food, all that this wretched cabin could offer, and that the officer of the detachment had himself prepared for her. The old peasant, half asleep, was casting amazed and delighted glances upon this lovely white creature, whose fingers loaded with glittering rings was attracting

her attention. Najeska Ivanowna, having removed her gloves, was pressing her icy hands upon her burning brow ready to burst; her cap, although light, appearing an insupportable weight to her aching head, had been cast aside. Freed thus from all fetters her heavy and silky chestnut hair, disheveled by the jolting of the vehicle, was falling almost unknotted upon the dark green plush mantle which scarcely covered her. Her remarkable beauty was not alone attracting attention; a lively curiosity was seizing their minds at the sight of this unknown woman who was militarily escorted by a whole detachment of police. They were regarding her with stupor, and asking who she could be, for in the poorest cabins they had the portrait of the late queen and some of the princesses (the royal family of Thessaly being very popular in the country), and this woman was surely not one of them, the astonished peasants were saying to each other. Who, then, was she?

The carriage was soon ready again.

“Is Madame la Princess disposed to continue her journey?” the officer demanded, respectfully.

This request was only made for form’s sake, for whether she was willing or not, the exile was obliged to continue her journey forward. But the men had received the explicit order to treat this young unfortunate woman with all the respect due to her rank.

Najeska Ivanowna was so much absorbed by her sad meditations, that at first she did not quite comprehend. The officer reiterated his request a second time. Then, rising frightened, as if coming out of a dream:

“Let us set out, if all is ready,” said she, her voice, like an unknown voice, sounding strange to her

own ears. Indeed, what difference did it make to her to go or to come? to remain here, or to advance there?

She followed the men, who renewed their march.

In this dark night the sky permitted no other scintillation to pierce than here and there, the reflection of a light through the black and heavy mass of clouds. All was disorder diffused. It seemed that they heard the breath of phantoms and of specters running near the vehicle, the croaking of malevolent birds in the air, and that, striding the winds, the hydras of the Apocalypse were flying, announcing the last hour of the world.

Suddenly, a strange thing, a phosphorescence invaded the sky. In this mountainous country nature is filled with phenomenons, explicable through electricity which can alone produce them. Glascha, frightened, made anew the sign of the cross.

“Madame la Princess, look—look there!” said she, pointing to the horizon.

There, almost grazing this phosphorescence, at a certain moment a long black file of birds of passage crossed the heavens. Then, as if they had breathed upon the light, it was suddenly extinguished.

Madame de Mineleko started; it was a flight of ravens, birds of ill-omen, whose presence always announced new misfortunes. Then, a great gust of wind arose; then, swelling, it became furious, tearing the earth up suddenly, and whirling in the air all that which it encountered like a fantastic whirlwind. Fear, bordering on insanity, was increasing more and more in the heart of Glascha.

“Holy Virgin of mercy! have pity on us! If we had only arrived to the end of our journey!” said she, while constantly signing herself with the cross.

“Madame la Princess, see! Oh! the heavens are angry! My God! what will become of us?”

Najeska Ivanowna did not respond, but she herself was quite overcome by this sinister phenomenon which was streaking the clouds. She got in the vehicle again, and the dull journey recommenced sad and gloomy. The obscurity was still very great, and the road was becoming more and more steep; from time to time, enormous groups of trembling shadows were delineated across the steep and difficult route. At times the tumult of the wind became almost deafening, and an uneasiness, the singular uneasiness which seizes in unknown and sublime solitudes, was taking possession of Najeska Ivanowna and her maid.

And while the vehicle continually ascends, while the heavy steps of the coachman descended from his seat in order to lighten the weight resounds, while the silence of the night is disturbed by the stamping of the breathless and weary horses and the clicking of the gendarme's sabers, a great sadness invades the soul of Najeska Ivanowna. A sorrowful cry rends her heart, a sublime prayer, that of our Saviour upon Calvary, falls from her lips: “Eli! Eli! lama sabachthani?” The unhappy woman succumbs, she also under the weight of her cross!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NEW INSULT.

When Najeska Ivanowna awoke for the first time in the pious retreat where she had come to seek peace and consolation, it was almost two o'clock in the afternoon. After having embraced her dear babies, her first thought was of him who had so cruelly, so unjustly sacrificed her. Undoubtedly, she would receive a letter, a message, or a telegram from him. Oh! yes, he would give her by some means a sign of life, of interest, of friendship! Although she had been pained to learn the frailty of the human heart, this poor immolated creature would not have been able to believe that this king whom she had seen the day before, so filled with love, so tremulous with tenderness, had already and forever forgotten and abandoned her. In this hour of distress how she recalled the oaths of eternal constancy and fidelity, which he had lavished upon her when tremblingly and timidly she had made him a confidant of her apprehensions of the future! Her apprehensions—alas! how promptly they were justified!

Completely depressed by discouragement and despair, the poor Princess de Mineleko was vainly endeavoring to return to the reality of things. Nothing of this which surrounded her was calculated to pour the least balm in this grief-stricken heart. The murky and rainy weather seemed the reflection of this soul so unhappy. An uncertain light was feebly penetrating through the narrow window of the little

cell which she occupied; her poor eyes, weakened by the abundant tears which she had shed, were wandering almost without perceiving it over this magnificent but sinister panorama which was spread out before her. Similar to those that Dante portrays in his "Purgatory," this landscape presented a truly sublime spectacle. An immense solitude extended on all sides; the frightful roar of the cascades, falling from steep summits to madly precipitate themselves like whirlwinds of humid dust through the labyrinth of valleys and the chaos of the mountains, alone disturbed the silence. Not a hut, not a roof, nothing but the sky. Gigantic blocks of granite, their enormous crevasses filled with heather and thorns rankly and wildly growing, were hanging over the narrow gorges, bristling with jagged mountains; in the distance, the horizon, bounded by eternal snows, was entirely covered with clouds that the wind, increased by the sonorousness of the atmosphere, was amassing at first in order to disperse them afterward. All was melancholy in this place, darkened by the heavy flight of ravens and that of great birds of prey, who hover silently in space. The sublimity of the spectacle, the gravity of the sky, the severity of this savage and wild nature grasped the soul, oppressed, overpowered it, in spite of the pure air which surrounded it. The great bell of the convent has suddenly rung; it is two o'clock, the dinner-hour. Najeska Ivanowna, drawn from her sad and profound meditations, thinks at last of dressing herself; she will have to do without assistance, for no bell is here to admit of her summoning her maid. How far is the luxury to which the aristocratic princess is habituated? Here, nothing but absolute necessities; all comfort, even all ease is ex-

cluded from this austere asylum; an iron bedstead, a stool, a table, and washstand; this is all that the chamber comprises in which Najeska Ivanowna must pass the days of her affliction.

Her toilet completed, she entered the cold and damp corridor which led to the refectory. This vast hall, of a truly lugubrious aspect, was already filled with nuns and pupils. In traversing the corridor which precedes the entrance to it, Madame de Mineleko encountered her dear babies, who, in their nurse's arms, were setting out for a short but hygienic promenade. Very much impressed by the surroundings in which they found themselves, these laughing and babbling women had suddenly become grave and taciturn. Desiring, at present, to follow as much as possible the rules of the community, they hardly dared to budge, even before their mistress whom, nevertheless, they loved well. The very involuntary or rather unconscious change of these women in their welcome, ordinarily so expansive and so cordial, violently hurt the tender and sensitive heart of the young woman. Like all those who suffer, she had become sensitive; the least thing wounded her to the quick. Great tears escaping from her eyes fell upon the plump cheeks of her children, whom she passionately embraced as though to compensate herself with those innocent beings for the abandonment of all.

The frugal repast was accomplished in the most profound silence; the noise of the forks and the glasses were the only ones which came to interrupt it. All was remembrance, compassion, for Najeska Ivanowna. What a difference, she was saying to herself, between this dinner and that of yesterday, seated at the table of her royal spouse, to the sound

of the music of the regiment of the guards! All, then, was joy and ostentation—and to-day?

The aspect of the meditative nuns in their woolen robes, wearing upon their breast the large cross of the crucifixion and at the left side the rosary, froze her soul.

Suddenly, the shrill sound of a hunting-horn is heard; the echoes round about reverberate it from space to space. This known signal, this loved signal, makes every eye raise hitherto kept obstinately lowered.

“It is the post-boy,” said the mother superior, near to whom Najeska Ivanowna had been placed. A furtive blush stained the pale wan face of the unhappy young woman.

“That which astonishes me,” pursued the abbess, “is that he comes at an hour which is unusual for him.” Then, turning to one of the sewing-nuns: “Sister Marie-Madeleine, go and ask the attendant sister what this may be.”

Najeska Ivanowna, all tremulous, was pitiful to behold.

“You do not eat, madam,” said the mother superior, seeing the princess’ plate remain full.

Some moments had flown when Sister Marie-Madeleine entered. Quite low, very low, she said some words in the mother superior’s ear. She, after having listened, turned to Madame de Mineleko.

“It is a message brought to you, madam, by a special courier, from the capital of Thessaly,” said she.

At this news Najeska Ivanowna saw something like a cloud pass before her eyes. She arose, tottering, feeling her knees bend under her, and painfully quitted the refectory.

A man, all covered still with the dust from his journey, was standing waiting in that part of the convent in which the opposite sex is still admitted. Raising his hand respectfully to his hat as if to execute a sort of military salute, he presented to Madame de Mineleko a large envelope sealed with the ministerial seal. Full of terror and anguish, Najeska Ivanowna, leaving the courier in the hall of the monastery, withdrew in order to be alone, entirely alone, to learn the contents of this letter so much desired. Who knows? perhaps it was a word of explanation from the king, a tender message from the husband of yesterday? Hardly had she cast her eyes upon this missive than she recognized with despair that the writing was not that of Charles Ferdinand. A vague presentiment compressed her heart like a vice, her hands were trembling so much that, incapable of controlling them, she had much difficulty in breaking the royal seal; armed with courage and impatience, however, she broke it. It was a communication from the ministry, "offering to Madame de Mineleko, in the king's name, the title of Princess of Rodrom, with the land, the chateau, and the revenues dependent on the title, a private property of the king, situated out of his dominion, on the express condition that she would never again set her feet upon the soil of Thessaly and to abandon forever her rights as the wife of the sovereign." And this was all. Not a line, not a word, not a sign from the king.

A terrible cry escaped from the breast of the unhappy princess; but immediately, pride and indignation predominating, the second which was frantically ascending to her throat, expired, strangled by the force of her will. Not a word of reproach,

not a murmur came to betray the tumult of her soul; a livid pallor spread over the weary features of the young woman alone revealed the combat which was taking place within her.

Desiring to distinctly emphasize all her contempt for this new insult, she contented herself by responding with a pencil which she had always about her. With a firm hand, that nothing more could agitate after this, she wrote on the reverse of the message:

“The king’s wife, not selling herself, refuses the infamous bargain; she will assert her rights, and will struggle to maintain them. This is the irrevocable response which she transmits to the Sovereign of Thessaly.”

And each word, in order to make them comprehend that she would remain inflexible in her resolution, she underscored three times.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.

When the messenger had departed, bearing the response of Madame de Mineleko, the dignity and the strength that had hitherto supported her, completely abandoned her. Quickly taking refuge in her miserable cell she could at last relieve her heart, so burdened with outrages and apprehensions, and permit the sobs which oppressed her to freely escape.

This nightmare which she was endeavoring to dispel; was it, then, a frightful reality? All was ended, then, between the king and her! Ended! and at the very hour wherein the marriage had been consummated.

Najeska Ivanowna wept a long time, her body thrown across the bed in an abandonment of heart-rending despair. Who had she now to aid and support her in this atrocious struggle which was about to commence? No one would come, to revive again by an affectionate word, her broken courage; not a friendly hand would endeavor to heal the wound of her heart! "Nothing more—nothing in the world but thou alone, oh my God! Forsake me not, I beseech thee!" A short, but fervent prayer which, from the soul of this poor martyr, ascended to heaven. Undoubtedly, the Lord was touched by it, for its efficacy was not long in coming. After having given free course to her tears Najeska Ivanowna felt her ideas gradually rearranging themselves in her poor head. Despite the delirium in

which she had lived since the previous day, an idea traversed her mind.

The Ambassador of Caucasus, in his furious jealousy against the king, had secretly put himself in communication with the advocates belonging to the parties in opposition to the government. She recollected that her husband had spoken especially of a Monsieur Klug, recognized chief of the opposition.

He was a man who by his personal valor and by his popularity in the country, inspired the ministry with a certain fear.

"It is," said Najeska Ivanowna to herself, "to Monsieur Klug that I must address myself."

A courier was to set out that very evening from Montaboro (the country in which the monastery of de la Misericorde was located); she would profit by it to write to the celebrated advocate of the residence.

Somewhat recomposed by this thought, the princess wrote the whole tragic truth to Monsieur Klug, strongly insisting that he should come to see her without losing a single instant. This letter completed, the young woman felt calmer. For greater precaution, she descended to the little village and delivered herself this precious missive in the post-office, not wishing at any price to intrust it to a third person or even to put it in the box of the convent where, morning and evening, a carrier came to take the correspondence of the nuns and the pupils.

This night a refreshing sleep descended at last upon the poor creature; she slept profoundly, and the next day, when the bell of the cloister was heard, she awoke, entirely illuminated by a dazzling sunbeam which, flooding her cell, was falling directly upon her pillow.

The morning passed slowly to the desires of the unhappy woman. Monsieur Klug had received at eight o'clock in the morning the letter of his illustrious client; he set out immediately by a diligence which brought him at five o'clock in the evening before the somber cloister of Sainte-Marie de la Misericorde.

When the advocate set his feet upon the ground before the massive doors of the gloomy edifice the sun still in all its strength was brilliantly lighting it and making all the front windows sparkle gayly with a thousand diverse fires. The aspect of this asylum of oblivion and of peace was less dismal, less sinister, than when Najeska Ivanowna, forty-eight hours before, had entered it for the first time in a dark and tempestuous night. The painted statues of the bleeding Christ which, at every twenty paces, were elevated in the rugged mountains, appeared themselves less sad, less frightful in this desert landscape which they decorated with their sublime and imposing figures; for in this Catholic country adjacent to Thessaly, as in Italy, everywhere may be seen on the exterior of villages and of houses, frescoes and paintings. Everywhere, also, painted statues in stucco of the Virgin and of our Lord.

Najeska Ivanowna introduced Monsieur Klug in her apartment. The interview which she had with him was long.

"The first step to take," said Monsieur Klug, "is, since the marriage has been kept secret from everybody, to publish the news in the official gazette, the ministerial organ of the king. They cannot refuse this insertion, since the king has himself signed the marriage register and that, moreover, there exists

a legal deed of gift made in your favor at the time of his union with you. I am going to address myself to the pastor and, rigorously, to the minister of worship, to obtain a copy of the church register; I will act in the same manner with the counselors who have drawn up the civil contract. Afterward, Madame la Princess, it will be necessary, by all means, to compel the government to retract the decree of banishment unjustly launched against you. Without some grave misdemeanor against the laws of a country, they cannot expel a subject from his own territory. Now, you, madam, by your morganatic marriage, have become not only the wife of the king, but also the first citizen of the kingdom. That which cannot exist for a foreigner, is with much stronger reason rejected for the wife of the king. Thus, I swear to you that whatsoever the old empress may say or do, justice will be fully and duly rendered to you; and that, despite the terrible wickedness, despite the supreme autocracy of this sovereign."

As soon as her defender had left her, Najeska Ivanowna felt herself delivered from the horrible weight under which she had succumbed since some days. The whole community remarked with pleasure, (for already she had known how to win many hearts), the happy change which was operating in her. With confidence, her appetite returned. She, who since her arrival had scarcely touched the food which had been presented to her, found the frugal fare of the cloister excellent, and this evening even did great honor to it.

Monsieur Klug had congratulated her upon the choice that she had made of this monastery as a retreat. "You are thus sheltered from the malignity of your enemies, who would be very happy to cast

infamous calumnies against you. I strongly advise you to remain here until further orders from me," he had said, on taking leave of her.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MARRIAGE ANNOUNCEMENT.

Midnight was striking from all the clocks of the residence city, when, all smoking, the post-horses of the celebrated advocate stopped before his door.

Madame Klug was anxiously waiting. Her husband had apprised her at the same time both of the stupefying news of the king's secret marriage, and the no less incredible news of the sudden banishment of the new wife. All these unexpected and strange facts had interested the advocate's wife to a great degree. This excellent woman, very practical and incapable of exciting herself for anything whatsoever, literally hadn't been able to think of any other thing during the fourteen hours that the absence of her husband had lasted.

Monsieur Klug, while supping, responded to the legitimate curiosity of his wife in relating everything to her.

"Apropos," said Madame Klug, "I met Walpurga de Heiligenthal this afternoon. Her family are more opposed than ever to her marriage with Conrad Haller; the poor little one is very sad and will surely become ill, for the two young people adore each other."

"Always romance! always complications in life!" said Monsieur Klug, sighing.

Monsieur Klug, not losing an instant, sent the

next morning a protest to the king and his ministers against the banishment of his client.

“They cannot banish the subjects of a country without making them acquainted with the motive of it,” said Monsieur Klug, “and Madame de Mineleko, by the circumstance even of her marriage with the reigning sovereign, has become the first citizen of the kingdom.”

This protest was addressed not only to the court and to the ministry, but also to the supreme tribunal, where a complaint was lodged.

The Empress of Hindostan had decided that she would take the King of Thessaly with her to pass some time in her empire. She was waiting to put her project in execution until the eight days of leave accorded to young Pattenpouff, on the occasion of his marriage, had expired.

Since the rupture of the king with the Princess de Mineleko, the old sovereign did not leave him any more than his shadow, always apprehending that, seized by some desire, he might return to his wife. The poor king was absolutely a slave to his mother-in-law.

The old empress was as usual with him when they handed to the king the demand of Najeska Ivanowna, to which Monsieur Klug had appended the official letter of the king, offering to Madame de Mineleko a title with lands and a pension as the price of her retirement and of her silence, and the response that she had made to it. On reading the proud and firm respond of the young woman, the king grew pale.

“What does that packet contain?” demanded the empress, imperiously.

Charles Ferdinand, knowing that it was useless to

endeavor to conceal it from his mother-in-law, extended the missive to her. The empress read it from one end to the other.

“To this,” said she, with her harsh, abrupt voice, “you must respond by a demand for a divorce.”

“But a divorce cannot be obtained without a cause!”

“This creature” (with what a contemptuous tone was this word pronounced!) “is a wretch; without that she would never have succeeded in circumventing you thus. Certainly, it will be easy in delving in her past, to find a thousand indiscretions which will be all-powerful reasons to annul this accursed marriage, and it is not doubtful that the tribunals will grant your cause.”

Poor Najeska Ivanowna! her only infamies, so vehemently reproached, consisted in that radiant beauty, that infinite charm, with which without even desiring it, she won all hearts.

The empress, while haranguing, while storming thus, was forgetting that the King of Thessaly, very near to his fiftieth year, was mature enough to be regarded as capable of knowing what he wished to do; he was no longer at that age in which inexperience and credulity may be deceived. Certainly they could never invoke his juvenility, his naivette, as extenuating circumstances.

“You must send for Haller immediately, and learn his opinion. It is he who will preside at the tribunal, who will pronounce the judgment; ah well! we must dispose him in favor of our just cause.”

By those few words the empress condemned herself; for if the cause was so just, why did she think to dispose the judge in her favor? The king did not respond. In his own mind he felt how ridiculous his im-

becility was making him culpable; he did not underestimate the false position in which he found himself, as much in respect to his own people as well as in the eyes of every serious, upright, and well-disposed person. His conscience, harassed by remorse, left him neither relaxation nor repose. Since the day of his marriage he could no longer sleep; haunted unceasingly by the thought of the unjust sufferings that his cowardice, said some, that the sacrifice of his happiness to his children's future, said others, had inflicted on an unhappy woman, anxious and uneasy, he was nothing but the shadow of himself. Until then, the rumor of his secret marriage had remained in a latent state; it might be hoped that time, that great master, would finish by smothering it; but now since Najeska Ivanowna had, very adroitly moreover, placed her interest in the hands of the chief of the opposition, they were no longer able to count upon discretion and silence.

An hour had scarcely elapsed after the first notification, before the king had a second.

This one came from the office of the official journal, and advised the king that Monsieur Klug had exacted that the announcement of the sovereign's marriage should be inserted in the columns of the public journal.

"It is the right of my client," he had said, "and I will maintain it against all opposition."

This time it was the commencement of a struggle whose fair side was not for the monarch.

At first the indignation of the empress knew no bounds.

"You are going to formally defend such a thing!" cried the mother-in-law.

The King of Thessaly sent for his private secretary.

“Let me speak to him,” said the empress, fearing that the king might not be positive enough in his orders.

The arrival of the secretary did not take place immediately. It was some distance from the room in which he labored to the apartments reserved for the empress, where the King of Thessaly was at present obliged to remain all day.

While waiting, the king, very much embarrassed at the grotesque role which he was obliged to play by the enraged mother-in-law, pretended to peruse a book, the empress, purple and breathless with rage, was walking to and fro like an animal inclosed in a cage, too narrow to contain it.

As the secretary appeared:

“Moll,” cried the empress, after having imparted to him that which had occurred, “you must repair immediately to the office of the official journal; there, you will say that the king forbids—do you understand me?—forbids this announcement to appear in any journals.”

The secretary, bowing to the earth before the sovereign, departed to execute promptly the royal order.

Hardly was he at the door before the empress, reconsidering, recalled him:

“Apropos, Monsieur Moll, the king wishes to speak to the president of the supreme tribunal.”

The king, stupefied, endeavored to make a gesture of denial; but the empress did not appear to pay any attention to it.

“At what hour does his majesty desire to see the

president of the court?" demanded Monsieur Moll, turning to the king.

"But at—at——" stammered the king.

"At four o'clock this afternoon, Monsieur Moll," interrupted the old sovereign.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE JUDGE'S ANGUISH.

The reader has, like ourselves, followed the hopeless love of Conrad Haller and Walpurga de Heiligenthal.

Madame Haller, who adored her son, could no longer support the sight of his chagrin. We know how much, even before the debut of this love, she was devoured with ambition and had madly wished that the king would ennoble her family. Now, that this ennobling had become a condition *sine qua non* of her son's marriage with Mademoiselle de Heiligenthal, she pushed to frenzy the desire which she had to obtain that honor.

She was plunged more than ever in this disposition of mind, when the secretary of the palace was announced.

It must not be forgotten that the king's marriage had been kept secret, that a very small number of persons had any knowledge of it. Monsieur Haller knew that Monsieur Klug had just addressed his protest to the supreme tribunal, but as he had not yet returned since morning, his wife (to whom, moreover, he did not relate everything) was still ignorant of the event.

Hardly had the messenger of the king departed before the carriage bringing back Monsieur Haller stopped before his door. Madame Haller, very much pre-occupied with the message left by the secretary, ran to meet her husband. What did they want of

him? Had they sent for him to speak to him at last about the title of nobility so much desired?

“My friend, thou must hasten, for the king expects thee at four o’clock precisely, at a private audience.”

Monsieur Haller, instead of appearing astonished, only said, smiling:

“Ah! the king has sent for me?”

“Why this enigmatical smile?”

“But what then? Tell me, then.”

“Oh, nothing!—nothing,” said Monsieur Haller, reticently, hastily seating himself at the table.

Madame Haller always dismissed the domestic during this luncheon. All being prepared upon the table, she preferred to serve her husband with her own chubby, plump hands; alone with him, they could converse more freely. This day, very much puzzled, she was determined to do everything in order to learn what the president could be concealing from her.

“Come! tell me all that thou thinkest. Thou knowest that I am discreet?” said she, while like a practical woman she put upon Monsieur Haller’s plate one of the morsels that he preferred. Knowing that after all, the secret, which he desired to keep, would soon be known to everybody, Monsieur Haller related to his wife the protest that Monsieur Klug had entered in the name of Madame de Mineleko.

Madame Haller made such a gesture of stupefaction and astonishment that she almost upset her chair.

“What dost thou tell me, my friend? But all this does not explain why the king wishes to speak this very day to thee. Thou art not an advocate.”

“No, but I will be ever so little his judge.” And Monsieur Haller, who for some years had suffered from the humiliations that his family had received at court, had in his voice an intonation of pride so pronounced that it did not escape his wife.

During some minutes both of them remained buried in their thoughts. Evidently, if the king had sent for Haller, it was to endeavor to dispose him in his favor. There was, perhaps, something to be made from this situation. This was the thought that came to Madame Haller. Her thoughts immediately reverted to her son, her handsome, her dear Conrad, now all pale, all disfigured by vexation; her Conrad who, throwing his weary head passionately on his mother’s lap, had said to her, this very morning, that he would end his life if he could not obtain the hand of his well-beloved Walpurga!

Madame Haller knew so well the immense loyalty and unalterable integrity of her husband that she had a real chill and fever through her whole body in thinking upon the ideas which were agitating her at this moment.

To say to Haller:

“Promise the king to pronounce a judgment in his favor if he will grant thee thy nobility and that of thy family,” had been such an outrage to his long life of honor and integrity, that she would not have attempted it for anything in the world.

With all the subtlety which belongs to a woman, not having the appearance of attaching any importance to this appeal of the king, she uttered a profound sigh.

“What is the matter, my dear?” demanded Haller, who adored his wife and son.

“I am completely overcome by Conrad’s condition.”

“Poor boy! What a ridiculous prejudice separates him from his happiness.”

“Ridiculous, indeed. And to think that one can do nothing, absolutely nothing! unless in the end, Walpurga’s family yields, for as to the ennobling, it is no longer to be counted upon.”

Haller, with all the sincerity of his frank nature, expressed in the most simple manner and without any reservation, correctly the idea that his wife wished to inculcate in him.

“What is so horrible,” pursued Madame Haller, “is that Doctor Schlotz says that the anæmia which commenced to declare itself scarcely three months ago, grows frightfully worse; all the efforts of the physician remaining impotent to arrest it. Alas! to have but one son—an only son—and to see him thus delivered up to certain death! And Madame Haller, always much affected at the thought of losing her Conrad, purposely exaggerating his malady, wept bitterly.

“Come! come, my dear!” Haller endeavored to speak consolingly, “do not abandon thyself to despair! Conrad is young; if the Heiligenthal family remain inexorable, ah well! we will force him to travel, and he will forget.”

“Oh! as for that, never! thou knowest not Conrad as I, his mother, know him. His is a profound nature, he will never forget. His heart is given, he will die, if need be, but he will never take it back.”

“At his age, my dear, the heart is recalled as easily as it is given!”

“Never! never! Ah! if thou hadst seen him, this

very morning! He was whiter than a sheet; the blood seemed to have left even his lips. Where, then, are thy eyes, if thou hast not remarked this frightful change My God! I see it, this death, which slowly but surely will take our Conrad from us, if we cannot soon give him the young girl whom he loves so much. My friend, thou art intelligent, thou art strong in thy experience and in thy services; thou must succeed in obtaining the consent of the Heiligenthal family."

"But thou knowest well that I have done everything! At present there is nothing to hope."

"I know it, I know it well! but, however, we must try again. Oh! if thou couldst clearly perceive what danger hovers over our son!"

Haller had no need that his wife should make him observe all those things. He had, with great anguish, remarked each phase of the profound and incurable melancholy of Conrad; he was very uneasy about it; sleep and appetite had left him at the same time that cheerfulness had disappeared from the heart of his well-beloved child.

"On leaving the palace I will go and find Schlotz," said he, "and I will speak to him very seriously of the voyage that I have in contemplation for Conrad."

On saying this, the judge of the supreme tribunal arose from the table, embraced his wife, and retired in his office, where diverse urgent matters demanded his attention. While endeavoring to fix his thoughts upon the important affairs intrusted to his sagacity, Monsieur Haller could not detach from all that which he did the pale and sad vision of Conrad, of this only son so superiorly beautiful, the glory, and, before his deadly chagrin, the joy of the house.

My God! if his wife spoke the truth! If he was to lose this child!

A hundred times an hour this terrible thought returned to him, and while thinking of the Heilighenthals, the cause of so much evil, he was furiously irritated against these people who should have thanked Providence for finding such a match for their daughter; for what other suitor would not have left her after her brother's disgrace? while Walpurga's imperious mother, in her stupid pride had, since this event, become only more haughty and more bitter.

CHAPTER XLII.

A RAY OF HOPE.

The president was exact. Punctually at four o'clock he presented himself before the Empress of Hindostan and the King of Thessaly.

"Your majesty has sent for me. In what can I be of service to you?"

While pronouncing these words the president of the supreme tribunal bowed profoundly before their majesties; the interview commenced. It was the old empress who, according to her custom, spoke for her son-in-law.

"Monsieur le President; you have doubtless received this very day, from Monsieur Klug, the protest of the Princess of Mineleko against her banishment from Thessalian territory."

"Indeed, your majesty, and, if it is permitted me, I must also observe to your majesty that the client of Monsieur Klug appears to me to have just cause for her complaint, especially if her marriage with his majesty the king, my sovereign master, has been legally accomplished. Now, if my information is correct, nothing is more certain."

"Would it be so, even though there was a means of finding a way which would interpret a decision contrary to the court?" demanded the empress.

"I regret to be obliged to say to your majesty that even at the risk of attracting the disfavor of my sovereign master, the court can decide nothing only according to positive facts; the laws of the country are explicit. Every marriage is recognized as legal

and legitimate when the formalities exacted by the code have been complied with. Jurisprudence only admits of divorce in very grave and very rare circumstances, that, as lawyers, we must scrupulously inquire into, without being permitted just to personally estimate them."

"And, outside of adultery, what are those circumstances?"

"For example, if one of the contracting parties had concealed some legal impediments, or had married with irregular papers. But, such is not the case, since one of the parties is the king, who, as the head of his kingdom, must be acquainted with the laws of his country and submit to them, and the other party, a princess, ex-ambadress, whose eminent family and antecedents are so well known."

"In any case, we demand that the court adjourns its decision upon the question of expulsion, and we count that it will give us sufficient time to make the researches necessary to the winning of our cause."

After these words the king and the empress, saluting Monsieur Haller, gave him to understand that the audience was terminated.

Scarcely had the chief of the supreme tribunal gone out than the empress, fastening her angry eyes upon her son-in-law, said:

"Ah! well! are you caught fast enough? My God! my God! in what a labyrinth you have cast yourself! How will you extricate yourself? I am curious to know," the arrogant old woman scornfully said, who, author of the evil, was now constituting herself a judge.

The poor king, not departing from the passive role which he had imposed on himself, preserved a resigned silence.

The empress, with a superb disdain, shrugged her shoulders:

“Come! the only thing which remains to me is to seek how I may be able to extricate you from this ugly business. Leave me alone an instant. It is the hour for the audience that I give to my minister; I must compose myself.”

When Lord Selfish, who had accompanied her majesty on this journey entered, he found her so pre-occupied that the old and intimate servant ventured to ask her the cause of it. The empress, so strict in all that which touched on the respect due to her rank, did not think, however, to be offended at this familiarity, which was excusable, moreover, by long years of entire devotion. She hesitated, at first, to respond to him; then, knowing that after all he was her best adviser, she reconsidered and related to him the little hope which remained to her since her interview with the judge of the supreme court.

“Nevertheless, your majesty, I catch a glimpse of a slight glimmer of hope, in that which you have been so kind as to confide to me.”

“In what? Speak—speak quickly! It is always reserved for you, then, to revive my drooping courage.”

“Has not the judge said that the marriage became illegal if one of the contracting parties had concealed some impediments provided for by law, or if they married with irregular papers?”

“Yes, but what are you coming at. For my part, I do not see there a circumstance to give occasion to hope.”

“But, bless me! it is not so rare a thing to find illegalities in actions. A woman born upon the bor-

ders of the Black Sea might well have something which may not be legal in her papers, then it is so far, the Black Sea! and so uncivilized! How many great Russian lords have had daughters without having legitimate wives.

“But I fear that is not our case.”

“I also, but one can always look. Your majesty has a man at your court, Sir Maurice Stephan, who, after numerous sojourns in Caucasus, knows a great many eminent personages and also the usages and customs of the country. Why not send him for intelligence? Has not your majesty told me that by bringing a pressure to bear upon the supreme tribunal, one might gain time by adjourning the decision upon the question of banishment? Then, I would observe to your majesty that there is another string to your bow. Your majesty has just mentioned the president of the tribunal. One cannot foresee to what an extent the promise of a decoration or of a title might influence his manner of seeing, and incline his decision on the side very naturally desired by your majesty, and so desirable from all points of view. As soon as I leave your majesty I will gain all the information I can about Monsieur Hal-ler and the other judges, called, like him, to preside at the coming trial.”

“So be it. You are always such an excellent counselor, my dear Selfish, that I give you full power to bring to a happy issue this unfortunate affair. Besides, nothing will fetter your proceedings, for I shall take the king to Hindostan as soon as I shall be able. Leave me alone now; I must collect my confused ideas.” And the minister of Hindostan, bowing to the ground, left his sovereign.

The audience with his sovereign terminated, Lord

Selfish reflected about that which was to be done. After some efforts of reflection he said to himself that in order to arrive at the most minute information it is always to the ladies that one must address one's self. He repaired, then, straight to the only one with whom he was at all acquainted, to the grand-mistress, the crabbed Comtesse de Langweilig.

Opportunity favored him. It was precisely the "day" of that first lady of the palace. A circle of ladies, with visages as faded as their garments, seated in a row like onions, surrounded the feminine dictator of the residence. Madame de Langweilig was dressed in a black silk gown of an ancient cut, which had certainly figured in her trousseau and which must have been constantly enlarged according as the lady increased in amplitude. She wore as a brooch a monumental cameo representing the "Three Graces," from whence a long watch-chain depended. It did not depend on her that all the pretty women of the residence and elsewhere were not hung, without that it had been labor quickly done! She was dictating according to her custom. Ah! bless me! when "she" had spoken, no divergence of opinion could arise; that would spoil all.

When Lord Selfish entered the house of Madame de Langweilig, there was suddenly a glacial silence. They had spoken precisely words more or less ambiguous about the king's marriage with Madame de Mineleko and Madame de Langweilig had led them to infer that she knew much more than she liked to say about that "adventuress." But, on the arrival of the empress' minister she deemed it prudent to change the subject of conversation.

Lord Selfish was for an instant positively afraid of catching himself a portion of the venom which was

circulating, there was so much of it in all these mouths. If all the evil that they said of the absent ladies had been true, Thessaly had been worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. In haste and considerably fatigued by all these extremely aristocratic but overpowering ladies, to abridge his visit he went straight to his object. Scarcely had he mentioned the name of Haller than Madame de Langweilig and her neighbors had nothing more urgent to do than to relate to him the silly but obstinate love affair of Walpurga de Heiligenthal with the president's son. Notwithstanding the disgrace of Walpurga's brother, we know that the Heiligenthals none the less declared that they would never consent that their daughter should marry a commoner.

"And the king," triumphantly exclaimed Madame de Langweilig, "has too much dignity to ever be willing to ennoble President Haller, son of a petty merchant married to the daughter of the court pharmacist!"

And this certitude delighted Madame de Langweilig, who thought with a sigh of her two faded flowers, so sadly forsaken, withering upon their stems.

Lord Astucio Selfish had learned enough. Taking leave of the son of feminine onions he quickly returned to the palace and requested another audience with her majesty, in order to impart to her his discovery of the vulnerable point in the president.

"Ah! Selfish! brave—brave Selfish! how prompt and expeditious you are! Quick, order Haller to appear again before me!"

Lord Selfish had a good deal of trouble to persuade her majesty that it would not be diplomatic to act so hastily. Having known, however, since a long

time, how it was necessary to proceed to manage this tyrannical and despotic character, he succeeded in making her have patience. After several days only the empress sent for the president. The interview was short but decisive. The empress said distinctly to Monsieur Haller "that she did not wish to influence him at all, but that if he should find that there was occasion to annul the marriage, and if the judgment of the court was such, she would pledge her word of honor that the king would elevate him to the nobility for his exceptionable services. I have learned," said the sovereign, with a gracious smile, "that if this is realized, all the obstacles to a certain thing which you have much at heart will be removed."

Haller, almost offended at the beginning of the interview, left the empress very solicitous. He hardly dared to say to his wife and son that it was in his power to give them the supreme happiness which would restore them to life. But when he observed the countenance of Madame Haller changed by incessant grief; when he saw Conrad's hand so pale, and so emaciated, that it appeared transparent under the rosy beams of the lamp in the evening, when he was distractedly turning the leaves of some pamphlet, he felt himself almost criminal, having the power to transform the despair of these two beings, who were so dear to him, into a delirium of happiness, he hesitated to speak. Ah! it is this terrible interior pincers which rends many skillfully arranged plots, conscience was still alive in him although vacillating. Would he really dare to decide, by an indestructible decree, against the life of a poor woman so terribly outraged and so unjustly punished?

But, alas! the struggle between his conscience and the love of his family, perhaps even also, in the end, his personal ambition, was too unequal to last long. More and more nobility, virtue, and magnanimity crumble in him. He wished to believe himself still the honest magistrate, when he was already nothing more than the weak husband and father, trembling before the menaced life of his son. Vanquished in the end, he relates to his family his interview with the empress. He tells them that he will not yield, and while saying so, he feels that he lies, he realizes nothing but the passionate cry that issued from the lips of his only son and which affected and struck him like the blade of a poniard plunged in the depths of his heart.

“My father! my father! I shall be happy then!”

And the son falls in the arms of his mother who weeps with joy. And they summon the father, they implore him, they tell him that Najeska Ivanowna has been an unworthy woman, that it was she who, betrothed to Walpurga's brother, had cowardly abandoned him and had thus created all the misfortunes of that unfortunate creature, because a richer and more illustrious suitor had presented himself. In fervent terms they represented to him in what manner she must have circumvented, bewitched, and enticed the poor feeble king, with the object of creating desires which she had always known to refuse to gratify, until in the end he had yielded and secretly married her. They are here, like two advocates of accusation, crushing the prisoner under the weight of their eloquence, a fiery and impetuous eloquence, proceeding from the terrible passions which agitate them. Who, better than they, can vilify and revile her, she without whose

mutilated body they would lack the stepping-stone which was to elevate them to happiness. They are so persuasive that they almost lead the judge to share their convictions.

When they have finished, the fate of Najeska Ivanowna is forever decided.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE DUEL.

While these frightful misfortunes were accumulating upon the unfortunate Najeska Ivanowna, events no less tragical were embracing in their iron circle the two men who had so much and so fatally loved her.

One evening, when Waldemar de Heiligenthal had returned home at a late hour, his servant informed him that since an hour already two gentleman had awaited him. At this apparently very simple news, the count, however, became very pale. Despite himself, an emotion, similar to that which one experiences in the great crises of life, startled him greatly. He knew that since two days the Prince de Mineleko had achieved his distant mission with which his government had purposely charged him, in order to remove him from Thessaly during the first ebullitions of the rage which after the loss of his suit was boiling hot and dangerous within him. These gentlemen were certainly sent by him. Feeling his throat contract and apprehending weakness at a moment in which energy would be most essential to him, he went to a buffet and swallowed at one gulp a large glass of Spanish wine.

Arrived in the little study in which the visitors had been introduced, he found himself with Prince Gariatinski and another secretary of the Caucasian Embassy, who were both to change their post, one to rejoin Prince de Mineleko, who was

about to depart as Ambassador to Bosnia, the other to go as attache to the Embassy at Paris. Prince Gariatinski very courteously handed him a note sealed with the arms of the Prince de Mineleko.

This is what he read:

“Waldemar de Heiligenthal, you have acted like a spy and a coward. Although unworthy of crossing swords with a Prince of Mineleko, who counts no less than two Czars of Caucasus among his ancestors, I am so eager for vengeance, I have such a thirst for your blood, that I declare to you that if you refuse to give me satisfaction in meeting me beyond the frontiers of Thessaly, a country to which access is forbidden me, I will come even there to seek you, to kill you. I would have come already months ago if I had been able.

“BORIS MICHAILOWITCH,

“Prince de Mineleko.”

One may judge of the fury of Walpurga's brother. If it had not been for the great forbearance of the Prince de Mineleko's two friends a regrettable incident had certainly taken place. But thanks to their tact and moderation, all passed with propriety.

“I shall await at the frontier of Thessaly him who has dared to insult me thus, and I will give him satisfaction,” said the Count de Heiligenthal. “Moreover, I will send to you, my friends; they will settle with you about all the details.”

Two days after, early in the morning, a small number of men were approaching in silence a glade in the forest of I——, situated outside of the Thessalian territory. By their correct and severe bearing, by their mysterious and serious deportment, one might easily comprehend that a capital event was preparing.

The seconds surveyed the ground attentively, examined minutely and for the last time the weapons of the two adversaries, carefully measured the distances from whence they were to fire, then the oldest, after having placed the enemies back to back, struck the three regulating blows. The duel did not last long; at the given signal the Prince de Mineleko advanced.

At the cry "Fire!" uttered by Gariatinski, a double detonation was heard, a light bluish smoke ascended like a spire in the air, and a man whose hands beat the empty air fell heavily at the feet of his adversary. It was Boris Michailowitch. Waldemar's ball had pierced his body. At first his friends believed him dead, but after having received the first cares of the physician who assisted at the combat he painfully opened his eyes.

"I am lost!" he muttered. Already he could scarcely speak.

Heiligenthal, very pale, his lips compressed, was regarding the blood which was copiously flowing. He was, in his emotion, almost as pale, as weak, as he whom he had just wounded unto death.

Boris Mineleko did not immediately succumb, notwithstanding the hemorrhages and the other accidents which supervened to aggravate his situation. The physician had declared that he would not live through the night, but in the morning he was breathing still, and found himself, he believed, a little better. He could now take some hours of repose. During the whole night he had not ceased to demand the presence of Heiligenthal, who could alone tell him something which he desired to know before departing this life. He was so vehement in his demand that Heiligenthal, very much affected

by this death of which he was the cause, promised not to depart before having satisfied the prince's desire.

Toward evening, as Waldemar was walking his chamber, Gariatinski came to seek him.

"I pray you," said he, "to follow me without losing a minute. He is very ill; he requests to see you instantly. Come, his moments are numbered, he has no more than a few hours to live."

Heilighenthal followed Prince Gariatinski through the long dull corridors of the hotel, deserted at this season of the year.

Arrived before the door of a chamber Gariatinski softly knocked.

"Enter," said a voice from the interior.

It was that of the nurse who was watching Boris Michailowitch. Gariatinski and Heilighenthal silently entered.

They suddenly found themselves in an apartment which appeared to them, who had left the broad daylight, completely obscure. But their eyes gradually habituated themselves to this penumbra, and Heilighenthal soon easily distinguished all the objects which surrounded him.

In an alcove, upon a low, narrow bed, the body of a man was extended which he would have taken for that of an unknown person, so much was he changed, if he had not known that he was really in the presence of Boris Michailowitch.

What had become of the visage full of strength and of savage energy? Now, the hollow and emaciated cheeks, the discolored skin stretched over the projecting cheek-bones, the eyes deeply sunken in their orbits, rendered this sad and gloomy figure almost unrecognizable.

Strongly impressed by this ruin which was his work, Heiligenthal endeavored to conceal the emotion which, despite himself, was convulsing his whole being.

“You have asked for me, prince?” said he, in a stifled voice, while approaching the bed on which the dying man was lying.

Then a strange, weak voice, which he did not recognize, responded to him, in a hoarse rattle:

“Yes, I desire to converse with you while—while strength yet remains to me.”

With his bloodless hand he made a gesture. Gariatinski and the nurse, understanding him, retired. When the two men were alone the voice of the dying man resumed:

“I desire—I desire to converse with you of a certain night in May of the year 188—, on the morrow of which the corpse of my poor Kassan was found strangled in my garden. You know that the police have never been able to discover the criminal nor to raise the least corner of the veil which enshrouds this mystery. You, however, perhaps, may be able to explain it.”

And the eyes of the dying man fastened themselves upon Heiligenthal as if he wished to pierce him through and through.

“That night it seemed to me that I had a terrible dream. A man had introduced himself in the apartment of the Princess de Mineleko. You see that my moments are numbered. It is a dying man who prays you to confess all to him as to a confessor.”

A terrible cough shook the unfortunate man whom these few words had fatigued; his voice ceased, a slight red foam ascended to the corner of his lips, then the blood issuing in floods inundated the hand-

kerchief that Boris Michailowitch had hastily carried to his mouth. Heiligenthal shuddered in all his being. How quickly the life of a man is taken!

At the all-powerful voice of his conscience, completely tortured by remorse, at the sincere cry of his repentant soul, the young man felt for the first time his vile and egotistical instincts dissolve.

Everybody was acquainted with the king's marriage with Najeska Ivanowna; it was not then of the wife of the Prince de Mineleko, but only of her who had been so, that Heiligenthal would have to speak.

Boris Michailowitch, summoning up all his failing strength, continued:

"I am convinced now that it was you, and not the king, who penetrated to my—to the apartment of Madame de Mineleko, and that which I then believed to be a dream was a reality."

Heiligenthal was silent. Had he desired to speak he had not been able, so strong and insurmountable was the emotion which compressed his throat.

"You must recollect how oppressive the evening of that day was. During the afternoon I had had a terrible neuralgia. The physician had rubbed me vigorously with a chloroform mixture. Was the dose too powerful? I do not know. I have always been a prey to a singular nervous agitation. Although very strongly under the influence of the soporific, it was impossible for me to take a moment's repose. Tortured, palpitating as I was with the agony of the most excessive jealousy, my entire thought was concentrated upon the love that the king was openly evincing for my young wife, and aside from this fixed idea my mind was incapable of thinking.

“The heat was intense, the rarefied air was insufficient for my oppressed lungs. Some heavy black clouds were amassing in the sky which was becoming more and more threatening. Under this leaden atmosphere a lethargic sleep gradually invaded me. Not yet knowing whether I was awake or asleep, I believed however, that I heard near me a dull and persistent noise. Was it real or did it belong to the dream that I had, and from which it snatched me?

“To this noise a deep sigh succeeded, then a species of a rattle. I could not budge. My legs, as though paralyzed, could no longer move; my body no longer obeyed my will, but nevertheless I was not insensible to physical pain, for I felt the neuralgia still torturing me. Notwithstanding the heaviness of my limbs, I believed that death was transporting me to unknown spheres, that I was flying in space. My whole being seemed vibrating with a peculiar electricity. When, by an extraordinary effort, I succeeded in opening my eyes, I had no idea of the objects upon which they rested. All that which remained living within me belonged only to this surprising spiritual life which possessed me. A cold sweat like that of the greatest terror was breaking out on my forehead; my heart was beating to bursting, as though I was afraid. And the dull, sharp noise was still persisting. Becoming more and more awake, I perceived that this noise, that I believed to be that of my heart, belonged rather to another being who seemed to be dragging himself painfully near me. I thought I heard a voice which called me—that of the princess. I made a new effort to rise; useless effort; an immense weight nailed me

to my place. Nevertheless in the end, seized with a furious rage, I succeeded in it. By an automatic movement, seizing a candle, I opened the door of my chamber. At the same moment a body, that of a man, was hastily disappearing by the window at the extremity of the passage which opened upon the garden. I advanced as rapidly as the vertigo which had not yet left me permitted, but arrived at the window at the moment where, raising my light, I was going perhaps to perceive the fugitive and recognize him, the wind rushing in the corridor, plunged me in profound obscurity. 'It is the king!' I said to myself; 'it is the king!' Completely awake, I wished to go to my wife's chamber. But a sudden weariness seizing me, I was obliged gropingly to regain my apartment, where I only had time to fall an inert mass upon my bed. The next morning my faithful Vassili came to inform me of the murder of his brother. I comprehended all; I had not only dreamed then, there was reality, terrible reality, in this dream. And now, tell me, Waldemar de Heiligenthal, as if you were in the presence of God, you or my wife, which of you, has been the murderer of Kassan? for one of you or both of you together must have killed him."

This long recital had completely exhausted Minleko. It had been necessary for him to make the most unheard of efforts of an iron will to arrive at the end, and interminable halts, occasioned by weakness or paroxysms of coughing, had often interrupted him. Heiligenthal had listened in absolute silence.

For some moments Boris Michailowitch had ceased to speak, and Waldemar still hesitated to respond to the questions that the interrogating

eyes of the invalid put to him. An interior combat was furiously fought in his soul, his pallor became deadly. Should he let the ex-ambassador die without learning this terrible secret? At last, making a violent effort:

“Prince,” said he, “I must tell you the truth; I will tell you the whole truth. This man, who had introduced himself that night in your wife’s apartment, you have divined him, it was I!”

A paroxysm of the old passion lulled to sleep seemed to vibrate again the almost extinguished pupils of the dying man. Like a tiger wounded by the hunter’s arrow, he endeavored, in spite of death, which was already encompassing him with its impenetrable wings, to arise again to overthrow his enemy; his strength abandoned him.

“That miserable woman has betrayed me then! She was your mistress!”

“Stop! do not blaspheme!” cried Heiligenthal, moved by the majesty of the duty which he had to fulfill. There was but one criminal, but one coward. That criminal, that coward, is here before you Prince of Mineleko, him whom you perceived, the murderer of Kassan. It was I, and upon the Saviour’s cross, upon my head, I swear it to you, she is innocent! Ah! do not look at me with such horror. Yes, I have been vile, criminal, but if you knew to what an extent I have repented, although having escaped the law, even you would feel pity. Ah! let me speak, and do not interrupt me.

“Your wife obstinately refused to receive me alone, but desperate with passion I was determined whatsoever might happen to possess her. No matter at what price, she was necessary to me. But she whose love had been so great when we were

affianced, was then a slave to her sworn faith, and resolute to remain forever faithful to the husband whose name she was so worthily bearing.

“Several times I had passionately requested her to grant me a rendezvous, but inexorable, she had rejected my prayers. Not knowing how to subdue the ardor of my desires, nor to imitate the example of that noble and pure creature, I did not hesitate to employ the only means which remained to me; that which I have not been able to obtain by persuasion I will obtain by force and subterfuge, I said to myself. I sounded Glascha. With some money I made quick work of her pretended scruples. Toward the middle of that terrible night she admitted me to the garden by the little priest’s door which you know of. With some wax she had taken the impression of the key which remained during the day in that entrance, and had a similar one made, so that I might make use of it to depart. All were asleep in the palace of the embassy. Glascha and I, both equally vile, advanced in silence, retaining our breath, and, like venomous beasts, crawling in darkness. For a moment I almost wished to retire, but Glascha had informed me that you had taken a potion in order to sleep, and assured me that you would hear nothing. Without shoes on our feet in order to avoid the slightest noise, we arrived at the dressing-room of the princess. This dressing-room was only rarely locked with a key; you traversed it in order to enter your wife’s apartment, this girl had told me. ‘Remain here, crouched behind this tall Pysche,’ whispered she to me. I obeyed, and she left me. Some instants after I heard steps which were approaching; it was the princess, who came to make her toilet for the night. Her hair,

unconfined, was falling over her pearly shoulders, the lace dressing-gown which enveloped her permitted you to see the curves of her beautiful waxen body. She was divinely beautiful, desperately tempting. Still immovable there where Glascha had placed me, she could not at first perceive me. Suddenly, I appeared to her. Frightened at first, she quickly recovered herself, and gave proof of great presence of mind. She did not utter a cry—not the semblance of one. She arose supple and nervous like a panther ready to spring upon its prey. Her indignation was so terrible that I shivered to the marrow of my bones. Approaching me, pale, terrible, in her wrath:

“I command you to depart!”—hissed she. “I chase you like a dog as you are, worse than that, like a varlet!” She was so resolved, so quick, and such a fire flashed from her dilated pupils, that she seemed to transform into a flaming sword the infamy of my actions, and to imprint them there upon my brow like an indelible mark. I endeavored to move her, but she wailed always the same words: “Coward! Wretch! Depart! Begone!” She was so beautified in her chaste wrath, that my desires no longer knew any limits; forgetting all, I seized her in my eager arms. Who knows how far the insanity of my passion would have pushed me, but, bounding backward like a crouching she-wolf, collecting herself in order to spring upon her prey, she rushed toward the chimney. A Russian cutlass was lying there; she seized it, and, with her frail nervous hand she plunged it violently into me in the first place which presented itself to her blows. I was struck in the shoulder. Although the wound was only a scratch, the pain which I felt drew a cry from me, and the

blood flowed. At the same time Najeska Ivanowna, profiting by my weakness, violently pushed me toward the door, opened it, and threw me out. Then, as I heard her violently push the bolts, the two hands of a man who suddenly sprang before me in the total obscurity of the passage seized me. Dismayed, not rendering an account of that which I was doing nor with whom I had to deal, so great was my nervous excitement, with superhuman strength, in order to prevent him from crying, I grasped the man by the throat. With my hands, become two pincers, I squeezed it, I squeezed it with all my strength! Not a sigh, not a rattle could proceed from his mouth. But, even in the obscurity, I saw the glistening of two round terrified, frightened eyes, which were projecting more and more from their sockets as my pressure was sinking deeper and deeper. I have never felt a sensation so bestial. His body stirred, writhed under the heat of mine. Then, suddenly, nothing more—nothing! he stirred no more. I had a terrible moment of terror, there in that gloomy passage, alone with that corpse. It was impossible for me to leave it before the princess' door. The only luminous point was the light from the window at the end of the corridor. It was necessary to drag the body there and to hastily throw it not, in order that they might believe it an accident or a suicide; but despite the over-excitement which increased my strength tenfold, my arms almost broke under the burden of that body.

“By dint of superhuman efforts, I succeeded, however, in arriving at the window. My head and my heart were in such an effervescence that the instinct of the beast alone guided me. Suddenly, I

heard a movement in the chamber which I knew to be yours. Terrified, dismayed, excited, realizing that there was not a moment to lose, I threw the corpse outside. The horrible and dull sound of its heavy fall gave me the most frightful chill that I have ever experienced! But, I had no time to define my sensation, for the door of your chamber opened. Electrified by the danger that I was incurring, I precipitated myself after it. That was a second of terrible agony in which I was revolving in space; but by a miracle of heaven, notwithstanding the height of the window and thanks to the turf on which I fell, I was not injured, not even a sprain!

“You approached the window by which I had just disappeared, I saw you, but you did not see me. Your staring eyes were looking into space. You say yourself a gust of wind extinguished your light. That was my salvation. I profited by that instant of obscurity to escape, running with prodigious rapidity. Making use of the key that the maid had given me, I went out of the garden. All the chances favored me that evening, for, hardly had I arrived, exhausted, at home, than a storm of rain and hail burst forth which literally inundated the earth. This storm would surely efface the imprint of my footsteps in your garden.

“During the first days which followed, not knowing how much the princess knew about that which had happened, I trembled lest she might speak, if not of the murder, at least of my nocturnal visit. What courage was necessary for me to join the royal picnic the day afterward, you would not be able to believe; and if I repaired thither, it was because I had no other means of approaching and sounding the princess upon how much she knew of

the assassin, and if she was ignorant that it was I. I was not long in comprehending that, having heard nothing, only doubtless, a smothered noise in the corridor, terrified she had remained shut up, believing me caught by her husband and fearing to aggravate the situation by showing herself; thus, knowing nothing positive, she had, like everybody, suspected you—you, rather than I.

“If, on the day of the picnic, I attracted your attention to the officiousness of the king with the ambassadress, it was under the impulse of a ferocious jealousy, but there was also mingled with it a diabolical calculation; the hope of removing from you all idea that I was paying attention to Madame de Mineleko, and to prevent your suspicions on the subject of the nocturnal visitor falling upon me.

“The princess had driven me out like a dog. I said to myself that it was because she loved the king. If she repulsed me thus, she should not give herself to another, and I would prevent it at any price! It was in this state of mind, in this ebullition of furious jealousy, that I announced to you the assignation in the Parc-aux-Cerfs.

“You see, I take my heart from my breast and lay it there, bare; before you, in all its hideousness! Ah! when one is not a hardened, obdurate criminal by profession, no chastisement of the law is equal to the secret torture which gnaws you. Even the powerful pen of Shakespeare, depicting the delirium of Macbeth after the murder of Banquo does not attain to the intensity of the overwhelming sensations alternately of terror and of hope, which make the chills constantly run over you, even to the roots of your hair! One is damned, damned forever! No

longer a single instant of peace; no longer an hour of sleep! Always the cold sweat of terror penetrating even to your entrails. At the lightest step which treads the soil, at the least sound of the bell, one would like to conceal one's self, to disappear. Before the most candid, the most indifferent regard, one trembles. When a door rattles, when a mouth opens to speak, one has a shock. Ah! to escape from this hideous remorse, one would like to flee to stupefy one's self! But though one may go to the uttermost parts of the earth, it follows you everywhere, because it is a part of yourself! And one continues to live, with this slender poniard plunged in his wound, and keeping the wound always bleeding. One feels that reason will at last escape, in such a collapse of the mental equilibrium. Half-mad, one contemplates suicide; but the honor of disappearing in the tomb pursued by your crime restrains you. Ah! it is a solace to cry out all this to some one who can denounce you, seize you, malignant and criminal beast, and make the law and mankind overwhelm you, crush you, in order that this remorse which agitates and devours you, may be extinguished, and annihilated at last in the bloody debris that the basket of the guillotine bears away!"

Heilighenthal could not finish. As he was speaking Mineleko, suddenly endeavored, convulsively, to arise while uttering a rattle: "I suffocate—I——"

He could not even complete this sentence. A lacerating cough strangled him, then a stream of blood, at first quite slender, escaped from his lips and saturated his shirt. Then this stream increasing, flowing from his mouth like a bubbling spring, became a torrent. Heilighenthal ran to the bell. At

the first summons, they came. Mineleko was rattling, choking, struggling with death. It was frightful, but animated, however, by a breath of avenging hate, he still essayed to make himself understood: "The king, the king," he muttered, and delirium commenced, doubtless carrying him back to the cruel and restless days which he had passed in the conviction of the king's love for his wife.

Thus was extinguished in a violent death this man of a passionate and savage nature.

CHAPTER XLIV.

NAJESKA'S REFLECTIONS.

In the convent, the days were passing slowly and despairingly for the unhappy Najeska Ivanowna, who was not ignorant of the events which were agitating the Thessalian Court. Glascha, who had been in her service since her sixteenth year, had left her almost as soon as she arrived at the convent. Although the Prince of Narish had saved this creature from the poverty wherein she was stagnating she had not hesitated to abandon her exiled and sick mistress.

The cold, produced by her journey from which Najeska Ivanowna had suffered since her arrival at the monastery, kept her continually confined to her chamber, and to the acute pains that the rarefied air of those high altitudes was producing in her chest, to the numberless anxieties which were assailing her despite the thick walls behind which she had taken refuge, a new apprehension had come to add itself.

A new misfortune which she dared not confess to herself had startled her in the most secret recesses of her being. Her feminine instinct, her mother's heart, felt stirring in her bosom the dear little creature to which she would give birth. This infant, that of the ungrateful king, of a father without justice, she loved already.

Her child! this one, like her dear little daughters, belonged to her—to her alone. Among these three little beings, under the special protection of the

God of the afflicted, of the unfortunate, what could she still have to fear from the malignity of men?

Now that her maternal duties were augmenting, she desired to live—to live resigned in the midst of her torments, happy in spite of her afflictions. Her children would be hereafter her only happiness, her only joy, her only loves, with them; through them some happy and beautiful days were yet preparing for this unfortunate creature that a great infamy had wounded in such a harsh, and unmerited manner.

The compassionate hearts of the good nuns were moved by so many outrages, so much injustice. These women, severe themselves, contenting themselves with so little, living on almost nothing, became tender and ingenious for this frail and fragile creature. In this austere convent, a cheerful, almost coquettish chamber, was discovered and ornamented, a comparative comfort was lavished on this young woman, whose delicate health was giving some anxiety to these recluses, became her companions, her friends.

So many attentions, so much tender pity were somewhat elevating to the discouraged soul of the Princess de Mineleko, but despite her promises to herself, despite her will to maintain them, long hours passed still sad and desolate by her solitary and dull fireside.

The bitter sentiments which traversed the rankling heart of this woman so cruelly and so cowardly wounded, were not those which may be surmounted in a day. This great infamy which is called life, had made in the soul of this sweet and gentle flower a wound that nothing could be ever heal.

While reanimating with her icy hands the fire

which was often extinguished for want of fuel, she evoked all the phases of her existence, from her most tender infancy until now. She evoked in her sorrowful reveries the remembrance of that old solitary chateau in which the charming years of her childhood had flown, by that solitary and boisterous sea which bathes the meridional coast of Caucasus, from Lake Bournasol to Saint Nicholas.

She saw again these low and sandy shores, and the black, thick fogs. With what delight she recalled those winter evenings passed in a very snug, a very warm room, between her good old governesses, who alternately read to her an interesting or merry tale, and her father, her well-beloved father, who read his journal. This father, this good father, the only man to whom a really serious and dear tie had united her, who had done everything to render her happy and by whom, through a nameless fatality, she owed the misfortune of her life! Ah! in the depths of his tomb, who shall say that his shade was not awakened by the tears and the sobs of this adored daughter!

How peaceful and happy was the interior of this old house wherein she had seen the light of day! She heard them, these violent winds which in winter, roar with rage and raise these black and sudden tempests which alight so unexpectedly upon this sea which they have baptized with their name—the Black Sea! What an amusement for her, heedless of misfortune and of suffering of which she was then ignorant, when by severe frost those great sheets of frozen water were extended, upon which elegant couples of skaters were gayly and rapidly gliding.

Yes, she was seeing all that again; this rugged

country, these vast steppes, these solitary endless verstes where, mounted upon a fiery courser, she galloped entire hours, letting the sharp north winds of the sea whip her face. And then that vast chamber in which she slept, in a soft, warm nest placed near to that of her father. Every morning, she said her first prayer in the arms of this man who had so tenderly sheltered her infancy; then later, she had been separated from this loving heart and united to two wretches, one, jealous and morose, the other, weak and unworthy that the happiness and the fortune of a woman should be confided to him. Najeska Ivanowna, desiring to shake off those remembrances which were besetting her, bravely endeavored to occupy herself with her charming babies.

She was now no longer rich, and with the advocates whom she would have to pay, it was necessary to think of sufficing with a very little; so she undertook all the necessary needlework for these dear little beings.

She commenced by cutting the garments of which they would have need, and gave herself, like a laborer, a regular task for each day. Thus her ideas would wander less, she would become calmer; for she realized perfectly that by constant thinking she would become insane. Then, obstinately determined to counteract it, she seated herself in her easy-chair, and, bending her adorable head over her work, she resolutely commenced.

But the more she buried her needle in the light material, the more her recollections were concentrated upon the last weeks, upon the unpardonable outrage of which she had been the victim. Then, her languishing fingers were scarcely able to draw

her tread. Silently, great tears fell like pearls upon the fine linen which she desired to convert into pretty robes. She endeavored to restrain those in her "translucent sapphires," as the king had baptized her eyes, in that happy time in which she had believed in his love; but the greater was the effort, the more imperiously and abundantly the tears escaped. First one rolled, then two, then others, then others yet again, then continuously until this fragile and nervous lady was shaken in a paroxysm of weeping.

In such a paroxysm, the work glided from her lap to the floor; she concealed her head in her handkerchief, which was soon completely soaked by a deluge of tears. When a sister or one of the nurses entered, she immediately arose, and, turning her head, she endeavored to appear occupied in searching in a drawer for an article not to be found; for the unfortunate creature had the modesty of the unmerited shame and suffering that the king had suffered to fall upon her.

In her immense chagrin, this proud and delicate soul was reserved; she kept it heroically to herself alone.

However, M. Klug did not write. What was occurring then? "Alas!" said she bitterly to herself, "this struggle will be that of the porcelain pot against the iron one, this lawsuit that my advocates have induced me to attempt against the king, will crush me; I must succumb under its weight! What satisfaction, indeed, is there to be obtained from this frightful comedy, more or less good, to cast a little dust into the eyes of the world! Ah! the poor creature who has had faith in the word of her sovereign, will be broken like a glass, I feel it but too well! But, however, it is impossible that the

law is not a protection for me as it is for others! Wherefore two weights, two measures? My rights as a wife are there; they must be maintained, respected! Whether my husband be a king or a simple mortal, no one will admit that, without any motive, unless that of pusillanimity, he may drive me from his residence, on the very night of our union. If he could do so with impunity what difference would there be between the guilty woman and she who has remained pure and innocent? Oh! all that there is in me of pride and of dignity revolts at this remembrance; the hearts of honest people will be stirred with indignation at the recital of so many unmerited misfortunes, they will be moved at the spectacle of so much hate, and my cause will be gained. Besides, I have faith in the merits, in the talents of my defenders. M. Klug has told me: "If there is justice in Thessaly," that justice will be for me! "My marriage is a fact as legal as loyal; the truth will easily come to light. Back of this demand for a divorce, the plot of the frightful snare extended to the weakness of the king will suddenly pierce through all, and my triumph will be more the brilliant for having been deferred."

Poor, poor creature! All this reasoning is only too true; but against whom is she struggling? Who are her adversaries? A king! sovereign of the court where the contest was to be unfolded, sovereign of the country where her cause was to be judged! But the unhappy creature was then ignorant in the sincerity of her soul that if justice has something of the holy of the sublime, nothing is more common or more terrible than the ambitions, the vanities, the platitudes of those men who, often, possess nothing of justice but their

name of "judges." In many cases, politics, the desire of attaining to power, to crush a rival, are the only motives of those beings to whom society confides the fate of so many afflicted people who hope in them, and whom they suffer to be crushed with impunity, with cynical indifference!

And then, what would not be done to attract the good graces of that old fury, the Empress of Hindostan. The latter in operating secretly, acts only the more surely; she is to be feared, very much to be feared, this indefatigable instigator to whom all were obedient, without love, but with invincible terror. Was not such an enemy enough, and was more necessary to break this feeble reed, so often agitated by the storm of passions and of hate?

So many interior combats, conflicting thoughts, of hopes followed by discouragements, were wasting and undermining poor Najeska Ivanowna. Endowed if we may so express it, with second sight, she divined the horrible end from which nothing could save her, and then, like a lamb under the ax ready to strike, she let painfully fall her head emaciated by suffering, but rendered yet more beautiful by resignation. Her heart, swollen with bitter sorrows, broken by so many unjust blows, found at last a little calm in the abundant tears which she shed in solitude, in abandonment.

CHAPTER XLV.

A WOMAN'S FAITH.

One morning, while reading a journal which entered the doors of the austere residence, for her alone, suddenly she arose frightened; a terrible trembling took possession of her whole frame; she hastily threw aside the public journal, uttered a heart-rending cry and fell at the feet of a nun, her sister in sacrifices, who was with her at that moment. What event can then have affected to such an extent this poor young woman, upon whom every affliction, every misfortune seemed, however, to fall without intermission!

Sister Marie, despite the indifference which she had sworn to everything in this world, cast an uneasy glance upon the "Nonvelliste." She read with stupor these few lines, which sufficed to explain the emotion of the poor recluse:

"A duel to the death has just taken place near H— upon the frontier of Thessaly. The two adversaries, sworn enemies, were the Prince de Mineleko and the Count de Heiligenthal. The issue of the combat was not doubtful; the hate of these two men was such that one of them had to remain upon the field. It was the Ex-Ambassador of Cancasus. Struck by a ball which pierced his body, he expired cursing the princess, his wife, for the coquetting through which she had so often exposed his life."

New and wicked outrage! Shameless lie! We know that, in this statement, one fact alone was true; the death of Boris Michailowitch de Mineleko.

This unforeseen and unexpected news struck the unfortunate Najeska Ivanowna to the heart. Recovered from a long swoon, she remained during some hours in a frightfully weak state.

Bitter reflections assailed her. "Perhaps," she said to herself, "that if she had frankly confessed to her husband the nocturnal visit of Heiligenthal," that which she had not done precisely in order to avoid a denouement such as that which had just taken place, and also because the murder once accomplished she could not compromise the life of Heiligenthal, who, after all, had been her first lover, nothing of all that would have occurred.

She would have, perhaps, momentarily vanquished the ferocious jealousy of her husband by her frankness, and would have proved her innocence to him. Ah! how the prince had looked at the blood which had flown upon the marble from the slight wound which she had inflicted upon Heiligenthal.

On the other hand, at the time of the murder and even at present, she did not cease to ask herself who had killed Kassan, for she knew nothing of the tragical confession that the count had made to the prince. 'But what is to be will be,' said this superstitious nature to herself. The prophecy made by the Bohemian in regard to that crown which eluded her even at the moment wherein she was putting it on, could not fail to be accomplished. After the death of the prince Najeska Ivanowna asked herself what new misfortune would still befall her. This valiant nature, for whom afflictions had not yet ended was anticipating everything. At this certitude of being forever devoted to misfortune, that the death of the prince confirmed, a more in-

tense pallor than ordinary exerted itself over the charming features already so faded of this poor martyr, who was to preserve the stigma until the day when, delivered at last from the cares and the tribulations of this mortal life, the Princess de Mineleko would surrender to earth her remains so tortured, so mortified, by every sacrifice. But let us not anticipate.

Does misfortune ever come singly? Oh, no; thus, in a few days after having learned in such a terrible manner of the death of him who had been her husband, the father of her dear and beloved little daughters, the courier brought her rather discouraging letters in regard to the issue of her suit. The king, her advocates stated, wished to dissolve their union, because he had been "duped." That was the only allegation which he could advance, for, in spite of the unheard of efforts of the old empress, Sir Maurice Stephan had not been able in Caucasus, whither he had been dispatched, to discover anything illicit on the part of the princess nor on that of her ancestors. All his devoted and interested researches remained unfruitful, but without that serving in anywise the cause of the accused.

M. Klug wrote in these terms to his client:

"Notwithstanding all the pain which I experience for your innocence so palpable, and for outraged justice, I regret to announce to you, Madame la Princess, that but little hope remains to me as to the issue too well foreseen of your suit. It is no longer in the face of justice that we find ourselves, but opposed alone to the power of might which crushes us. Come what may I will struggle, and I will struggle to the end. Rely upon my devotion which you have entirely acquired."

This opinion only served to confirm Najeska

Ivanowna in the presentiments which were besetting her and undermining more and more her broken constitution.

Some days after she received, to her great surprise, a visit from M. Klug. As this celebrated man did not absent himself only on very great occasions, she was chilled to the heart when he was announced.

Alas! she had only too much reason. M. Klug, not daring to confide such bad news to a written message, wishing to extenuate the frightful shock by communicating it to her with every possible precaution, had come to acquaint her with the worst, that is to say the annulment of her marriage with the king. He took a poignant interest in this victim so gentle, so resigned, and so beautiful; he was almost as astounded as she by this verdict so unexpected, so iniquitous, rendered by the judges.

When Najeska Ivanowna noiselessly entered the chamber like a pale ghost which glides the old advocate was very much struck by the great change that those few weeks had wrought in her. He believed he saw the specter of that which had formerly been her, when this woman, so pale, in a long dressing-gown of mourning, appeared in the twilight of this somber cell. His old hardened heart beat so violently when he imparted this new misfortune to her, that he was astonished at the gloomy resignation with which she listened to him without interrupting him.

“The opinion of the judges, madam,” said M. Klug, “has been much discussed. It was only the preponderating voice of President Haller, an all-powerful voice, which has decided your sad destiny.”

Najeska Ivanowna was still silent. Her two little hands alone, frozen anew, like two snow-balls which were interlaced in each other, displayed the emotion which was undermining and lacerating her. The last word uttered by M. Klug on taking leave of her, was a ray of light for the princess.

“Notwithstanding that it is painful to me to mention the name of Heiligenthal in your presence,” he had said, “since it is Count Waldemar who has killed Prince de Mineleko in a duel (this young man, moreover, has since disappeared, and no one has been able to discover a vestige of him), a piece of news which I learned at the residence will perhaps have some interest for you, Madame la Princess. The Heiligenthal family have at last consented to their daughter’s engagement with young Haller, son of the President of the Tribunal, whom the king has just elevated to the nobility in recompense of his long and faithful services.”

The ironical intonation with which Klug pronounced these last words did not escape Najeska Ivanowna. It was because he had pronounced against her that her enemies had elevated him so high.

When Klug had departed she did not shed a tear, she evinced no visible grief. She was petrified, almost stupefied. Ah! if she had only been able to dissipate this enormous weight, which was oppressing her heart, in heart-rending sobs. But nothing nothing! Not a word, not a cry. Only profound sighs were exhaled, one after the other, from her broken heart.

The comedy in this whole contest was visible, hideous. One really remains stupefied at the thought that such a deed could be produced in full view of

this nineteenth century. However, is not this if ever the era of justice? But boast, whatsoever we may do as long as humanity exists it will always be thus.

This last blow was the last drop for poor Najeska Ivanowna. Feeling herself abandoned, rejected by cruel and unjust men, she turned her eyes toward the Consoler of the afflicted, the Support of the feeble. The cup being too full, the unhappy creature thought of pouring it in the heart of one of these confidants that the church strews with such a touching pity upon the road of the afflicted. She comprehended at last that terrestrial existence is only a painful labor which must be accomplished in order to merit a more perfect state. The loss of her first husband, the denouement of her suit she believed to be her last misfortunes.

“My sister,” said she, “my sister, I would like to see a confessor. All that which was dear to me in life crumbles around me. Alone more than ever, I long for death, but not before having learned to love my enemies, and to pardon them.” Although since several weeks, incessantly harassed, without ever enjoying a single instant of relaxation, her soul was not embittered, so much spirituality she preserved within her from whence flowed the scintillation of a future existence.

The nun, frightened and affected by so much despairing resignation, endeavored to revive the dejected spirit of the unfortunate woman; her words fell like a gentle dew, drop by drop, upon this grief-stricken soul, but in vain.

Surrendering to the uneasy desires of the poor invalid, she called the confessor so ardently desired, so hoped for.

By a happy privilege of Heaven, almost for once to this poor unfortunate, he was one of those priests too rare, alas! gentle and merciful. This man, whose race, like the good in all things, seems to be extinguished, remained a long time with his penitent; the unction of his indulgent and compassionate language fortified this fainting soul, to which only a little love had been necessary to attach it anew to existence.

But life seemed to retire gradually from this body so enfeebled, her health changed day by day. Crushed by disquietude, sleep obstinately fled from her poor eyes swollen by tears.

The months, however, were flowing; thus, like the grief in her soul, winter was gradually invading the earth. Hitherto the luxuriant vegetation of the environing hills had lent some gayety to the retreat, wherein Najeska Ivanowna had come to bury her shame and her outrage. Now this immense park, surrounded by thick and high walls, offered nothing but a dismal spectacle. The long avenues, so shady still, since some days now have presented nothing but the aspect of a forest of trees with long branches despoiled of their leaves, and which appear like so many skeletons raising their arms toward Heaven to demand the aid and succor for this nature that death seems to embrace.

It is in one of these somber and long alleys that Najeska Ivanowna loves to come and lose herself. In this solitude where the icy wind somewhat refreshed her brow, burning with fever, in the profound quietude of these woods with their trees half denuded by autumn, where sometimes in the great silence, according to the sublime expression of Byron, "the winds even retained their breath," she

loved to wander, and the pungent odors of the soil seemed to invigorate her sorrow-stricken soul.

She could not sleep during the night, when the winds were howling dolefully through the battlements of the old abbey; so, worn by grief, enfeebled by torments, she came to these retired places to woo and enjoy here a repose absent during long hours of insomnia, having for her couch a solitary bench and the sky for a canopy.

One afternoon she was later than usual; the evening was calm and veiled by a fog, not a zephyr stirred the bronze hair of the poor sufferer, who was walking slowly, her hat in her hand, exposing thus her feverish head to the benefit of the pure fresh air. Notwithstanding the sweet tranquillity of this nature in mourning, she could not this day find the least sleep, but refreshed by her promenade, calmed by the profound repose which surrounded her on every side, she felt better. She was preparing to return by a long detour, when she suddenly heard talking in a thicket of neighboring laurels.

She soon recognized the voice of one of the large pupils, "the eldest," as the oldest was called, who was conversing with a nun of the convent. The young girl was a Thessalian, a cousin of Walpurga de Heiligenthal; her accent and her discourse yet more revealed only too much to Najeska Ivanowna.

"How sad and unhappy I am to leave you, my sister," said the pupil. "But mamma does not wish me to remain any longer in the house which shelters that miserable Mineleko."

"Do not judge so hastily, my daughter, and especially do not be severe, for fear of being unjust. See how gentle and sad this poor unfortunate creature is; she is a model of resignation, never a murmur,

never a complaint. It would be much to be desired if all of us knew how to imitate her submission in the trials which Heaven may send us."

"I do not say it, my sister, but that does not prevent her having done something very dreadful."

"After what they say of her one may expect anything from her. It appears that unequaled in strategy, she has extorted the half of the king's fortune. She would have completely ruined him, she would even have ruined the kingdom, if the Empress of Hindostan had not interposed. Yes, in spite of all the sorrow that I will experience in seeing you no more I am almost happy at the idea of not having to encounter this bad woman."

Bounding under this infamous calumny, Najeska Ivanowna going to rush out of her retreat and cry:

"You lie! your people lie! the king, the empress, all lie! I have taken nothing, desired nothing. I have refused all, even to the least present that the poorest suitor offers to his betrothed. I repeat it to you, it is an odious lie. I alone am outraged. I alone am the victim. I alone have the right to complain, to accuse!"

But reason predominating over the affront under which she had bounded, she sorrowfully said to herself:

"What use to seek to justify myself? would they even listen to me? Am I not the holocaust of the king, of this king that they believe and that they cherish. Am I not the immolation of this empress whose name all the people venerate? Of what avail would be my demands, my appeals to justice, for my right?"

A lingering regard, filled with resignation, cast upon one of the Christs whose outstretched arms

called her to him, as if to clasp her to this heart which had loved and suffered so much, calmed a little this unhappy creature whose life was nothing more than a painful Calvary. A frightful sob escaped from her panting bosom, her head fell heavily in her emaciated hands, and thus absorbed in her despair, she remained a long time, feeling neither the cold which was increasing nor the fog which was descending.

Alas! when misfortune crushes us under its icy claw, it is in vain we struggle, endeavoring to rehabilitate ourselves, we must either bend or succumb under the burden. Besides, what is there to be done against the malignity of the world, so prompt to exercise its judgments, whether true or false, but so slow to retract them. Is it not better to wait for time, that great justifier of the oppressed and the oppressors? But not a thought, not a complaint, not a murmur, came to touch this proud and delicate soul, the magnanimous creature had modesty of her martyrdom, of her profound abandonment. When indignant and suffering from the wounds of life, from the hissing of vipers infuriated against her, she felt rebellion invading her rankling heart, she came quickly to conceal her grief in the tears silently shed in the refuge of her narrow cell. But was she really so unhappy? Since the visit of the man of God a great quietude, a profound peace inundated her soul; she felt that if life and mankind had cruelly struck her she remained none the less worthy, none the less respectable, by the nobleness and resignation with which she had passed through all the phases of her tribulations. Her conscience, that judge which nothing can corrupt, did it not tell her that it is as much a glory to die

innocent, as it is a shame to live guilty; comparing her role thus with that of her executioners, she had not been willing to change it. Oh, no! no! a thousand times no! Gradually and entirely now security in the immensity of the consoling God had entered in her heart, which no human profanity would ever be able to touch. The Creator, in all His majesty, in all His mystery, was appearing to His creatures, who suddenly illuminated with a new and hitherto unknown light, fell on her knees and adored her God, her Father. Like the Christians in the early ages, a superhuman enthusiasm transported her soul in the ethereal regions of immensity, and she began to love her sufferings, her martyrdom, because she believed in a divine compensation. Oh, sublimity of faith! whither extends the depths of thy consolations?

CHAPTER XLVI.

LAST HOURS.

Seven months have elapsed since the last events. We are in May.

During the preceding March Najeska Ivanowna has become a mother; she has given birth to a sickly little boy; the son of the king.

This atom in creation, this blood of her blood she loves with a passion all kneaded with tears, all cemented with pains. The more anguish and tears this poor little being has cost her the more she feels herself attached to it. Born in a condition bordering on poverty, she will surround it with solitudes, with delicacies, with luxuries even, that her maternal love will know how to procure for it. She loves it with all the regrets that for it alone she experiences at the idea that were it not for the intervention of the Empress of Hindostan this birth, almost a shame to-day, would have made the happiness of a king. Of this poor child, born of a love lost as soon as created, she asks pardon for the abandonment of his father, pardon for the life which she has given him, for the joys, for the pleasures of which he is deprived. Poor woman! what does she not suffer, what has she not suffered! Her sickness, so tormented by the alternatives which she had to undergo, was painful and burdensome, her accouchment, occurring in such unhappy circumstances, made her very ill. Several times they had feared as much for the child as for the mother, for

from the worn envelope of this tender and sensitive heart life was slowly but surely retiring.

The physicians, in order to reanimate this flame, nearly extinguished, had sent her to S——, a little sea-side resort on the Adriatic. There, far from all noise, she had rented a modest villa at whose base the waves broke.

Whiter than the white dressing-gown in which she was as if enshrouded, she remained long hours lying upon her couch, admiring the boundless extent of the waves which down there, very far down there, as far as her thoughts could extend, were confounded with the sky. At other times when the weather was fine, the atmosphere pure and serene, they painfully transported her upon a terrace of the little villa, and she remained there as long as her strength would permit her.

Her visage, completely emaciated by the contusions of her tears, all pale with the too well-known lines of death, disappeared under a mantilla of Spanish lace. With love and pity, this dying mother was eagerly regarding her son, this son so feeble that it seemed as though the robust arms of his Venetian nurse must crush him like a blade of grass. The expression of this little face, completely blue with the distard, which he had inherited from the sufferings of his mother, was angelic, as if it already belonged to another sphere. Because the mother had been a victim and a martyr, this poor child, retained its life by a very slight breath; it was forever stamped with the seal of weakness and suffering.

“Was it not enough then for her to suffer? was it still necessary to these inhuman executioners that the innocent should expiate and die.”

All these thoughts were clashing and crossing each other in the enfeebled brain of the poor invalid. A little repose, a little quiet and affection, and perhaps nature had still resisted; but nothing; nothing but desertion, grief, regrets. What more was necessary to destroy this sensitive being emaciated by sorrow?"

As upon the finest summer days, this spring sky was of an intense blue; the sun become a magnificent incandescent globe was sinking into the waves, entirely covered with marine alga; each house of the little town of S—— was enkindled with the last light of day; one had said that an immense conflagration was about to consume all. It was a magnificent spectacle, but soon a long, reddish train alone remained on the horizon, as if it was the blood of her bruised heart which tinted this sea. Gradually the country recovered its customary aspect, and then entirely disappeared under the shadows of twilight which were invading the earth. The church bell was heard in the distance; its clear and joyous voice was throwing its gay and pearly notes, announcing that the hour of "Ave Marie," of repose and prayer, had come.

The day had been hot without being oppressive, the warm colors of the setting sun were announcing another day full of promise for the bathers and the tourist.

A gentle breeze which was rising out at sea was wafting its refreshing breath upon all brows fatigued by the heat of the day. Najeska Ivanowna, profiting of these beneficent zephyrs, was installed upon the terrace, very near a large door, where the two little girls of her first marriage were now wildly and heedlessly playing with their old Russian gov-

erness, who had replaced their nurses. The branches, gently agitated by a light breeze, seemed more than ever to evoke in her mind the remembrance of a past very near still, but which events so manifold had rendered so distant; each agitated branch, each rustling leaf, had a very distinct voice, which murmured very low in the ear of the poor forsaken creature:

“Since thy last hour is going soon to strike wait no more; bid us an adieu which will be eternal for us who have known and loved thee. See how entire nature is in festal robes for this last evening which she dedicates to thy weeping soul. Do not be ungrateful. Let thy last smile be for us who have comprehended thy sorrows, who have pitied thee, and be without fear, for beyond this world, where thou hast suffered so much, there is eternity, there is repose, there is love.”

Then before the almost sightless eyes of the princess a star more brilliant than the rest cleft the firmament in two. With the rapidity of lightning it appeared in the east, and was extinguished in the west. Then some sounds which had nothing of the terrestrial re-echoed in her drowsy head. What was going to become of her? Was she ill or was this death? To die! but, if she was dying there, beyond the limits of this life, was forgetfulness, was happiness!—but her children! her children whom she was going to leave!

A whole hour has elapsed; a great cry is heard. From whence comes it? It is the nurse of the poor baby become an orphan who has uttered it. This woman, believing that her mistress had sunk into a sweet sleep, had at first religiously respected that repose; but feeling the cold of the night growing

heavy upon the earth, she had feared for the princess. She had, at first, endeavored to awaken her by addressing some words to her; receiving no response, she had approached her, and touched her, and then only had found her frozen with that cold death alone can impart.

Gently, without a pang, the Great Reaper had gathered this scarcely opened flower which men had rejected. It was a star which was extinguished, ere it hardly arrived from heaven.

[THE END.]

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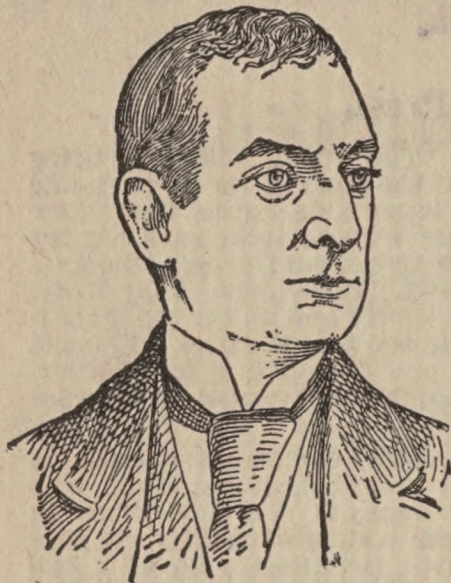
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