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JACQUELINE

By THERESE BENTZON (MME. BLANC)

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XIV

BITTER DISILLUSION

Some people in this world who turn round and round in a daily circle of small things, like squirrels in a cage, have no idea of the pleasure a young creature, conscious of courage, has in trying its strength; this struggle with fortune loses its charm as it grows longer and longer and more and more difficult, but at the beginning it is an almost certain remedy for sorrow.

To her resolve to make head against misfortune Jacqueline owed the fact that she did not fall into those morbid reveries which might have converted her passing fancy for a man who was simply a male flirt into the importance of a lost love. Is there any human being conscious of energy, and with faith in his or her own powers, who has not wished to know something of adversity in order to rise to the occasion and confront it? To say nothing of the pleasure there is in eating brown bread, when one has been fed only on cake, or of the satisfaction that a child feels when, after strict discipline, he is left to do as he likes, to say nothing of the pleasure ladies boarding in nunneries are sure to feel on reentering the world, at recovering their liberty, Jacqueline by nature loved independence, and she was attracted by the novelty of her situation as larks are attracted by a mirror. She was curious to know what life held for her in reserve, and she was extremely anxious to repair the error she had committed in giving way to a feeling of which she was now ashamed. What could do this better than hard work? To owe everything to herself, to her talents, to her efforts, to her industry, such was Jacqueline's ideal of her future life.

She had, before this, crowned her brilliant reputation in the 'cours' of M. Regis by passing her preliminary examination at the Sorbonne; she was confident of attaining the highest degree--the 'brevet superieur', and while pursuing her own studies she hoped to give lessons in music and in foreign languages, etc. Thus assured of making her own living, she could afford to despise the discreditable happiness of Madame de Nailles, who, she had no doubt, would shortly become Madame Marien; also the crooked ways in which M. de Cymier might pursue his fortune-hunting. She said to herself that she should never marry; that she had other objects of interest; that marriage was for those who had nothing better before them; and the world appeared to her under a new aspect, a sphere of useful activity full of possibilities, of infinite variety, and abounding in interests. Marriage might be all very well for rich girls, who unhappily were objects of value to be bought and sold; her semi-poverty gave her the right to break the chains that hampered the career of other well-born women--she would make her own way in the world like a man.

Thus, at eighteen, youth is ready to set sail in a light skiff on a rough sea, having laid in a good store of imagination and of courage, of childlike ignorance and self-esteem.

No doubt she would meet with some difficulties; that thought did but excite her ardor. No doubt Madame de Nailles would try to keep her with her, and Jacqueline had provided herself beforehand with some double-edged remarks by way of weapons, which she intended to use according to circumstances. But all these preparations for defense or attack proved unnecessary. When she told the Baroness of her plans she met with no opposition. She had expected that her project of separation would highly displease her stepmother; on the contrary, Madame de Nailles discussed her projects quietly, affecting to consider them merely temporary, but with no indication of dissatisfaction or resistance. In truth she was not sorry that Jacqueline, whose companionship became more and more embarrassing every day, had cut the knot of a difficult position by a piece of wilfulness and perversity which seemed to put her in the wrong. The necessity she would have been under of crushing such a girl, who was now eighteen, would have been distasteful and unprofitable; she was very glad to get rid of her stepdaughter, always provided it could be done decently and without scandal. Those two, who had once so loved each other and who were now sharers in the same sorrows, became enemies--two hostile parties, which only skilful strategy could ever again bring together. They tacitly agreed to certain conditions: they would save appearances; they would remain on outwardly good terms with each other whatever happened, and above all they would avoid any explanation. This programme was faithfully carried out, thanks to the great tact of Madame de Nailles.

No one could have been more watchful to appear ignorant of everything which, if once brought to light, would have led to difficulties; for instance, she feigned not to know that her stepdaughter was in possession of a secret which, if the world knew, would forever make them strangers to each other; nor would she seem aware that Hubert Marien, weary to death of the tie that bound him to her, was restrained from breaking it

only by a scruple of honor. Thanks to this seeming ignorance, she parted from Jacqueline without any open breach, as she had long hoped to do, and she retained as a friend who supplied her wants a man who was only too happy to be allowed at this price to escape the act of reparation which Jacqueline, in her simplicity, had dreaded.

All those who, having for years dined and danced under the roof of the Nailles, were accounted their friends by society, formed themselves into two parties, one of which lauded to the skies the dignity and resignation of the Baroness, while the other admired the force of character in Jacqueline.

Visitors flocked to the convent which the young girl, by the advice of Giselle, had chosen for her retreat because it was situated in a quiet quarter. She who looked so beautiful in her crape garments, who showed herself so satisfied in her little cell with hardly any furniture, who was grateful for the services rendered her by the lay sisters, content with having no salon but the convent parlor, who was passing examinations to become a teacher, and who seemed to consider it a favor to be sometimes allowed to hear the children in the convent school say their lessons--was surely like a heroine in a novel. And indeed Jacqueline had the agreeable sensation of considering herself one. Public admiration was a great help to her, after she had passed through that crisis in her grief during which she could feel nothing but the horror of knowing she should never see her father again, when she had ceased to weep for him incessantly, to pray for him, and to turn, like a wounded lioness, on those who blamed his reckless conduct, though she herself had been its chief victim.

For three months she hardly left the convent, walking only in the grounds and gardens, which were of considerable extent. From time to time Giselle came for her and took her to drive in the Bois at that hour of the day when few people were there.

Enguerrand, who, thanks to his mother's care, was beginning to be an intelligent and interesting child, though he was still painfully like M. de Talbrun, was always with them in the coupe, kindhearted Giselle thinking that nothing could be so likely to assuage grief as the prattle of a child. She was astonished--she was touched to the heart, by what she called naively the conversion of Jacqueline. It was true that the young girl had no longer any whims or caprices. All the nuns seemed to her amiable, her lodging was all she needed, her food was excellent; her lessons gave her amusement. Possibly the excitement of the entire change had much to do at first with this philosophy, and in fact at the end of six months Jacqueline owned that she was growing tired of dining at the table d'hote.

There was a little knot of crooked old ladies who were righteous overmuch, and several sour old maids whose only occupation seemed to be to make remarks on any person who had anything different in dress, manners, or appearance from what they considered the type of the becoming. If it is not good that man should live alone, it is equally true that women should not live together. Jacqueline found this out as

soon as her powers of observation came back to her. And about the same time she discovered that she was not so free as she had flattered herself she should be. The appearance of a lady, fair and with light hair, very pretty and about her own age, gave her for the first time an inclination to talk at table. She and this young woman met twice a day at their meals, in the morning and in the evening; their rooms were next each other, and at night Jacqueline could hear her through the thin partition giving utterance to sighs, which showed that she was unhappy. Several times, too, she came upon her in the garden looking earnestly at a place where the wall had been broken, a spot whence it was said a Spanish countess had been carried off by a bold adventurer. Jacqueline thought there must be something romantic in the history of this newcomer, and would have liked exceedingly to know what it might be. As a prelude to acquaintance, she offered the young stranger some holy water when they met in the chapel, a bow and a smile were interchanged, their fingers touched. They seemed almost friends. After this, Jacqueline contrived to change her seat at table to one next to this unknown person, so prettily dressed, with her hair so nicely arranged, and, though her expression was very sad, with a smile so very winning. She alone represented the world, the world of Paris, among all those ladies, some of whom were looking for places as companions, some having come up from the provinces, and some being old ladies who had seen better days. Her change of place was observed by the nun who presided at the table, and a shade of displeasure passed over her face. It was slight, but it portended trouble. And, indeed, when grace had been said, Mademoiselle de Nailles was sent for by the Mother Superior, who gave her to understand that, being so young, it was especially incumbent on her to be circumspect in her choice of associates. Her place thenceforward was to be between Madame de X-----, an old, deaf lady, and Mademoiselle J-----, a former governess, as cold as ice and exceedingly respectable. As to Madame Saville, she had been received in the convent for especial reasons, arising out of circumstances which did not make her a fit companion for inexperienced girls. The Superior hesitated a moment and then said: "Her husband requested us to take charge of her," in a tone by which Jacqueline quite understood that "take charge" was a synonym for "keep a strict watch upon her." She was spied upon, she was persecuted--unjustly, no doubt.

All this increased the interest that Jacqueline already felt in the lady with the light hair. But she made a low curtsy to the Mother Superior and returned no answer. Her intercourse with her neighbor was thenceforward; however, sly and secret, which only made it more interesting and exciting. They would exchange a few words when they met upon the stairs, in the garden, or in the cloisters, when there was no curious eye to spy them out; and the first time Jacqueline went out alone Madame Saville was on the watch, and, without speaking, slipped a letter into her hand.

This first time Jacqueline went out was an epoch in her life, as small events are sometimes in the annals of nations; it was the date of her emancipation, it coincided with what she called her choice of a career. Thinking herself sure of possessing a talent for teaching, she had spoken of it to several friends who had come to see her, and who each and all

exclaimed that they would like some lessons, a delicate way of helping her quite understood by Jacqueline. Pupils like Belle Ray and Yvonne d'Étapes, who wanted her to come twice a week to play duets with them or to read over new music, were not nearly so interesting as those in her little class who had hardly more than learned their scales! Besides this, Madame d'Avrigny begged her to come and dine with her, when there would be only themselves, on Mondays, and then practise with Dolly, who had not another moment in which she could take a lesson. She should be sent home scrupulously before ten o'clock, that being the hour at the convent when every one must be in. Jacqueline accepted all these kindnesses gratefully. By Giselle's advice she hid her slight figure under a loose cloak and put on her head a bonnet fit for a grandmother, a closed hat with long strings, which, when she first put it on her head, made her burst out laughing. She imagined herself to be going forth in disguise. To walk the streets thus masked she thought would be amusing, so amusing that the moment she set foot on the street pavement she felt that the joy of living was yet strong in her. With a roll of music in her hand, she walked on rather hesitatingly, a little afraid, like a bird just escaped from the cage where it was born; her heart beat, but it was with pleasure; she fancied every one was looking at her, and in fact one old gentleman, not deceived by the cloak, did follow her till she got into an omnibus for the first time in her life--a new experience and a new pleasure. Once seated, and a little out of breath, she remembered Madame Saville's letter, which she had slipped into her pocket. It was sealed and had a stamp on it; it was too highly scented to be in good taste, and it was addressed to a lieutenant of chasseurs with an aristocratic name, in a garrison at Fontainebleau.

Then Jacqueline began vaguely to comprehend that Madame Saville's husband might have had serious reasons for commending his wife to the surveillance of the nuns, and that there might have been some excuse for their endeavoring to hinder all intimacy between herself and the little blonde.

This office of messenger, thrust upon her without asking permission, was not agreeable to Jacqueline, and she resolved as she dropped the missive, which, even on the outside, looked compromising, into the nearest post-box, to be more reserved in future. For which reason she responded coldly to a sign Madame Saville made her when, in the evening, she returned from giving her lessons.

Those lessons--those excursions which took her abroad in all weathers, though with praiseworthy and serious motives, into the fashionable parts of Paris, from which she had exiled herself by her own will--were greatly enjoyed by Jacqueline. Everything amused her, being seen from a point of view in which she had never before contemplated it. She seemed to be at a play, all personal interests forgotten for the moment, looking at the world of which she was no longer a part with a lively, critical curiosity, without regrets but without cynicism. The world did not seem to her bad--only man's higher instincts had little part in it. Such, at least, was what she thought, so long as people praised her for her courage, so long as the houses in which another Jacqueline de Nailles had been once so brilliant, received her with affection as before, though she

had to leave in an anteroom her modest waterproof or wet umbrella. They were even more kind and cordial to her than ever, unless an exaggerated cordiality be one form of impertinence. But the enthusiasm bestowed on splendid instances of energy in certain circles, to which after all such energy is a reproach, is superficial, and not being genuine is sure not to last long. Some people said that Jacqueline's staid manners were put on for effect, and that she was only attempting to play a difficult part to which she was not suited; others blamed her for not being up to concert-pitch in matters of social interest. The first time she felt the pang of exclusion was at Madame d'Avrigny's, who was at the same moment overwhelming her with expressions of regard. In the first place, she could see that the little family dinner to which she had been so kindly invited was attended by so many guests that her deep mourning seemed out of place among them. Then Madame d'Avrigny would make whispered explanations, which Jacqueline was conscious of, and which were very painful to her. Such words as: "Old friend of the family;" "Is giving music lessons to my daughter;" fell more than once upon her ear, followed by exclamations of "Poor thing!" "So courageous!" "Chivalric sentiments!" Of course, everyone added that they excused her toilette. Then when she tried to escape such remarks by wearing a new gown, Dolly, who was always a little fool (there is no cure for that infirmity) cried out in a tone such as she never would have dared to use in the days when Jacqueline was a model of elegance: "Oh, how fine you are!" Then again, Madame d'Avrigny, notwithstanding the good manners on which she prided herself, could not conceal that the obligation of sending home the recluse to the ends of the earth, at a certain hour, made trouble with her servants, who were put out of their way. Jacqueline seized on this pretext to propose to give up the Monday music-lesson, and after some polite hesitation her offer was accepted, evidently to Madame d'Avrigny's relief.

In this case she had the satisfaction of being the one to propose the discontinuance of the lessons. At Madame Ray's she was simply dismissed. About the close of winter she was told that as Isabelle was soon to be married she would have no time for music till her wedding was over, and about the same time the d'Etaples told her much the same thing. This was not to be wondered at, for Mademoiselle Ray was engaged to an officer of dragoons, the same Marcel d'Etaples who had acted with her in Scylla and Charybdis, and Madame Ray, being a watchful mother, was not long in perceiving that Marcel came to pay court to Isabelle too frequently at the hour for her music-lesson. Madame d'Etaples on her part had made a similar discovery, and both judged that the presence of so beautiful a girl, in Jacqueline's position, might not be desirable in these interviews between lovers.

When Giselle, as she was about to leave town for the country in July, begged Jacqueline, who seemed run down and out of spirits, to come and stay with her, the poor child was very glad to accept the invitation. Her pupils were leaving her one after another, she could not understand why, and she was bored to death in the convent, whose strict rules were drawn tighter on her than before, for the nuns had begun to understand her better, and to discover the real worldliness of her character. At the same time, that retreat within these pious walls no longer seemed

like paradise to Jacqueline; her transition from the deepest crape to the softer tints of half mourning, seemed to make her less of an angel in their eyes. They said to each other that Mademoiselle de Nailles was fanciful, and fancies are the very last things wanted in a convent, for fancies can brave bolts, and make their escape beyond stone walls, whatever means may be taken to clip their wings.

"She does not seem like the same person," cried the good sisters, who had been greatly edified at first by her behavior, and who were almost ready now to be shocked at her.

The course of things was coming back rapidly into its natural channel; in obedience to the law which makes a tree, apparently dead, put forth shoots in springtime. And that inevitable re-budding and reblossoming was beautiful to see in this young human plant. M. de Talbrun, Jacqueline's host, could not fail to perceive it. At first he had been annoyed with Giselle for giving the invitation, having a habit of finding fault with everything he had not ordered or suggested, by virtue of his marital authority, and also because he hated above all things, as he said, to have people in his house who were "wobegones." But in a week he was quite reconciled to the idea of keeping Mademoiselle de Nailles all the summer at the Chateau de Fresne. Never had Giselle known him to take so much trouble to be amiable, and indeed Jacqueline saw him much more to advantage at home than in Paris, where, as she had often said, he diffused too strong an odor of the stables. At Fresne, it was more easy to forgive him for talking always of his stud and of his kennel, and then he was so obliging! Every day he proposed some new jaunt, an excursion to see some view, to visit all the ruined chateaux or abbeys in the neighborhood. And, with surprising delicacy, M. de Talbrun refrained from inviting too many of his country neighbors, who might perhaps have scared Jacqueline and arrested her gradual return to gayety. They might also have interrupted his tete-a-tete with his wife's guest, for they had many such conversations. Giselle was absorbed in the duty of teaching her son his a, b, c. Besides, being very timid, she had never ridden on horseback, and, naturally, riding was delightful to her cousin. Jacqueline was never tired of it; while she paid as little attention to the absurd remarks Oscar made to her between their gallops as a girl does at a ball to the idle words of her partner. She supposed it was his custom to talk in that manner--a sort of rough gallantry--but with the best intentions. Jacqueline was disposed to look upon her life at Fresne as a feast after a long famine. Everything was to her taste, the whole appearance of this lordly chateau of the time of Louis XIII, the splendid trees in the home park, the gardens laid out 'a la Francais', decorated with art and kept up carefully. Everything, indeed, that pertained to that high life which to Giselle had so little importance, was to her delightful. Giselle's taste was so simple that it was a constant subject of reproach from her husband. To be sure, it was with him a general rule to find fault with her about everything. He did not spare her his reproaches on a multitude of subjects; all day long he was worrying her about small trifles with which he should have had nothing to do. It is a mistake to suppose that a man can not be brutal and fussy at the same time. M. de Talbrun was proof to the contrary.

"You are too patient," said Jacqueline often to Giselle. "You ought to answer him back--to defend yourself. I am sure if you did so you would have him, by-and-bye, at your beck and call."

"Perhaps so. I dare say you could have managed better than I do," replied Giselle, with a sad smile, but without a spark of jealousy. "Oh, you are in high favor. He gave up this week the races at Deauville, the great race week from which he has never before been absent, since our marriage. But you see my ambition has become limited; I am satisfied if he lets me alone." Giselle spoke these words with emphasis, and then she added: "and lets me bring up his son my own way. That is all I ask."

Jacqueline thought in her heart that it was wrong to ask so little, that poor Giselle did not know how to make the best of her husband, and, curious to find out what line of conduct would serve best to subjugate M. de Talbrun, she became herself--that is to say, a born coquette--venturing from one thing to another, like a child playing fearlessly with a bulldog, who is gentle only with him, or a fly buzzing round a spider's web, while the spider lies quietly within.

She would tease him, contradict him, and make him listen to long pieces of scientific music as she played them on the piano, when she knew he always said that music to him was nothing but a disagreeable noise; she would laugh at his thanks when a final chord, struck with her utmost force, roused him from a brief slumber; in short, it amused her to prove that this coarse, rough man was to her alone no object of fear. She would have done better had she been afraid.

Thus it came to pass that, as they rode together through some of the prettiest roads in the most beautiful part of Normandy, M. de Talbrun began to talk, with an ever-increasing vivacity, of the days when they first met, at Treport, relating a thousand little incidents which Jacqueline had forgotten, and from which it was easy to see that he had watched her narrowly, though he was on the eve of his own marriage. With unnecessary persistence, and stammering as he was apt to do when moved by any emotion, he repeated over and over again, that from the first moment he had seen her he had been struck by her--devilishly struck by her--he had been, indeed! And one day when she answered, in order not to appear to attach any importance to this declaration, that she was very glad of it, he took an opportunity, as their horses stopped side by side before a beautiful sunset, to put his arm suddenly round her waist, and give her a kiss, so abrupt, so violent, so outrageous, that she screamed aloud. He did not remove his arm from her, his coarse, red face drew near her own again with an expression that filled her with horror. She struggled to free herself, her horse began to rear, she screamed for help with all her might, but nothing answered her save an echo. The situation seemed critical for Jacqueline. As to M. de Talbrun, he was quite at his ease, as if he were accustomed to make love like a centaur; while the girl felt herself in peril of being thrown at any moment, and trampled under his horse's feet. At last she succeeded in striking her aggressor a sharp blow across the face with her riding-whip. Blinded for a moment, he let her go, and she took advantage of her release to put her horse to its full speed. He galloped after her, beside himself with wrath and

agitation; it was a mad but silent race, until they reached the gate of the Chateau de Fresne, which they entered at the same moment, their horses covered with foam.

"How foolish!" cried Giselle, coming to meet them. "Just see in what a state you have brought home your poor horses."

Jacqueline, pale and trembling, made no answer. M. de Talbrun, as he helped her to dismount, whispered, savagely: "Not a word of this!"

At dinner, his wife remarked that some branch must have struck him on the cheek, there was a red mark right across his face like a blow.

"We were riding through the woods," he answered, shortly.

Then Giselle began to suspect something, and remarked that nobody was talking that evening, asking, with a half-smile, whether they had been quarrelling.

"We did have a little difference," Oscar replied, quietly.

"Oh, it did not amount to anything," he said, lighting his cigar; "let us make friends again, won't you?" he added, holding out his hand to Jacqueline. She was obliged to give him the tips of her fingers, as she said in her turn, with audacity equal to his own:

"Oh, it was less than nothing. Only, Giselle, I told your husband that I had had some bad news, and shall have to go back to Paris, and he tried to persuade me not to go."

"I beg you not to go," said Oscar, vehemently.

"Bad news?" repeated Giselle, "you did not say a word to me about it!"

"I did not have a chance. My old Modeste is very ill and asks me to come to her. I should never forgive myself if I did not go."

"What, Modeste? So very ill? Is it really so serious? What a pity! But you will come back again?"

"If I can. But I must leave Fresne to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I defy you to leave Fresne!" said M. de Talbrun.

Jacqueline leaned toward him, and said firmly, but in a low voice:

"If you attempt to hinder me, I swear I will tell everything."

All that evening she did not leave Giselle's side for a moment, and at night she locked herself into her chamber and barricaded the door, as if a mad dog or a murderer were at large in the chateau.

Giselle came into her room at an early hour.

"Is what you said yesterday the truth, Jacqueline? Is Modeste really ill? Are you sure you have had no reason to complain of anybody in this place?--of any one?"

Then, after a pause, she added:

"Oh, my darling, how hard it is to do good even to those whom we most dearly love."

"I don't understand you," said Jacqueline, with an effort. "Everybody has been kind to me."

They kissed each other with effusion, but M. de Talbrun's leave-taking was icy in the extreme. Jacqueline had made a mortal enemy.

The grand outline of the chateau, built of brick and stone with its wings flanked by towers, the green turf of the great park in which it stood, passed from her sight as she drove away, like some vision in a dream.

"I shall never come back--never come back!" thought Jacqueline. She felt as if she had been thrust out everywhere. For one moment she thought of seeking refuge at Lizerolles, which was not very many miles from the railroad station, and when there of telling Madame d'Argy of her difficulties, and asking her advice; but false pride kept her from doing so--the same false pride which had made her write coldly, in answer to the letters full of feeling and sympathy Fred had written to her on receiving news of her father's death.

CHAPTER XV

TREACHEROUS KINDNESS

The experience through which Jacqueline had just passed was not calculated to fortify her or to elevate her soul. She felt for the first time that her unprotected situation and her poverty exposed her to insult, for what other name could she give to the outrageous behavior of M. de Talbrun, which had degraded her in her own eyes?

What right had that man to treat her as his plaything? Her pride and all her womanly instincts rose up in rebellion. Her nerves had been so shaken that she sobbed behind her veil all the way to her destination. Paris, when she reached it, offered her almost nothing that could comfort or amuse her. That city is always empty and dull in August, more so than at any other season. Even the poor occupation of teaching her little class of music pupils had been taken away by the holidays. Her sole resource was in Modeste's society. Modeste--who, by the way, had never been ill, and who suffered from nothing but old age--was delighted to receive her dear young lady in her little room far up under the roof, where, though quite infirm, she lived comfortably, on her savings. Jacqueline, sitting beside her as she sewed, was soothed by her old

nursery tales, or by anecdotes of former days. Her own relatives were often the old woman's theme. She knew the history of Jacqueline's family from beginning to end; but, wherever her story began, it invariably wound up with:

"If only your poor papa had not made away with all your money!"

And Jacqueline always answered:

"He was quite at liberty to do what he pleased with what belonged to him."

"Belonged to him! Yes, but what belonged to you? And how does it happen that your stepmother seems so well off? Why doesn't some family council interfere? My little pet, to think of your having to work for your living. It's enough to kill me!"

"Bah! Modeste, there are worse things than being poor."

"Maybe so," answered the old nurse, doubtfully, "but when one has money troubles along with the rest, the money troubles make other things harder to bear; whereas, if you have money enough you can bear anything, and you would have had enough, after all, if you had married Monsieur Fred."

At which point Jacqueline insisted that Modeste should be silent, and answered, resolutely: "I mean never to marry at all."

To this Modeste made answer: "That's another of your notions. The worst husband is always better than none; and I know, for I never married."

"That's why you talk such nonsense, my poor dear Modeste! You know nothing about it."

One day, after one of these visits to the only friend, as she believed, who remained to her in the world--for her intimacy with Giselle was spoiled forever--she saw, as she walked with a heavy heart toward her convent in a distant quarter, an open fiacre pull up, in obedience to a sudden cry from a passenger who was sitting inside. The person sprang out, and rushed toward Jacqueline with loud exclamations of joy.

"Madame Strahlberg!"

"Dear Jacqueline! What a pleasure to meet you!" And, the street being nearly empty, Madame Strahlberg heartily embraced her friend.

"I have thought of you so often, darling, for months past--they seem like years, like centuries! Where have you been all that long time?"

In point of fact, Jacqueline had no proof that the three Odinska ladies had ever remembered her existence, but that might have been partly her own fault, or rather the fault of Giselle, who had made her promise to have as little as possible to do with such compromising personages. She was seized with a kind of remorse when she found such warmth of

recognition from the amiable Wanda. Had she not shown herself ungrateful and cowardly? People about whom the world talks, are they not sometimes quite as good as those who have not lost their standing in society, like M. de Talbrun? It seemed to her that, go where she would, she ran risks.

The cynicism that is the result of sad experience was beginning to show itself in Jacqueline.

"Oh, forgive me!" she said, feeling, contrite.

"Forgive you for what, you beautiful creature?" asked Madame Strahlberg, with sincere astonishment.

She had the excellent custom of never observing when people neglected her, or at least, of never showing that she did so, partly because her life was so full of varied interests that she cared little for such trifles, and secondly because, having endured several affronts of that nature, she had ceased to be very sensitive.

"I knew, through the d'Avrignys," she said, "that you were still at the convent. You are not going to take the veil there, are you? It would be a great pity. No? You wish to lead the life of an intelligent woman who is free and independent? That is well; but it was rather an odd idea to begin by going into a cloister. Oh!--I see, public opinion?" And Madame Strahlberg made a little face, expressive of her contempt for public opinion.

"It does not pay to consult other people's opinions--it is useless, believe me. The more we sacrifice to public opinion, the more it asks of us. I cut that matter short long ago. But how glad I am to hear that you don't intend to hide that lovely face in a convent. You are looking better than ever--a little too pale, still, perhaps--a little too interesting. Colette will be so glad to see you, for you must let me take you home with me. I shall carry you off, whether you will or not, now I have caught you. We will have a little music just among ourselves, as we had in the good old times--you know, our dear music; you will feel like yourself again. Ah, art--there is nothing to compare with art in this world, my darling!"

Jacqueline yielded without hesitation, only too glad of the unhoped-for good fortune which relieved her from her ennui and her depression. And soon the hired victoria was on its way to that quarter of the city which is made up of streets with geographical names, and seems as if it were intended to lodge all the nations under heaven. It stopped in the Rue de Naples, before a house that was somewhat showy, but which showed from its outside, that it was not inhabited by high-bred people. There were pink linings to lace curtains at the windows, and quantities of green vines drooped from the balconies, as if to attract attention from the passers-by. Madame Strahlberg, with her ostentatious and undulating walk, which caused men to turn and notice her as she went by, went swiftly up the stairs to the second story. She put one finger on the electric bell, which caused two or three little dogs inside to begin barking, and pushed Jacqueline in before her, crying: "Colette! Mamma! See whom I have

brought back to you!" Meantime doors were hurriedly opened, quick steps resounded in the antechamber, and the newcomer found herself received with a torrent of affectionate and delighted exclamations, pressed to the ample bosom of Madame Odinska, covered with kisses by Colette, and fawned upon by the three toy terriers, the most sociable of their kind in all Paris, their mistresses declared.

Jacqueline was passing through one of those moments when one is at the mercy of chance, when the heart which has been closed by sorrow suddenly revives, expands, and softens under the influence of a ray of sunshine. Tears came into her eyes, and she murmured:

"My friends--my kind friends!"

"Yes, your friends, whatever happens, now and always," said Colette, eagerly, though she had probably barely given a thought to Jacqueline for eighteen months. Nevertheless, on seeing her, Colette really thought she had not for a moment ceased to be fond of her. "How you have suffered, you poor pussy! We must set to work and make you feel a little gay, at any price. You see, it is our duty. How lucky you came to-day--"

A sign from her sister stopped her.

They carried Jacqueline into a large and handsome salon, full of dust and without curtains, with all the furniture covered up as if the family were on the eve of going to the country. Madame Strahlberg, nevertheless, was not about to leave Paris, her habit being to remain there in the summer, sometimes for months, picnicking as it were, in her own apartment. What was curious, too, was that the chandelier and all the side-lights had fresh wax candles, and seats were arranged as if in preparation for a play, while near the grand piano was a sort of stage, shut off from the rest of the room by screens.

Colette sat down on one of the front row of chairs and cried: "I am the audience--I am all ears." Her sister hurriedly explained all this to Jacqueline, with out waiting to be questioned: "We have been giving some little summer entertainments of late, of which you see the remains." She went at once to the piano, and incited Jacqueline to sing by beginning one of their favorite duets, and Jacqueline, once more in her native element, followed her lead. They went on from one song to another, from the light to the severe, from scientific music to mere tunes and airs, turning over the old music-books together.

"Yes, you are a little out of practice, but all you have to do is to rub off the rust. Your voice is finer than ever--just like velvet." And Madame Strahlberg pretended that she envied the fine mezzo-soprano, speaking disparagingly of her own little thread of a voice, which, however, she managed so skilfully. "What a shame to take up your time teaching, with such a voice as that!" she cried; "you are out of your senses, my dear, you are raving mad. It would be sinful to keep your gifts to yourself! I am very sorry to discourage you, but you have none of the requisites for a teacher. The stage would be best for you--'Mon Dieu! why not? You will see La Rochette this evening; she is a

person who would give you good advice. I wish she could hear you!"

"But my dear friend, I can not stay," murmured Jacqueline, for those unexpected words "the stage, why not?" rang in her head, made her heart beat fast, and made lights dance before her eyes. "They are expecting me to dine at home."

"At your convent? I beg your pardon, I'll take care of that. Don't you know me? My claws seldom let go of a prize, especially when that prize is worth the keeping. A little telegram has already been sent, with your excuses. The telegraph is good for that, if not for anything else: it facilitates 'impromptus'."

"Long live impromptus," cried out Colette, "there is nothing like them for fun!" And while Jacqueline was trying to get away, not knowing exactly what she was saying, but frightened, pleased, and much excited, Colette went on: "Oh! I am so glad, so glad you came to-day; now you can see the pantomime! I dreamed, wasn't it odd, only last night, that you were acting it with us. How can one help believing in presentiments? Mine are always delightful--and yours?"

"The pantomime?" repeated Jacqueline in bewilderment, "but I thought your sister told me you were all alone."

"How could we have anything like company in August?" said Madame Strahlberg, interrupting her; "why, it would be impossible, there are not four cats in Paris. No, no, we sha'n't have anybody. A few friends possibly may drop in--people passing through Paris--in their travelling-dresses. Nothing that need alarm you. The pantomime Colette talks about is only a pretext that they may hear Monsieur Szmera."

And who was M. Szmera?

Jacqueline soon learned that he was a Hungarian, second half-cousin of a friend of Kossuth, the most wonderful violinist of the day, who had apparently superseded the famous Polish pianist in these ladies' interest and esteem. As for the latter, they had almost forgotten his name, he had behaved so badly.

"But," said Jacqueline, anxiously, "you know I am obliged to be home by ten o'clock."

"Ah! that's like Cinderella," laughed Wanda. "Will the stroke of the clock change all the carriages in Paris into pumpkins? One can get 'fiacres' at any hour."

"But it is a fixed rule: I must be in," repeated Jacqueline, growing very uneasy.

"Must you really? Madame Saville says it is very easy to manage those nuns--"

"What? Do you know Madame Saville, who was boarding at the convent last

winter?"

"Yes, indeed; she is a countrywoman of ours, a friend, the most charming of women. You will see her here this evening. She has gained her divorce suit--"

"You are mistaken," said Colette, "she has lost it. But that makes no difference. She has got tired of her husband. Come, say 'Yes,' Jacqueline--a nice, dear 'Yes'--you will stay, will you not? Oh, you darling!"

They dined without much ceremony, on the pretext that the cook had been turned off that morning for impertinence, but immediately after dinner there was a procession of boys from a restaurant, bringing whipped creams, iced drinks, fruits, sweetmeats, and champagne--more than would have been wanted at the buffet of a ball. The Prince, they said, had sent these things. What Prince?

As Jacqueline was asking this question, a gentleman came in whose age it would have been impossible to guess, so disguised was he by his black wig, his dyed whiskers, and the soft bloom on his cheeks, all of which were entirely out of keeping with those parts of his face that he could not change. In one of his eyes was stuck a monocle. He was bedizened with several orders, he bowed with military stiffness, and kissed with much devotion the ladies' hands, calling them by titles, whether they had them or not. His foreign accent made it as hard to detect his nationality as it was to know his age. Two or three other gentlemen, not less decorated and not less foreign, afterward came in. Colette named them in a whisper to Jacqueline, but their names were too hard for her to pronounce, much less to remember. One of them, a man of handsome presence, came accompanied by a sort of female ruin, an old lady leaning on a cane, whose head, every time she moved, glittered with jewels, placed in a very lofty erection of curled hair.

"That gentleman's mother is awfully ugly," Jacqueline could not help saying.

"His mother? What, the Countess? She is neither his mother nor his wife. He is her gentleman-in-waiting--that's all. Don't you understand? Well, imagine a man who is a sort of "gentleman-companion"; he keeps her accounts, he escorts her to the theatre, he gives her his arm. It is a very satisfactory arrangement."

"The gentleman receives a salary, in such a case?" inquired Jacqueline, much amused.

"Why, what do you find in it so extraordinary?" said Colette. "She adores cards, and there he is, always ready to be her partner. Oh, here comes dear Madame Saville!"

There were fresh cries of welcome, fresh exchanges of affectionate diminutives and kisses, which seemed to make the Prince's mouth water. Jacqueline discovered, to her great surprise, that she, too, was a dear

friend of Madame Saville's, who called her her good angel, in reference, no doubt, to the letter she had secretly put into the post. At last she said, trying to make her escape from the party: "But it must be nine o'clock."

"Oh! but--you must hear Szmera."

A handsome young fellow, stoutly built, with heavy eyebrows, a hooked nose, a quantity of hair growing low upon his forehead, and lips that were too red, the perfect type of a Hungarian gypsy, began a piece of his own composition, which had all the ardor of a mild 'galopade' and a Satanic hunt, with intervals of dying sweetness, during which the painted skeleton they called the Countess declared that she certainly heard a nightingale warbling in the moonlight.

This charming speech was forthwith repeated by her "umbra" in all parts of the room, which was now nearly filled with people, a mixed multitude, some of whom were frantic about music, others frantic about Wanda Strahlberg. There were artists and amateurs present, and even respectable women, for Madame d'Avrigny, attracted by the odor of a species of Bohemianism, had come to breathe it with delight, under cover of a wish to glean ideas for her next winter's receptions.

Then again there were women who had been dropped out of society, like Madame de Versanne, who, with her sunken eyes and faded face, was not likely again to pick up in the street a bracelet worth ten thousand francs. There was a literary woman who signed herself Fraisiline, and wrote papers on fashion--she was so painted and bedizened that some one remarked that the principal establishments she praised in print probably paid her in their merchandise. There was a dowager whose aristocratic name appeared daily on the fourth page of the newspapers, attesting the merits of some kind of quack medicine; and a retired opera-singer, who, having been called Zenaide Rochet till she grew up in Montmartre, where she was born, had had a brilliant career as a star in Italy under the name of Zina Rochette. La Rochette's name, alas! is unknown to the present generation.

In all, there were about twenty persons, who made more noise with their applause than a hundred ordinary guests, for enthusiasm was exacted by Madame Strahlberg. Profiting by the ovation to the Hungarian musician, Jacqueline made a movement toward the door, but just as she reached it she had the misfortune of falling in with her old acquaintance, Nora Sparks, who was at that moment entering with her father. She was forced to sit down again and hear all about Kate's marriage. Kate had gone back to New York, her husband being an American, but Nora said she had made up her mind not to leave Europe till she had found a satisfactory match.

"You had better make haste about it, if you expect to keep me here," said Mr. Sparks, with a peculiar expression in his eye. He was eager to get home, having important business to attend to in the West.

"Oh, papa, be quiet! I shall find somebody at Bellagio. Why, darling, are you still in mourning?"

She had forgotten that Jacqueline had lost her father. Probably she would not have thought it necessary to wear black so long for Mr. Sparks. Meantime, Madame Strahlberg and her sister had left the room.

"When are they coming back?" said Jacqueline, growing very nervous. "It seems to me this clock must be wrong. It says half-past nine. I am sure it must be later than that."

"Half-past nine!--why, it is past eleven," replied Miss Nora, with a giggle. "Do you suppose they pay any attention to clocks in this house? Everything here is topsy-turvy."

"Oh! what shall I do?" sighed poor Jacqueline, on the verge of tears.

"Why, do they keep you such a prisoner as that? Can't you come in a little late--"

"They wouldn't open the doors--they never open the doors on any pretext after ten o'clock," cried Jacqueline, beside herself.

"Then your nuns must be savages? You should teach them better."

"Don't be worried, dear little one, you can sleep on this sofa," said Madame Odinska, kindly.

To whom had she not offered that useful sofa? Wanda and Colette were just as ready to propose that others should spend the night with them as, on the smallest pretext, to accept the same hospitality from others. Wanda, indeed, always slept curled up like a cat on a divan, in a fur wrapper, which she put on early in the evening when she wanted to smoke cigarettes. She went to sleep at no regular hour. A bear's skin was placed always within her reach, so that if she were cold she could draw it over her. Jacqueline, not being accustomed to these Polish fashions, did not seem to be much attracted by the offer of the sofa. She blamed herself bitterly for her own folly in having got herself into a scrape which might lead to serious consequences.

But this was neither time nor place for expressions of anxiety; it would be absurd to trouble every one present with her regrets. Besides, the harm was done--it was irreparable--and while she was turning over in her mind in what manner she could explain to the Mother Superior that the mistake about the hour had been no fault of hers--and the Mother Superior, alas! would be sure to make inquiries as to the friends whom she had visited--the magic violin of M. Szmera played its first notes, accompanied by Madame Odinska on the piano, and by a delicious little flute. They played an overture, the dreamy sweetness of which extorted cries of admiration from all the women.

Suddenly, the screens parted, and upon the little platform that represented a stage bounded a sort of anomalous being, supple and charming, in the traditional dress of Pierrot, whom the English vulgarize and call Harlequin. He had white camellias instead of buttons on his

loose white jacket, and the bright eyes of Wanda shone out from his red-and-white face. He held a mandolin, and imitated the most charming of serenades, before a make-believe window, which, being opened by a white, round arm, revealed Colette, dressed as Colombine.

The little pantomime piece was called 'Pierrot in Love'. It consisted of a series of dainty coquetries, sudden quarrels, fits of jealousy, and tender reconciliations, played by the two sisters. Colette with her beauty, Wanda with her talent, her impishness, her graceful and voluptuous attitudes, electrified the spectators, especially in a long monologue, in which Pierrot contemplated suicide, made more effective by the passionate and heart-piercing strains of the Hungarian's violin, so that old Rochette cried out: "What a pity such a wonder should not be upon the stage!" La Rochette, now retired into private life, wearing an old dress, with her gray hair and her black eyes, like those of a watchful crocodile, took the pleasure in the pantomime that all actors do to the very last in everything connected with the theatre. She cried 'brava' in tones that might reach Italy; she blew kisses to the actors in default of flowers.

Madame d'Avrigny was also transported to the sixth heaven, but Jacqueline's presence somewhat marred her pleasure. When she first perceived her she had shown great surprise. "You here, my dear?" she cried, "I thought you safe with our own excellent Giselle."

"Safe, Madame? It seems to me one can be safe anywhere," Jacqueline answered, though she was tempted to say "safe nowhere;" but instead she inquired for Dolly.

Dolly's mother bit her lips and then replied: "You see I have not brought her. Oh, yes, this house is very amusing--but rather too much so. The play was very pretty, and I am sorry it would not do at my house. It is too--too 'risque', you know;" and she rehearsed her usual speech about the great difficulties encountered by a lady who wished to give entertainments and provide amusement for her friends.

Meantime Pierrot, or rather Madame Strahlberg, had leaped over an imaginary barrier and came dancing toward the company, shaking her large sleeves and settling her little snake-like head in her large quilled collar, dragging after her the Hungarian, who seemed not very willing. She presented him to Madame d'Avrigny, hoping that so fashionable a woman might want him to play at her receptions during the winter, and to a journalist who promised to give him a notice in his paper, provided--and here he whispered something to Pierrot, who, smiling, answered neither yes nor no. The sisters kept on their costumes; Colette was enchanting with her bare neck, her long-waisted black velvet corsage, her very short skirt, and a sort of three-cornered hat upon her head. All the men paid court to her, and she accepted their homage, becoming gayer and gayer at every compliment, laughing loudly, possibly that her laugh might exhibit her beautiful teeth.

Wanda, as Pierrot, sang, with her hands in her pockets, a Russian village song: "Ah! Dounai-li moy Dounai" ("Oh! thou, my Danube"). Then she

imperiously called Jacqueline to the piano: --"It is your turn now," she said, "most humble violet."

Up to that moment, Jacqueline's deep mourning had kept the gentlemen present from addressing her, though she had been much stared at. Although she did not wish to sing, for her heart was heavy as she thought of the troubles that awaited her the next day at the convent, she sang what was asked of her without resistance or pretension. Then, for the first time, she experienced the pride of triumph. Szmera, though he was furious at not being the sole lion of the evening, complimented her, bowing almost to the ground, with one hand on his heart; Madame Rochette assured her that she had a fortune in her throat whenever she chose to seek it; persons she had never seen and who did not know her name, pressed her hands fervently, saying that her singing was adorable. All cried "Encore," "Encore!" and, yielding to the pleasure of applause, she thought no more of the flight of time. Dawn was peeping through the windows when the party broke up.

"What kind people!" thought the debutante, whom they had encouraged and applauded; "some perhaps are a little odd, but how much cordiality and warmth there is among them! It is catching. This is the sort of atmosphere in which talent should live."

Being very much fatigued, she fell asleep upon the offered sofa, half-pleased, half-frightened, but with two prominent convictions: one, that she was beginning to return to life; the other, that she stood on the edge of a precipice. In her dreams old Rochette appeared to her, her face like that of an affable frog, her dress the dress of Pierrot, and she croaked out, in a variety of tones: "The stage! Why not? Applauded every night--it would be glorious!" Then she seemed in her dream to be falling, falling down from a great height, as one falls from fairyland into stern reality. She opened her eyes: it was noon. Madame Odinska was waiting for her: she intended herself to take her to the convent, and for that purpose had assumed the imposing air of a noble matron.

Alas! it was in vain! Jacqueline, was made to understand that such an infraction of the rules could not be overlooked. To pass the night without leave out of the convent, and not with her own family, was cause for expulsion. Neither the prayers nor the anger of Madame Odinska had any power to change the sentence. While the Mother Superior calmly pronounced her decree, she was taking the measure of this stout foreigner who appeared in behalf of Jacqueline, a woman overdressed, yet at the same time shabby, who had a far from well-bred or aristocratic air. "Out of consideration for Madame de Talbrun," she said, "the convent consents to keep Mademoiselle de Nailles a few days longer--a few weeks perhaps, until she can find some other place to go. That is all we can do for her."

Jacqueline listened to this sentence as she might have watched a game of dice when her fate hung on the result, but she showed no emotion. "Now," she thought, "my fate has been decided; respectable people will have nothing more to do with me. I will go with the others, who, perhaps, after all are not worse, and who most certainly are more

amusing."

A fortnight after this, Madame de Nailles, having come back to Paris, from some watering-place, was telling Marien that Jacqueline had started for Bellagio with Mr. and Miss Sparks, the latter having taken a notion that she wanted that kind of chaperon who is called a companion in England and America.

"But they are of the same age," said Marien.

"That is just what Miss Sparks wants. She does not wish to be hampered by an elderly chaperon, but to be accompanied, as she would have been by her sister."

"Jacqueline will be exposed to see strange things; how could you have consented--"

"Consented? As if she cared for my consent! And then she manages to say such irritating things as soon as one attempts to blame her or advise her. For example, this is one of them: 'Don't you suppose,' she said to me, 'that every one will take the most agreeable chance that offers for a visit to Italy?' What do you think of that allusion? It closed my lips absolutely."

"Perhaps she did not mean what you think she meant."

"Do you think so? And when I warned her against Madame Strahlberg, saying that she might set her a very bad example, she answered: 'I may have had worse.' I suppose that was not meant for impertinence either!"

"I don't know," said Hubert Marien, biting his lips doubtfully, "but--"

He was silent a few moments, his head drooped on his breast, he was in some painful reverie.

"Go on. What are you thinking about?" asked Madame de Nailles, impatiently.

"I beg your pardon. I was only thinking that a certain responsibility might rest on those who have made that young girl what she is."

"I don't understand you," said the stepmother, with an impatient gesture. "Who can do anything to counteract a bad disposition? You don't deny that hers is bad? She is a very devil for pride and obstinacy--she has no affection--she has proved it. I have no inclination to get myself wounded by trying to control her."

"Then you prefer to let her ruin herself?"

"I should prefer not to give the world a chance to talk, by coming to an open rupture with her, which would certainly be the case if I tried to contradict her. After all, the Sparks and Madame Odinska are not yet put out of the pale of good society, and she knew them long ago. An early

intimacy may be a good explanation if people blame her for going too far--"

"So be it, then; if you are satisfied it is not for me to say anything," replied Marien, coldly.

"Satisfied? I am not satisfied with anything or anybody," said Madame de Nailles, indignantly. "How could I be satisfied; I never have met with anything but ingratitude."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SAILOR'S RETURN

Madame D'Argy did not leave her son in ignorance of all the freaks and follies of Jacqueline. He knew every particular of the wrong-doings and the imprudences of his early friend, and even the additions made to them by calumny, ever since the fit of independence which, after her father's death, had led her to throw off all control. She told of her sudden departure from Fresne, where she might have found so safe a refuge with her friend and cousin. Then had not her own imprudence and coquetry led to a rupture with the families of d'Etaples and Ray? She told of the scandalous intimacy with Madame Strahlberg; of her expulsion from the convent, where they had discovered, even before she left, that she had been in the habit of visiting undesirable persons; and finally she informed him that Jacqueline had gone to Italy with an old Yankee and his daughter--he being a man, it was said, who had laid the foundation of his colossal fortune by keeping a bar-room in a mining camp in California. This last was no fiction, the cut of Mr. Sparks's beard and his unpolished manners left no doubt on the subject; and she wound up by saying that Madame d'Avrigny, whom no one could accuse of ill-nature, had been grieved at meeting this unhappy girl in very improper company, among which she seemed quite in her element, like a fish in water. It was said also that she was thinking of studying for the stage with La Rochette--M. de Talbrun had heard it talked about in the foyer of the Opera by an old Prince from some foreign country--she could not remember his name, but he was praising Madame Strahlberg without any reserve as the most delightful of Parisiennes. Thereupon Talbrun had naturally forbidden his wife to have anything to do with Jacqueline, or even to write to her. Fat Oscar, though he was not all that he ought to be himself, had some very strict notions of propriety. No one was more particular about family relations, and really in this case no one could blame him; but Giselle had been very unhappy, and to the very last had tried to stand up for her unhappy friend. Having told him all this, she added, she would say no more on the subject.

Giselle was a model woman in everything, in tact, in goodness, in good sense, and she was very attentive to the poor old mother of Fred, who but for her must have died long ago of loneliness and sorrow. Thereupon ensued the poor lady's usual lamentations over the long, long absence of

her beloved son; as usual, she told him she did not think she should live to see him back again; she gave him a full account of her maladies, caused, or at least aggravated, by her mortal, constant, incurable sorrow; and she told how Giselle had been nursing her with all the patience and devotion of a Sister of Charity. Through all Madame d'Argy's letters at this period the angelic figure of Giselle was contrasted with the very different one of that young and incorrigible little devil of a Jacqueline.

Fred at first believed his mother's stories were all exaggeration, but the facts were there, corroborated by the continued silence of the person concerned. He knew his mother to be too good wilfully to blacken the character of one whom for years she had hoped would be her daughter-in-law, the only child of her best friend, the early love of her son. But by degrees he fancied that the love so long living at the bottom of his heart was slowly dying, that it had been extinguished, that nothing remained of it but remembrance, such remembrance as we retain for dead things, a remembrance without hope, whose weight added to the homesickness which with him was increasing every day.

There was no active service to enable him to endure exile. The heroic period of the war had passed. Since a treaty of peace had been signed with China, the fleet, which had distinguished itself in so many small engagements and bombardments, had had nothing to do but to mount guard, as it were, along a conquered coast. All round it in the bay, where it lay at anchor, rose mountains of strange shapes, which seemed to shut it into a kind of prison. This feeling of nothing to be done--of nothing likely to be done, worked in Fred's head like a nightmare. The only thing he thought of was how he could escape, when could he once more kiss the faded cheeks of his mother, who often, when he slept or lay wakeful during the long hours of the siesta, he saw beside him in tears. Hers was the only face that he recalled distinctly; to her and to her only were devoted his long reveries when on watch; that time when he formerly composed his love verses, tender or angry, or full of despair. That was all over! A sort of mournful resignation had succeeded his bursts of excited feeling, his revolt against his fate.

This was Fred's state of mind when he received orders to return home--orders as unexpected as everything seems to be in the life of a naval man. "I am going back to her!" he cried. Her was his mother, her was France. All the rest had disappeared as if into a fog. Jacqueline was a phantom of the past; so many things had happened since the old times when he had loved her. He had crossed the Indian Ocean and the China Sea; he had seen long stretches of interminable coast-line; he had beheld misery, and glory, and all the painful scenes that wait on warfare; he had seen pestilence, and death in every shape, and all this had wrought in him a sort of stoicism, the result of long acquaintance with solitude and danger. He remembered his old love as a flower he had once admired as he passed it, a treacherous flower, with thorns that had wounded him. There are flowers that are beneficent, and flowers that are poisonous, and the last are sometimes the most beautiful. They should not be blamed, he thought; it was their nature to be hurtful; but it was well to pass them by and not to gather them.

By the time he had debarked Fred had made up his mind to let his mother choose a wife for him, a daughter-in-law suited to herself, who would give her the delight of grandchildren, who would bring them up well, and who would not weary of Lizerolles. But a week later the idea of this kind of marriage had gone out of his head, and this change of feeling was partly owing to Giselle. Giselle gave him a smile of welcome that went to his heart, for that poor heart, after all, was only waiting for a chance again to give itself away. She was with Madame d'Argy, who had not been well enough to go to the sea-coast to meet her son, and he saw at the same moment the pale and aged face which had visited him at Tonquin in his dreams, and a fair face that he had never before thought so beautiful, more oval than he remembered it, with blue eyes soft and tender, and a mouth with a sweet infantine expression of sincerity and goodness. His mother stretched out her trembling arms, gave a great cry, and fainted away.

"Don't be alarmed; it is only joy," said Giselle, in her soft voice.

And when Madame d'Argy proved her to be right by recovering very quickly, overwhelming her son with rapid questions and covering him with kisses, Giselle held out her hand to him and said:

"I, too, am very glad you have come home."

"Oh!" cried the sick woman in her excitement, "you must kiss your old playfellow!"

Giselle blushed a little, and Fred, more embarrassed than she, lightly touched with his lips her pretty smooth hair which shone upon her head like a helmet of gold. Perhaps it was this new style of hairdressing which made her seem so much more beautiful than he remembered her, but it seemed to him he saw her for the first time; while, with the greatest eagerness, notwithstanding Giselle's attempts to interrupt her, Madame d'Argy repeated to her son all she owed to that dear friend "her own daughter, the best of daughters, the most patient, the most devoted of daughters, could not have done more! Ah! if there only could be found another one like her!"

Whereupon the object of all these praises made her escape, disclaiming everything.

Why, after this, should she have hesitated to come back to Lizerolles every day, as of late had been her custom? Men know so little about taking care of sick people. So she came, and was present at all the rejoicings and all the talks that followed Fred's return. She took her part in the discussions about Fred's future. "Help me, my pet," said Madame d'Argy, "help me to find a wife for him: all we ask is that she should be like you."

In answer to which Fred declared, half-laughing and half-seriously, that that was his ideal.

She did not believe much of this, but, following her natural instinct, she assumed the dangerous task of consolation, until, as Madame d'Argy grew better, she discontinued her daily visits, and Fred, in his turn, took a habit of going over to Fresne without being invited, and spending there a good deal of his time.

"Don't send me away. You who are always charitable," he said. "If you only knew what a pleasure a Parisian conversation is after coming from Tonquin!"

"But I am so little of a Parisienne, or at least what you mean by that term, and my conversation is not worth coming for," objected Giselle.

In her extreme modesty she did not realize how much she had gained in intellectual culture. Women left to themselves have time to read, and Giselle had done this all the more because she had considered it a duty. Must she not know enough to instruct and superintend the education of her son? With much strong feeling, yet with much simplicity, she spoke to Fred of this great task, which sometimes frightened her; he gave her his advice, and both discussed together the things that make up a good man. Giselle brought up frequently the subject of heredity: she named no one, but Fred could see that she had a secret terror lest Enguerrand, who in person was very like his father, might also inherit his character. Fears on this subject, however, appeared unfounded. There was nothing about the child that was not good; his tastes were those of his mother. He was passionately fond of Fred, climbing on his lap as soon as the latter arrived and always maintaining that he, too, wanted a pretty red ribbon to wear in his buttonhole, a ribbon only to be got by sailing far away over the seas, like sailors.

"A sailor! Heaven forbid!" cried Madame de Talbrun.

"Oh! sailors come back again. He has come back. Couldn't he take me away with him soon? I have some stories about cabin-boys who were not much older than I."

"Let us hope that your friend Fred won't go away," said Giselle. "But why do you wish to be a cabinboy?"

"Because I want to go away with him, if he does not stay here--because I like him," answered Enguerrand in a tone of decision.

Hereupon Giselle kissed her boy with more than usual tenderness. He would not take to the hunting-field, she thought, the boulevard, and the corps de ballet. She would not lose him. "But, oh, Fred!" she cried, "it is not to be wondered at that he is so fond of you! You spoil him! You will be a devoted father some day; your vocation is evidently for marriage."

She thought, in thus speaking, that she was saying what Madame d'Argy would like her to say.

"In the matter of children, I think your son is enough for me," he said,

one day; "and as for marriage, you would not believe how all women-- I mean all the young girls among whom I should have to make a choice-- are indifferent to me. My feeling almost amounts to antipathy."

For the first time she ventured to say: "Do you still care for Jacqueline?"

"About as much as she cares for me," he answered, dryly. "No, I made a mistake once, and that has made me cautious for the future."

Another day he said:

"I know now who was the woman I ought to have loved."

Giselle did not look up; she was devoting all her attention to Enguerrand.

Fred held certain theories which he used to talk about. He believed in a high, spiritual, disinterested affection which would raise a man above himself, making him more noble, inspiring a disgust for all ignoble pleasures. The woman willing to accept such homage might do anything she pleased with a heart that would be hers alone. She would be the lady who presided over his life, for whose sake all good deeds and generous actions would be done, the idol, higher than a wife or any object of earthly passion, the White Angel whom poets have sung.

Giselle pretended that she did not understand him, but she was divinely happy. This, then, was the reward of her spotless life! She was the object of a worship no less tender than respectful. Fred spoke of the woman he ought to have loved as if he meant to say, "I love you;" he pressed his lips on the auburn curls of little Enguerrand where his mother had just kissed him. Day after day he seemed more attracted to that salon where, dressed with more care than she had ever dressed before, she expected him. Then awoke in her the wish to please, and she was beautiful with that beauty which is not the insipid beauty of St. Agnes, but that which, superior to all other, is seen when the face reflects the soul. All that winter there was a new Giselle--a Giselle who passed away again among the shadows, a Giselle of whom everybody said, even her husband, "Ma foi! but she is beautiful!" Oscar de Talbrun, as he made this remark, never thought of wondering why she was more beautiful. He was ready to take offense and was jealous by nature, but he was perfectly sure of his wife, as he had often said. As to Fred, the idea of being jealous of him would never have entered his mind. Fred was a relative and was admitted to all the privileges of a cousin or a brother; besides, he was a fellow of no consequence in any way.

While this platonic attachment grew stronger and stronger between Fred and Giselle, assisted by the innocent complicity of little Enguerrand, Jacqueline was discovering how hard it is for a girl of good birth, if she is poor, to carry out her plans of honest independence. Possibly she had allowed herself to be too easily misled by the title of "companion," which, apparently more cordial than that of 'demoiselle de compagnie', means in reality the same thing--a sort of half-servile position.

Money is a touchstone which influences all social relations, especially when on one side there is a somewhat morbid susceptibility, and on the other a lack of good breeding and education. The Sparks, father and daughter, Americans of the lower class, though willing to spend any number of dollars for their own pleasure, expected that every penny they disbursed should receive its full equivalent in service; the place therefore offered so gracefully and spontaneously to Mademoiselle de Nailles was far from being a sinecure. Jacqueline received her salary on the same footing as Justine, the Parisian maid, received her wages, for, although her position was apparently one of much greater importance and consideration than Justine's, she was really at the beck and call of a girl who, while she called her "darling," gave her orders and paid her for her services. Very often Miss Nora asked her to sew, on the plea that she was as skilful with her fingers as a fairy, but in reality that her employer might feel the superiority of her own position.

Hitherto Miss Nora had been delighted to meet at watering-places a friend of whom she could say proudly, "She is a representative of the old nobility of France" (which was not true, by the way, for the title of Baron borne by M. de Nailles went no farther back than the days of Louis XVIII); and she was still more proud to think that she was now waited on by this same daughter of a nobleman, when her own father had kept a drinking-saloon. She did not acknowledge this feeling to herself, and would certainly have maintained that she never had had such an idea, but it existed all the same, and she was under its influence, being very vain and rather foolish. And, indeed, Jacqueline, would have been very willing to plan trimmings and alter finery from morning to night in her own chamber in a hotel, exactly as Mademoiselle Justine did, if she could by this means have escaped the special duties of her difficult position, which duties were to follow Miss Nora everywhere, like her own shadow, to be her confidant and to act sometimes as her screen, or even as her accomplice, in matters that occasionally involved risks, and were never to her liking.

The young American girl had already said to her father, when he asked her to give up her search for an entirely satisfactory European suitor, which search he feared might drag on forever without any results: "Oh! I shall be sure to find him at Bellagio!" And she made up her mind that there he was to be sought and found at any price. Hotel life offered her opportunities to exercise her instincts for flirtation, for there she met many specimens of men she called chic, with a funny little foreign accent, which seemed to put new life into the wornout word. Twenty times a day she baited her hook, and twenty times a day some fish would bite, or at least nibble, according as he was a fortune-hunter or a diletante. Miss Nora, being incapable of knowing the difference, was ready to capture good or bad, and went about dragging her slaves at her chariot-wheels. Sometimes she took them rowing, with the Stars and Stripes floating over her boat, by moonlight; sometimes she drove them recklessly in a drag through roads bordered by olive-groves and vineyards; all these expeditions being undertaken under-pretence of admiring the romantic scenery. Her father was not disposed to interfere with what he called "a little harmless dissipation." He was confident his daughter's

"companion" must know what was proper, she being, as he said, accustomed to good society. Were not all Italian ladies attended by gentlemen? Who could blame a young girl for amusing herself? Meantime Mr. Sparks amused himself after his own fashion, which was to sit comfortably, with his feet up on the piazza rail of the hotel, imbibing strong iced drinks through straws. But in reality Jacqueline had no power whatever to preserve propriety, and only compromised herself by her associations, though her own conduct was irreproachable. Indeed she was considered quite prudish, and the rest of the mad crowd laughed at her for having the manners of a governess. In vain she tried to say words of warning to Nora; what she said was laughed at or resented in a tone that told her that a paid companion had not the right to speak as frankly as a friend.

Her business, she was plainly told one day, was to be on the spot in case any impertinent suitor should venture too far in a tete-a-tete, but short of that she was not to "spoil sport." "I am not doing anything wrong; it is allowable in America," was Miss Nora's regular speech on such occasions, and Jacqueline could not dispute the double argument. Nora's conduct was not wicked, and in America such things might be allowed. Yet Jacqueline tried to demonstrate that a young girl can not pass unscathed through certain adventures, even if they are innocent in the strict sense of the word; which made Nora cry out that all she said was subterfuge and that she had no patience with prejudices.

In vain her young companion pointed out to her charge that other Americans at Bellagio seemed far from approving her conduct. American ladies of a very different class, who were staying at the hotel, held aloof from her, and treated her with marked coldness whenever they met; declaring that her manners would be as objectionable in her own country, in good society, as they were in Italy.

But Miss Sparks was not to be put down by any argument. "Bah! they are stuck-up Bostonians. And do you know, Jacqueline, you are getting very tiresome? You were faster yourself than I when we were the Blue Band at Treport."

Nora's admirers, sometimes encouraged, sometimes snubbed, when treated cavalierly by this young lady, would occasionally pay court to the 'demoiselle de compagnie', who indeed was well worth their pains; but, to their surprise, the subordinate received their attentions with great coldness. Having entered her protest against what was going on, and having resisted the contagion of example, it was natural she should somewhat exaggerate her prudery, for it is hard to hit just the right point in such reaction. The result was, she made herself so disagreeable to Miss Sparks that the latter determined on getting rid of her as tactfully as possible.

Their parting took place on the day after an excursion to the Villa Sommariva, where Miss Sparks and her little court had behaved with their usual noise and rudeness. They had gone there ostensibly to see the pictures, about which none of them cared anything, for Nora, wherever she was, never liked any one to pay attention to anybody or to look at anything but her own noisy, all-pervading self.

It so happened that at the most riotous moment of the picnic an old gentleman passed near the lively crowd. He was quite inoffensive, pleasant-mannered, and walked leaning on his cane, yet, had the statue of the Commander in Don Juan suddenly appeared it could not have produced such consternation as his presence did on Jacqueline, when, after a moment's hesitation, he bowed to her. She recognized in him a friend of Madame d'Argy, M. Martel, whom she had often met at her house in Paris and at Lizerolles. When he recognized her, she fancied she had seen pass over his face a look of painful surprise. He would surely tell how he had met her; what would her old friends think of her? What would Fred? For some time past she had thought more than ever before of what Fred would think of her. The more she grew disgusted with the men she met, the more she appreciated his good qualities, and the more she thought of the honest, faithful love he had offered her--love that she had so madly thrown away. She never should meet such love again, she thought. It was the idea of how Fred would blame her when he heard what she pictured to herself the old gentleman would say of her, that suddenly decided her to leave Bellagio.

She told Mr. Sparks that evening that she was not strong enough for such duties as were required of a companion.

He looked at her with pity and annoyance.

"I should have thought you had more energy. How do you expect to live by work if you are not strong enough for pleasure?"

"Pleasure needs strength as well as labor," she said, smiling; "I would rather work in the fields than go on amusing myself as I have been doing."

"My dear, you must not be so difficult to please. When people have to earn their bread, it is a bad plan. I am afraid you will find out before long that there are harder ways of making a living than lunching, dancing, walking, and driving from morning to night in a pretty country--"

Here Mr. Sparks began to laugh as he thought of all he had had to do, without making objections, in the Far West, in the heroic days of his youthful vigor. He was rather fond of recalling how he had carried his pick on his shoulder and his knife in his belt, with two Yankee sayings in his head, and little besides for baggage: "Muscle and pluck!--Muscle and pluck!" and "Go ahead for ever!" That was the sort of thing to be done when a man or a woman had not a cent.

And now, what was Jacqueline to do next? She reflected that in a very short time she had attempted many things. It seemed to her that all she could do now was to follow the advice which, when first given her by Madame Strahlberg, had frightened her, though she had found it so attractive. She would study with Madame Rochette; she would go to the Milan Conservatory, and as soon as she came of age she would go upon the stage, under a feigned name, of course, and in a foreign country. She

would prove to the world, she said to herself, that the career of an actress is compatible with self-respect. This resolve that she would never be found wanting in self-respect held a prominent place in all her plans, as she began to understand better those dangers in life which are for the most part unknown to young girls born in her social position. Jacqueline's character, far from being injured by her trials and experiences, had gained in strength. She grew firmer as she gained in knowledge. Never had she been so worthy of regard and interest as at the very time when her friends were saying sadly to themselves, "She is going to the bad," and when, from all appearances, they were right in this conclusion.

CHAPTER XVII

TWIN DEVILS

Jacqueline came to the conclusion that she had better seriously consult Madame Strahlberg. She therefore stopped at Monaco, where this friend, whom she intended to honor with the strange office of Mentor, was passing the winter in a little villa in the Condamine quarter--a cottage surrounded by roses and laurel-bushes, painted in soft colors and looking like a plaything.

Madame Strahlberg had already urged Jacqueline to come and make acquaintance with her "paradise," without giving her any hint of the delights of that paradise, from which that of gambling was not excluded, for Madame Strahlberg was eager for any kind of excitement. Roulette now occupied with her a large part of every night--indeed, her nights had been rarely given to slumber, for her creed was that morning is the time for sleep, for which reason they never took breakfast in the pink villa, but tea, cakes, and confectionery were eaten instead at all hours until the evening. Thus it happened very often that they had no dinner, and guests had to accommodate themselves to the strange ways of the family. Jacqueline, however, did not stay long enough to know much of those ways.

She arrived, poor thing, with weary wing, like some bird, who, escaping from the fowler's net, where it has left its feathers, flies straight to the spot where a sportsman lies ready to shoot it. She was received with the same cries of joy, the same kisses, the same demonstrations of affection, as those which, the summer before, had welcomed her to the Rue de Naples. They told her she could sleep on a sofa, exactly like the one on which she had passed that terrible night which had resulted in her expulsion from the convent; and it was decided that she must stay several days, at least, before she went on to Paris, to begin the life of hard study and courageous work which would make of her a great singer.

Tired?--No, she was hardly tired at all. The journey over the enchanting road of the Corniche had awakened in her a fervor of admiration which prevented her from feeling any bodily needs, and now she seemed to have reached fairyland, where the verdure of the tropics was like the hanging

gardens of Babylon, only those had never had a mirror to reflect back their ancient, far-famed splendor, like that before her eyes, as she looked down upon the Mediterranean, with the sun setting in the west in a sky all crimson and gold.

Notwithstanding the disorder of her travelling-dress, Jacqueline allowed her friend to take her straight from the railway station to the Terrace of Monte Carlo. She fell into ecstasies at sight of the African cacti, the century plants, and the fig-trees of Barbary, covering the low walls whence they looked down into the water; at the fragrance of the evergreens that surrounded the beautiful palace with its balustrades, dedicated to all the worst passions of the human race; with the sharp rocky outline of Turbia; with an almost invisible speck on the horizon which they said was Corsica; with everything, which, whether mirage or reality, lifted her out of herself, and plunged her into that state of excited happiness and indescribable sense of bodily comfort, which exterior impressions so easily produce upon the young.

After exhausting her vocabulary in exclamations and in questions, she stood silent, watching the sun as it sank beneath the waters, thinking that life is well worth living if it can give us such glorious spectacles, notwithstanding all the difficulties that may have to be passed through. Several minutes elapsed before she turned her radiant face and dazzled eyes toward Wanda, or rather toward the spot where Wanda had been standing beside her. "Oh! my dear--how beautiful!" she murmured with a long sigh.

The sigh was echoed by a man, who for a few moments had looked at her with as much admiration as she had looked at the landscape. He answered her by saying, in a low voice, the tones of which made her tremble from head to foot:

"Jacqueline!"

"Monsieur de Cymier!"

The words slipped through her lips as they suddenly turned pale. She had an instinctive, sudden persuasion that she had been led into a snare. If not, why was Madame Strahlberg now absorbed in conversation with three other persons at some little distance.

"Forgive me--you did not expect to see me--you seem quite startled," said the young man, drawing near her. With an effort she commanded herself and looked full in his face. Her anger rose. She had seen the same look in the ugly, brutal face of Oscar de Talbrun. From the Terrace of Monte Carlo her memory flew back to a country road in Normandy, and she clenched her hand round an imaginary riding-whip. She needed coolness and she needed courage. They came as if by miracle.

"It is certain, Monsieur," she answered, slowly, "that I did not expect to meet you here."

"Chance has had pity on me," he replied, bowing low, as she had set him

the example of ceremony.

But he had no idea of losing time in commonplace remarks--he wished to take up their intimacy on the terms it had been formerly, to resume the romance he himself had interrupted.

"I knew," he said in the same low voice, full of persuasion, which gave especial meaning to his words, "I knew that, after all, we should meet again."

"I did not expect it," said Jacqueline, haughtily.

"Because you do not believe in the magnetism of a fixed desire."

"No, I do not believe any such thing, when, opposed to such a desire, there is a strong, firm will," said Jacqueline, her eyes burning.

"Ah!" he murmured, and he might have been supposed to be really moved, so much his look changed, "do not abuse your power over me--do not make me wretched; if you could only understand--"

She made a swift movement to rejoin Madame Strahlberg, but that lady was already coming toward them with the same careless ease with which she had left them together.

"Well! you have each found an old acquaintance," she said, gayly.

"I beg your pardon, my loveliest, but I had to speak to some old friends, and ask them to join us to-morrow evening. We shall sup at the restaurant of the Grand Hotel, after the opera--for, I did not tell you before, you will have the good luck to hear Patti. Monsieur de Cymier, we shall expect you. Au revoir."

He had been on the point of asking leave to walk home with them. But there was something in Jacqueline's look, and in her stubborn silence, that deterred him. He thought it best to leave a skilful advocate to plead his cause before he continued a conversation which had not begun satisfactorily. Not that Gerard de Cymier was discouraged by the behavior of Jacqueline. He had expected her to be angry at his defection, and that she would make him pay for it; but a little skill on his part, and a little credulity on hers, backed by the intervention of a third party, might set things right.

One moment he lingered to look at her, admiring her as she stood in the light of the dying sun, as beautiful in her plain dress and her indignant paleness, while she looked far out to sea, that she might not be obliged to look at him, as she had been when he had known her in prosperity.

At that moment he knew she hated him, but it would be an additional delight to overcome that feeling.

The two women, when he left them, continued walking on the terrace side by side, without a word. Wanda watched her companion out of the corners of her eyes, and hummed an air to herself to break the silence. She saw

a storm gathering under Jacqueline's black eyebrows, and knew that sharp arrows were likely to shoot forth from those lips which several times had opened, though not a word had been uttered, probably through fear of saying too little or too much.

At last she made some trifling comment on the view, explaining something about pigeon-shooting.

"Wanda," interrupted Jacqueline, "did you not know what happened once?"

"Happened, how? About what?" asked Madame Strahlberg, with an air of innocence.

"I am speaking of the way Monsieur de Cymier treated me."

"Bah! He was in love with you. Who didn't know it? Every one could see that. It was all the more reason why you should have been glad to meet him."

"He did not act as if he were much in love," said Jacqueline.

"Because he went away when your family thought he was about to make his formal proposal? Not all men are marrying men, my dear, nor have all women that vocation. Men fall in love all the same."

"Do you think, then, that when a man knows he has no intention of marrying he should pay court to a young girl? I think I told you at the time that he had paid court to me, and that he afterward--how shall I say it?--basely deserted me."

The sharp and thrilling tone in which Jacqueline said this amused Madame Strahlberg.

"What big words, my dear! No, I don't remember that you ever said anything of the sort to me before. But you are wrong. As we grow older we lay aside harsh judgments and sharp words. They do no good. In your place I should be touched by the thought that a man so charming had been faithful to me."

"Faithful!" cried Jacqueline, her dark eyes flashing into the cat-like eyes of Madame Strahlberg.

Wanda looked down, and fastened a ribbon at her waist.

"Ever since we have been here," she said, "he has been talking of you."

"Really--for how long?"

"Oh, if you must know, for the last two weeks."

"It is just a fortnight since you wrote and asked me to stay with you," said Jacqueline, coldly and reproachfully.

"Oh, well--what's the harm? Suppose I did think your presence would increase the attractions of Monaco?"

"Why did you not tell me?"

"Because I never write a word more than is necessary; you know how lazy I am. And also because, I may as well confess, it might have scared you off, you are so sensitive."

"Then you meant to take me by surprise?" said Jacqueline, in the same tone.

"Oh! my dear, why do you try to quarrel with me?" replied Madame Strahlberg, stopping suddenly and looking at her through her eyeglass. "We may as well understand what you mean by a free and independent life."

And thereupon ensued an address to which Jacqueline listened, leaning one hand on a balustrade of that enchanted garden, while the voice of the serpent, as she thought, was ringing in her ears. Her limbs shook under her--her brain reeled. All her hopes of success as a singer on the stage Madame Strahlberg swept away, as not worth a thought. She told her that, in her position, had she meant to be too scrupulous, she should have stayed in the convent. Everything to Jacqueline seemed to dance before her eyes. The evening closed around them, the light died out, the landscape, like her life, had lost its glow. She uttered a brief prayer for help, such a prayer as she had prayed in infancy. She whispered it in terror, like a cry in extreme danger. She was more frightened by Wanda's wicked words than she had been by M. de Talbrun or by M. de Cymier. She ceased to know what she was saying till the last words, "You have good sense and you will think about it," met her ear.

Jacqueline said not a word.

Wanda took her arm. "You may be sure," she said, "that I am thinking only of your good. Come! Would you like to go into the Casino and look at the pictures? No, you are tired? You can see them some evening. The ballroom holds a thousand persons. Yes, if you prefer, we will go home. You can take a nap till dinner-time. We shall dine at eight o'clock."

Conversation languished till they reached the Villa Rosa. Notwithstanding Jacqueline's efforts to appear natural, her own voice rang in her ears in tones quite new to her, a laugh that she uttered without any occasion, and which came near resulting in hysterics. Yet she had power enough over her nerves to notice the surroundings as she entered the house. At the door of the room in which she was to sleep, and which was on the first story, Madame Strahlberg kissed her with one of those equivocal smiles which so long had imposed on her simplicity.

"Till eight o'clock, then."

"Till eight o'clock," repeated Jacqueline, passively.

But when eight o'clock came she sent word that she had a severe headache, and would try to sleep it off.

Suppose, she thought, M. de Cymier should have been asked to dinner; suppose she should be placed next to him at table? Anything in that house seemed possible now.

They brought her a cup of tea. Up to a late hour she heard a confused noise of music and laughter. She did not try to sleep. All her faculties were on the alert, like those of a prisoner who is thinking of escape. She knew what time the night trains left the station, and, abandoning her trunk and everything else that she had with her, she furtively--but ready, if need were, to fight for her liberty with the strength of desperation--slipped down the broad stairs over their thick carpet and pushed open a little glass door. Thank heaven! people came in and went out of that house as if it had been a mill. No one discovered her flight till the next morning, when she was far on her way to Paris in an express train. Modeste, quite unprepared for her young mistress's arrival, was amazed to see her drop down upon her, feverish and excited, like some poor hunted animal, with strength exhausted. Jacqueline flung herself into her nurse's arms as she used to do when, as a little girl, she was in what she fancied some great trouble, and she cried: "Oh, take me in--pray take me in! Keep me safe! Hide me!" And then she told Modeste everything, speaking rapidly and disconnectedly, thankful to have some one to whom she could open her heart. In default of Modeste she would have spoken to stone walls.

"And what will you do now, my poor darling?" asked the old nurse, as soon as she understood that her young lady had come back to her, "with weary foot and broken wing," from what she had assured her on her departure would be a brilliant excursion.

"Oh! I don't know," answered Jacqueline, in utter discouragement; "I am too worn out to think or to do anything. Let me rest; that is all."

"Why don't you go to see your stepmother?"

"My stepmother? Oh, no! She is at the bottom of all that has happened to me."

"Or Madame d'Argy? Or Madame de Talbrun? Madame de Talbrun is the one who would give you good advice."

Jacqueline shook her head with a sad smile.

"Let me stay here. Don't you remember--years ago--but it seems like yesterday--all the rest is like a nightmare--how I used to hide myself under your petticoats, and you would say, going on with your knitting: 'You see she is not here; I can't think where she can be.' Hide me now just like that, dear old Modeste. Only hide me."

And Modeste, full of heartfelt pity, promised to hide her "dear child" from every one, which promise, however, did not prevent her, for she was

very self-willed, from going, without Jacqueline's knowledge, to see Madame de Talbrun and tell her all that had taken place. She was hurt and amazed at her reception by Giselle, and at her saying, without any offer of help or words of sympathy, "She has only reaped what she has sown." Giselle would have been more than woman had not Fred, and a remembrance of the wrongs that he had suffered through Jacqueline, now stood between them. For months he had been the prime object in her life; her mission of comforter had brought her the greatest happiness she had ever known. She tried to make him turn his attention to some serious work in life; she wanted to keep him at home, for his mother's sake, she thought; she fancied she had inspired him with a taste for home life. If she had examined herself she might have discovered that the task she had undertaken of doing good to this young man was not wholly for his sake but partly for her own. She wanted to see him nearly every day and to occupy a place in his life ever larger and larger. But for some time past the conscientious Giselle had neglected the duty of strict self-examination. She was thankful to be happy--and though Fred was a man little given to self-flattery in his relations with women, he could not but be pleased at the change produced in her by her intercourse with him.

But while Fred and Giselle considered themselves as two friends trying to console each other, people had begun to talk about them. Even Madame d'Argy asked herself whether her son might not have escaped from the cruel claws of a young coquette of the new school to fall into a worse scrape with a married woman. She imagined what might happen if the jealousy of "that wild boar of an Oscar de Talbrun" were aroused; the dangers, far more terrible than the perils of the sea, that might in such a case await her only son, the child for whose safety her mother-love caused her to suffer perpetual torments. "O mothers! mothers!" she often said to herself, "how much they are to be pitied. And they are very blind. If Fred must get into danger and difficulty for any woman, it should not have been for Giselle de Talbrun."

CHAPTER XVIII

"AN AFFAIR OF HONOR"

A meeting took place yesterday at Vesinet between the Vicomte de Cymier, secretary of Embassy at Vienna, and M. Frederic d'Argy, ensign in the navy. The parties fought with swords. The seconds of M. de Cymier were the Prince de Moelk and M. d'Etaples, captain in the --th Hussars; those of M. d'Argy Hubert Marien, the painter. M. d'Argy was wounded in the right arm, and for the present the affair is terminated, but it is said it will be resumed on M. d'Argy's recovery, although this seems hardly probable, considering the very slight cause of the quarrel--an altercation at the Cercle de la Rue Boissy d'Anglas, which took place over the card-table.

Such was the announcement in a daily paper that met the eyes of Jacqueline, as she lay hidden in Modeste's lodging, like a fawn in its

covert, her eyes and ears on the alert, watching for the least sign of alarm, in fear and trembling. She expected something, she knew not what; she felt that her sad adventure at Monaco could not fail to have its epilogue; but this was one of which she never had dreamed.

"Modeste, give me my hat! Get me a carriage! Quick! Oh, my God, it is my fault!--I have killed him!"

These incoherent cries came from her lips while Modeste, in alarm, picked up the newspaper and adjusted her silver spectacles upon her nose to read the paragraph. "Monsieur Fred wounded! Holy Virgin! His poor mother! That is a new trouble fallen on her, to be sure. But this quarrel had nothing to do with you, my pet; you see they say it was about cards."

And folding up the Figaro, while Jacqueline in all haste was wrapping her head in a veil, Modeste, with the best intentions, went on to say: "Nobody ever dies of a sword-thrust in the arm."

"But you see it says that they are going to fight all over again--don't you understand? You are so stupid! What could they have had to quarrel about but me? O God! Thou art just! This is indeed punishment--too much punishment for me!"

So saying, she ran down the many stairs that led up to Modeste's little lodging in the roof, her feet hardly touching them as she ran, while Modeste followed her more slowly, crying: "Wait for me! Wait for me, Mademoiselle!"

Calling a fiacre, Jacqueline, almost roughly, pushed the old woman into it, and gave the coachman the address of Madame d'Argy, having, in her excitement, first given him that of their old house in the Parc Monceau, so much was she possessed by the idea that this was a repetition of that dreadful day, when with Modeste, just as now, she went to meet an irreparable loss. She seemed to see before her her dead father--he looked like Fred, and now, as before, Marien had his part in the tragedy. Could he not have prevented the duel? Could he not have done something to prevent Fred from exposing himself? The wound might be no worse than it was said to be in the newspaper--but then a second meeting was to take place. No!--it should not, she would stop it at any price!

And yet, as the coach drew nearer to the Rue de Varenne, where Madame d'Argy had her winter residence, a little calm, a little sense returned to Jacqueline. She did not see how she could dare to enter that house, where probably they cursed her very name. She would wait in the street with the carriage-blinds pulled down, and Modeste should go in and ask for information. Five minutes passed--ten minutes passed--they seemed ages. How slow Modeste was, slow as a tortoise! How could she leave her there when she knew she was so anxious? What could she be doing? All she had to do was to ask news of M. Fred in just two words!

At last, Jacqueline could bear suspense no longer. She opened the coach-door and jumped out on the pavement. Just at that moment Modeste appeared, brandishing the umbrella that she carried instead of a stick,

in a manner that meant something. It might be bad news, she would know in a moment; anything was better than suspense. She sprang forward.

"What did they say, Modeste? Speak!--Why have you been such a time?"

"Because the servants had something else to do than to attend to me. I wasn't the only person there--they were writing in a register. Get back into the carriage, Mademoiselle, or somebody will see you-- There are lots of people there who know you--Monsieur and Madame d'Etaples--"

"What do I care?--The truth! Tell me the truth--"

"But didn't you understand my signals? He is going on well. It was only a scratch--Ah! Madame that's only my way of talking. He will be laid up for a fortnight. The doctor was there--he has some fever, but he is not in any danger."

"Oh! what a blessing! Kiss me, Modeste. We have a fortnight in which we may interfere--But how--Oh, how?--Ah! there is Giselle! We will go to Giselle at once!"

And the 'fiacre' was ordered to go as fast as possible to the Rue Barbet-de-Jouy. This time Jacqueline herself spoke to the concierge.

"Madame la Comtesse is out."

"But she never goes out at this hour. I wish to see her on important business. I must see her."

And Jacqueline passed the concierge, only to encounter another refusal from a footman, who insisted that Madame la Comtesse was at home to no one.

"But me, she will see me. Go and tell her it is Mademoiselle de Nailles."

Moved by her persistence, the footman went in to inquire, and came back immediately with the answer:

"Madame la Comtesse can not see Mademoiselle."

"Ah!" thought Jacqueline, "she, too, throws me off, and it is natural. I have no friends left. No one will tell me anything!--I think it will drive me mad?"

She was half-mad already. She stopped at a newsstand and bought all the evening journals; then, up in her garret, in her poor little nest under the roof-which, as she felt bitterly, was her only refuge, she began to look over those printed papers in which she might possibly find out the true cause of the duel. Nearly all related the event in almost the exact terms used by the Figaro. Ah!--here was a different one! A reporter who knew something more added, in Gil Blas: "We have stated the cause of the

dispute as it has been given to the public, but in affairs of this nature more than in any others, it is safe to remember the old proverb: 'Look for the woman.' The woman could doubtless have been found enjoying herself on the sunny shores of the Mediterranean, while men were drawing swords in her defense."

Jacqueline went on looking through the newspapers, crumpling up the sheets as she laid them down. The last she opened had the reputation of being a repository of scandals, never to be depended on, as she well knew. Several times it had come to her hand and she had not opened it, remembering what her father had always said of its reputation. But where would she be more likely to find what she wanted than in the columns of a journal whose reporters listened behind doors and peeped through keyholes? Under the heading of 'Les Dessous Parisiens', she read on the first page:

"Two hens lived in peace; a cock came
And strife soon succeeded to joy;
E'en as love, they say, kindled the flame
That destroyed the proud city of Troy.

"This quarrel was the outcome of a violent rupture between the two hens in question, ending in the flight of one of them, a young and tender pullet, whose voice we trust soon to hear warbling on the boards at one of our theatres. This was the subject of conversation in a low voice at the Cercle, at the hour when it is customary to tell such little scandals. M. de C----- was enlarging on the somewhat Bohemian character of the establishment of a lovely foreign lady, who possesses the secret of being always surrounded by delightful friends, young ladies who are self-emancipated, quasi-widows who, by divorce suits, have regained their liberty, etc. He was speaking of one of the beauties who are friends of his friend Madame S----, as men speak of women who have proved themselves careless of public opinion; when M. d'A----, in a loud voice, interrupted him; the lie was given in terms that of course led to the hostile meeting of which the press has spoken, attributing it to a dispute about the Queen of Spades, when it really concerned the Queen of Hearts."

Then she had made no mistake; it had been her flight from Madame Strahlberg's which had led to her being attacked by one man, and defended by the other! Jacqueline found it hard to recognize herself in this tissue of lies, insinuations, and half-truths. What did the paper mean its readers to understand by its account? Was it a jealous rivalry between herself and Madame Strahlberg?--Was M. de Cymier meant by the cock? And Fred had heard all this--he had drawn his sword to refute the calumny. Brave Fred! Alas! he had been prompted only by chivalric generosity. Doubtless he, also, looked upon her as an adventuress.

All night poor Jacqueline wept with such distress that she wished that she might die. She was dropping off to sleep at last, overpowered by fatigue, when a ring at the bell in the early morning roused her. Then she heard whispering:

"Do you think she is so unhappy?"

It was the voice of Giselle.

"Come in--come in quickly!" she cried, springing out of bed. Wrapped in a dressing-gown, with bare feet, her face pale, her eyelids red, her complexion clouded, she rushed to meet her friend, who was almost as much disordered as herself. It seemed as if Madame de Talbrun might also have passed a night of sleeplessness and tears.

"You have come! Oh! you have come at last!" cried Jacqueline, throwing her arms around her, but Giselle repelled her with a gesture so severe that the poor child could not but understand its meaning. She murmured, pointing to the pile of newspapers: "Is it possible?--Can you have believed all those dreadful things?"

"What things? I have read nothing," said Giselle, harshly. "I only know that a man who was neither your husband nor your brother, and who consequently was under no obligation to defend you, has been foolish enough to be nearly killed for your sake. Is not that a proof of your downfall? Don't you know it?"

"Downfall?" repeated Jacqueline, as if she did not understand her. Then, seizing her friend's hand, she forcibly raised it to her lips: "Ah! what can anything matter to me," she cried, "if only you remain my friend; and he has never doubted me!"

"Women like you can always find defenders," said Giselle, tearing her hand from her cousin's grasp.

Giselle was not herself at that moment. "But, for your own sake, it would have been better he should have abstained from such an act of Quixotism."

"Giselle! can it be that you think me guilty?"

"Guilty!" cried Madame de Talbrun, her pale face aflame. "A little more and Monsieur de Cymier's sword-point would have pierced his lungs."

"Good heavens!" cried Jacqueline, hiding her face in her hands. "But I have done nothing to--"

"Nothing except to set two men against each other; to make them suffer, or to make fools of them, and to be loved by them all the same."

"I have not been a coquette," said Jacqueline, with indignation.

"You must have been, to authorize the boasts of Monsieur de Cymier. He had seen Fred so seldom, and Tonquin had so changed him that he spoke in his presence--without supposing any one would interfere. I dare not tell you what he said--"

"Whatever spite or revenge suggested to him, no doubt," said Jacqueline.

"Listen, Giselle--Oh, you must listen. I shall not be long."

She forced her to sit down; she crouched on a foot stool at her feet, holding her hands in hers so tightly that Giselle could not draw them away, and began her story, with all its details, of what had happened to her since she left Fresne. She told of her meeting with Wanda; of the fatal evening which had resulted in her expulsion from the convent; her disgust at the Sparks family; the snare prepared for her by Madame Strahlberg. "And I can not tell you all," she added, "I can not tell you what drove me away from my true friends, and threw me among these people--"

Giselle's sad smile seemed to answer, "No need--I am aware of it--I know my husband." Encouraged by this, Jacqueline went on with her confession, hiding nothing that was wrong, showing herself just as she had been, a poor, proud child who had set out to battle for herself in a dangerous world. At every step she had been more and more conscious of her own imprudence, of her own weakness, and of an ever-increasing desire to be done with independence; to submit to law, to be subject to any rules which would deliver her from the necessity of obeying no will but her own.

"Ah!" she cried, "I am so disgusted with independence, with amusement, and amusing people! Tell me what to do in future--I am weary of taking charge of myself. I said so the other day to the Abbe Bardin. He is the only person I have seen since my return. It seems to me I am coming back to my old ideas--you remember how I once wished to end my days in the cell of a Carmelite? You might love me again then, perhaps, and Fred and poor Madame d'Argy, who must feel so bitterly against me since her son was wounded, might forgive me. No one feels bitterly against the dead, and it is the same as being dead to be a Carmelite nun. You would all speak of me sometimes to each other as one who had been very unhappy, who had been guilty of great foolishness, but who had repaired her faults as best she could."

Poor Jacqueline! She was no longer a girl of the period; in her grief and humiliation she belonged to the past. Old-fashioned forms of penitence attracted her.

"And what did the Abbe Bardin tell you?" asked Giselle, with a slight movement of her shoulders.

"He only told me that he could not say at present whether that were my vocation."

"Nor can I," said Giselle.

Jacqueline lifted up her face, wet with tears, which she had been leaning on the lap of Giselle.

"I do not see what else I can do, unless you would get me a place as

governess somewhere at the ends of the earth," she said. "I could teach children their letters. I should not mind doing anything. I never should complain. Ah! if you lived all by yourself, Giselle, how I should implore you to take me to teach little Enguerrand!"

"I think you might do better than that," said Giselle, wiping her friend's eyes almost as a mother might have done, "if you would only listen to Fred."

Jacqueline's cheeks became crimson.

"Don't mock me--it is cruel--I am too unworthy--it would pain me to see him. Shame--regret--you understand! But I can tell you one thing, Giselle--only you. You may tell it to him when he is quite old, when he has been long married, and when everything concerning me is a thing of the past. I never had loved any one with all my heart up to the moment when I read in that paper that he had fought for me, that his blood had flowed for me, that after all that had passed he still thought me worthy of being defended by him."

Her tears flowed fast, and she added: "I shall be proud of that all the rest of my life! If only you, too, would forgive me."

The heart of Giselle was melted by these words.

"Forgive you, my dear little girl? Ah! you have been better than I. I forgot our old friendship for a moment--I was harsh to you; and I have so little right to blame you! But come! Providence may have arranged all for the best, though one of us may have to suffer. Pray for that some one. Good-by--'au revoir!"

She kissed Jacqueline's forehead and was gone, before her cousin had seized the meaning of her last words. But joy and peace came back to Jacqueline. She had recovered her best friend, and had convinced her of her innocence.

CHAPTER XIX

GENTLE CONSPIRATORS

Before Giselle went home to her own house she called on the Abbe Bardin, whom a rather surly servant was not disposed to disturb, as he was just eating his breakfast. The Abbe Bardin was Jacqueline's confessor, and he held the same relation to a number of other young girls who were among her particular friends. He was thoroughly acquainted with all that concerned their delicate and generally childish little souls. He kept them in the right way, had often a share in their marriages, and in general kept an eye upon them all their lives. Even when they escaped from him, as had happened in the case of Jacqueline, he did not give them up. He commended them to God, and looked forward to the time of their

repentance with the patience of a father. The Abbe Bardin had never been willing to exercise any function but that of catechist; he had grown old in the humble rank of third assistant in a great parish, when, with a little ambition, he might have been its rector. "Suffer little children to come unto me," had been his motto. These words of his Divine Master seemed more often than any others on his lips--lips so expressive of loving kindness, though sometimes a shrewd smile would pass over them and seem to say: "I know, I can divine." But when this smile, the result of long experience, did not light up his features, the good Abbe Bardin looked like an elderly child; he was short, his walk was a trot, his face was round and ruddy, his eyes, which were short-sighted, were large, wide-open, and blue, and his heavy crop of white hair, which curled and crinkled above his forehead, made him look like a sixty-year-old angel, crowned with a silvery aureole.

Rubbing his hands affably, he came into the little parlor where Madame de Talbrun was waiting for him. There was probably no ecclesiastic in all Paris who had a salon so full of worked cushions, each of which was a keepsake--a souvenir of some first communion. The Abbe did not know his visitor, but the name Talbrun seemed to him connected with an honorable and well-meaning family. The lady was probably a mother who had come to put her child into his hands for religious instruction. He received visits from dozens of such mothers, some of whom were a little tiresome, from a wish to teach him what he knew better than they, and at one time he had set apart Wednesday as his day for receiving such visits, that he might not be too greatly disturbed, as seemed likely to happen to him that day. Not that he cared very much whether he ate his cutlet hot or cold, but his housekeeper cared a great deal. A man may be a very experienced director, and yet be subject to direction in other ways.

The youth of Giselle took him by surprise.

"Monsieur l'Abbe," she said, without any preamble, while he begged her to sit down, "I have come to speak to you of a person in whom you take an interest, Jacqueline de Nailles."

He passed the back of his hand over his brow and said, with a sigh: "Poor little thing!"

"She is even more to be pitied than you think. You have not seen her, I believe, since last week."

"Yes--she came. She has kept up, thank God, some of her religious duties."

"For all that, she has played a leading part in a recent scandal."

The Abbe sprang up from his chair.

"A duel has taken place because of her, and her name is in all men's mouths--whispered, of course--but the quarrel took place at the Club. You know what it is to be talked of at the Club."

"The poison of asps," growled the Abbe; "oh! those clubs--think of all the evil reports concocted in them, of which women are the victims!"

"In the present case the evil report was pure calumny. It was taken up by some one whom you also know--Frederic d'Argy."

"I have had profound respect these many years for his excellent and pious mother."

"I thought so. In that case, Monsieur l'Abbe, you would not object to going to Madame d'Argy's house and asking how her son is."

"No, of course not; but--it is my duty to disapprove--"

"You will tell her that when a young man has compromised a young girl by defending her reputation in a manner too public, there is but one thing he can do afterward--marry her."

"Wait one moment," said the Abbe, who was greatly surprised; "it is certain that a good marriage would be the best thing for Jacqueline. I have been thinking of it. But I do not think I could so suddenly--so soon after--"

"Today at four o'clock, Monsieur l'Abbe. Time presses. You can add that such a marriage is the only way to stop a second duel, which will otherwise take place."

"Is it possible?"

"And it is also the only way to bring Frederic to decide on sending in his resignation. Don't forget that--it is important."

"But how do you know--"

The poor Abbe stammered out his words, and counted on his fingers the arguments he was desired to make use of.

"And you will solemnly assure them that Jacqueline is innocent."

"Oh! as to that, there are wolves in sheeps' clothing, as the Bible tells us; but believe me, when such poor young things are in question, it is more often the sheep which has put on the appearance of a wolf--to seem in the fashion," added the Abbe, "just to seem in the fashion. Fashion will authorize any kind of counterfeiting."

"Well, you will say all that, will you not, to Madame d'Argy? It will be very good of you if you will. She will make no difficulties about money. All she wants is a quietly disposed daughter-in-law who will be willing to pass nine months of the year at Lizerolles, and Jacqueline is quite cured of her Paris fever."

"A fever too often mortal," murmured the Abbe; "oh, for the simplicity of nature! A priest whose lot is cast in the country is fortunate, Madame,

but we can not choose our vocation. We may do good anywhere, especially in cities. Are you sure, however, that Jacqueline--"

"She loves Monsieur d'Argy."

"Well, if that is so, we are all right. The great misfortune with many of these poor girls is that they have never learned to love anything; they know nothing but agitations, excitements, curiosities, and fancies. All that sort of thing runs through their heads."

"You are speaking of a Jacqueline before the duel. I can assure you that ever since yesterday, if not before, she has loved Monsieur d'Argy, who on his part for a long time--a very long time--has been in love with her."

Giselle spoke eagerly, as if she forced herself to say the words that cost her pain. Her cheeks were flushed under her veil. The Abbe, who was keen-sighted, observed these signs.

"But," continued Giselle, "if he is forced to forget her he may try to expend elsewhere the affection he feels for her; he may trouble the peace of others, while deceiving himself. He might make in the world one of those attachments--Do not fail to represent all these dangers to Madame d'Argy when you plead the cause of Jacqueline."

"Humph! You are evidently much attached, Madame, to Mademoiselle de Nailles."

"Very much, indeed," she answered, bravely, "very much attached to her, and still more to him; therefore you understand that this marriage must--absolutely must take place."

She had risen and was folding her cloak round her, looking straight into the Abbe's eyes. Small as she was, their height was almost the same; she wanted him to understand thoroughly why this marriage must take place.

He bowed. Up to that time he had not been quite sure that he had not to do with one of those wolves dressed in fleece whose appearance is as misleading as that of sheep disguised as wolves: now his opinion was settled.

"Mon Dieu! Madame," he said, "your reasons seem to me excellent--a duel to be prevented, a son to be kept by the side of his sick mother, two young people who love each other to be married, the saving, possibly, of two souls--"

"Say three souls, Monsieur l'Abbe!"

He did not ask whose was the third, nor even why she had insisted that this delicate commission must be executed that same day. He only bowed when she said again: "At four o'clock: Madame d'Argy will be prepared to see you. Thank you, Monsieur l'Abbe." And then, as she descended the staircase, he bestowed upon her silently his most earnest benediction,

before returning to the cold cutlet that was on his breakfast table.

Giselle did not breakfast much better than he. In truth, M. de Talbrun being absent, she sat looking at her son, who was eating with a good appetite, while she drank only a cup of tea; after which, she dressed herself, with more than usual care, hiding by rice-powder the trace of recent tears on her complexion, and arranging her fair hair in the way that was most becoming to her, under a charming little bonnet covered with gold net-work which corresponded with the embroidery on an entirely new costume.

When she went into the dining-room Enguerrand, who was there with his nurse finishing his dessert, cried out: "Oh! mamma, how pretty you are!" which went to her heart. She kissed him two or three times--one kiss after another.

"I try to be pretty for your sake, my darling."

"Will you take me with you?"

"No, but I will come back for you, and take you out."

She walked a few steps, and then turned to give him such a kiss as astonished him, for he said:

"Is it really going to be long?"

"What?"

"Before you come back? You kiss me as if you were going for a long time, far away."

"I kissed you to give myself courage."

Enguerrand, who, when he had a hard lesson to learn, always did the same thing, appeared to understand her.

"You are going to do some thing you don't like."

"Yes, but I have to do it, because you see it is my duty."

"Do grown people have duties?"

"Even more than children."

"But it isn't your duty to write a copy--your writing is so pretty. Oh! that's what I hate most. And you always say it is my duty to write my copy. I'll go and do it while you do your duty. So that will seem as if we were both together doing something we don't like--won't it, mamma?"

She kissed him again, even more passionately.

"We shall be always together, we two, my love!"

This word love struck the little ear of Enguerrand as having a new accent, a new meaning, and, boy-like, he tried to turn this excess of tenderness to advantage.

"Since you love me so much, will you take me to see the puppet-show?"

"Anywhere you like--when I come back. Goodby."

CHAPTER XX

A CHIVALROUS SOUL

Madame D'Argy sat knitting by the window in Fred's chamber, with that resigned but saddened air that mothers wear when they are occupied in repairing the consequences of some rash folly. Fred had seen her in his boyhood knitting in the same way with the same, look on her face, when he had been thrown from his pony, or had fallen from his velocipede. He himself looked ill at ease and worried, as he lay on a sofa with his arm in a sling. He was yawning and counting the hours. From time to time his mother glanced at him. Her look was curious, and anxious, and loving, all at the same time. He pretended to be asleep. He did not like to see her watching him. His handsome masculine face, tanned that pale brown which tropical climates give to fair complexions, looked odd as it rose above a light-blue cape, a very feminine garment which, as it had no sleeves, had been tied round his neck to keep him from being cold. He felt himself, with some impatience, at the mercy of the most tender, but the most sharp-eyed of nurses, a prisoner to her devotion, and made conscious of her power every moment. Her attentions worried him; he knew that they all meant "It is your own fault, my poor boy, that you are in this state, and that your mother is so unhappy." He felt it. He knew as well as if she had spoken that she was asking him to return to reason, to marry, without more delay, their little neighbor in Normandy, Mademoiselle d'Argeville, a niece of M. Martel, whom he persisted in not thinking of as a wife, always calling her a "cider apple," in allusion to her red cheeks.

A servant came in, and said to Madame d'Argy that Madame de Talbrun was in the salon.

"I am coming," she said, rolling up her knitting.

But Fred suddenly woke up:

"Why not ask her to come here?"

"Very good," said his mother, with hesitation. She was distracted between her various anxieties; exasperated against the fatal influence of Jacqueline, alarmed by the increasing intimacy with Giselle, desirous that all such complications should be put an end to by his marriage, but

terribly afraid that her "cider apple" would not be sufficient to accomplish it.

"Beg Madame de Talbrun to come in here," she said, repeating the order after her son; but she settled herself in her chair with an air more patient, more resigned than ever, and her lips were firmly closed.

Giselle entered in her charming new gown, and Fred's first words, like those of Enguerrand, were: "How pretty you are! It is charity," he added, smiling, "to present such a spectacle to the eyes of a sick man; it is enough to set him up again."

"Isn't it?" said Giselle, kissing Madame d'Argy on the forehead. The poor mother had resumed her knitting with a sigh, hardly glancing at the pretty walking-costume, nor at the bonnet with its network of gold.

"Isn't it pretty?" repeated Giselle. "I am delighted with this costume. It is made after one of Rejane's. Oscar fell in love with it at a first representation of a vaudeville, and he gave me over into the hands of the same dressmaker, who indeed was named in the play. That kind of advertising seems very effective."

She went on chattering thus to put off what she had really come to say. Her heart was beating so fast that its throbs could be seen under the embroidered front of the bodice which fitted her so smoothly. She wondered how Madame d'Argy would receive the suggestion she was about to make.

She went on: "I dressed myself in my best to-day because I am so happy."

Madame d'Argy's long tortoise-shell knitting-needles stopped.

"I am glad to hear it, my dear," she said, coldly, "I am glad anybody can be happy. There are so many of us who are sad."

"But why are you pleased?" asked Fred, looking at her, as if by some instinct he understood that he had something to do with it.

"Our prodigal has returned," answered Giselle, with a little air of satisfaction, very artificial, however, for she could hardly breathe, so great was her fear and her emotion. "My house is in the garb of rejoicing."

"The prodigal? Do you mean your husband?" said Madame d'Argy, maliciously.

"Oh! I despair of him," replied Giselle, lightly. "No, I speak of a prodigal who did not go far, and who made haste to repent. I am speaking of Jacqueline."

There was complete silence. The knitting-needles ticked rapidly, a slight flush rose on the dark cheeks of Fred.

"All I beg," said Madame d'Argy, "is that you will not ask me to eat the fattened calf in her honor. The comings and going of Mademoiselle de Nailles have long ceased to have the slightest interest for me."

"They have for Fred at any rate; he has just proved it, I should say," replied Giselle.

By this time the others were as much embarrassed as Giselle. She saw it, and went on quickly:

"Their names are together in everybody's mouth; you can not hinder it."

"I regret it deeply-and allow me to make one remark: it seems to me you show a want of tact such as I should never have imagined in telling us--"

Giselle read in Fred's eyes, which were steadily fixed on her, that he was, on that point, of his mother's opinion. She went on, however, still pretending to blunder.

"Forgive me--but I have been so anxious about you ever since I heard there was to be a second meeting--"

"A second meeting!" screamed Madame d'Argy, who, as she read no paper but the Gazette de France, or occasionally the Debats, knew nothing of all the rumors that find their echo in the daily papers.

"Oh, 'mon Dieu! I thought you knew--"

"You need not frighten my mother," said Fred, almost angrily; "Monsieur de Cymier has written a letter which puts an end to our quarrel. It is the letter of a man of honor apologizing for having spoken lightly, for having repeated false rumors without verifying them--in short, retracting all that he had said that reflected in any way on Mademoiselle de Nailles, and authorizing me, if I think best, to make public his retraction. After that we can have nothing more to say to each other."

"He who makes himself the champion to defend a young girl's character," said Madame d'Argy, sententiously, "injures her as much as those who have spoken evil of her."

"That is exactly what I think," said Giselle. "The self-constituted champion has given the evil rumor circulation."

There was again a painful silence. Then the intrepid little woman resumed: "This step on the part of Monsieur de Cymier seems to have rendered my errand unnecessary. I had thought of a way to end this sad affair; a very simple way, much better, most certainly, than men cutting their own throats or those of other people. But since peace has been made over the ruins of Jacqueline's reputation, I had better say nothing and go away."

"No--no! Let us hear what you had to propose," said Fred, getting up from his couch so quickly that he jarred his bandaged arm, and uttered a

cry of pain, which seemed very much like an oath, too.

Giselle was silent. Standing before the hearth, she was warming her small feet, watching, as she did so, Madame d'Argy's profile, which was reflected in the mirror. It was severe--impenetrable. It was Fred who spoke first.

"In the first place," he said, hesitating, "are you sure that Mademoiselle de Nailles has not just arrived from Monaco?"

"I am certain that for a week she has been living quietly with Modeste, and that, though she passed through Monaco, she did not stay there--twenty-four hours, finding that the air of that place did not agree with her."

"But what do you say to what Monsieur Martel saw with his own eyes, and which is confirmed by public rumor?" cried Madame d'Argy, as if she were giving a challenge.

"Monsieur Martel saw Jacqueline in bad company. She was not there of her own will. As to public rumor, we may feel sure that to make it as flattering to her tomorrow as it is otherwise to-day only a marriage is necessary. Yes, a marriage! That is the way I had thought of to settle everything and make everybody happy."

"What man would marry a girl who had compromised herself?" said Madame d'Argy, indignantly.

"He who has done his part to compromise her."

"Then go and propose it to Monsieur de Cymier!"

"No. It is not Monsieur de Cymier whom she loves."

"Ah!" Madame d'Argy was on her feet at once. "Indeed, Giselle, you are losing your senses. If I were not afraid of agitating Fred--"

He was, in truth, greatly agitated. The only hand that he could use was pulling and tearing at the little blue cape crossed on his breast, in which his mother had wrapped him; and this unsuitable garment formed such a queer contrast to the expression of his face that Giselle, in her nervous excitement, burst out laughing, an explosion of merriment which completed the exasperation of Madame d'Argy.

"Never!" she cried, beside herself. "You hear me--never will I consent, whatever happens!"

At that moment the door was partly opened, and a servant announced "Monsieur l'Abbe Bardin."

Madame d'Argy made a gesture which was anything but reverential.

"Well, to be sure--this is the right moment with a vengeance! What does

he want! Does he wish me to assist in some good work--or to undertake to collect money, which I hate."

"Above all, mother," cried Fred, "don't expose me to the fatigue of receiving his visit. Go and see him yourself. Giselle will take care of your patient while you are gone. Won't you, Giselle?"

His voice was soft, and very affectionate. He evidently was not angry at what she had dared to say, and she acknowledged this to herself with an aching heart.

"I don't exactly trust your kind of care," said Madame d'Argy, with a smile that was not gay, and certainly not amiable.

She went, however, because Fred repeated:

"But go and see the Abbe Bardin."

Hardly had she left the room when Fred got up from his sofa and approached Giselle with passionate eagerness.

"Are you sure I am not dreaming," said he. "Is it you--really you who advise me to marry Jacqueline?"

"Who else should it be?" she answered, very calm to all appearance.

"Who can know better than I? But first you must oblige me by lying down again, or else I will not say one word more. That is right. Now keep still. Your mother is furiously displeased with me--I am sorry--but she will get over it. I know that in Jacqueline you would have a good wife--a wife far better than the Jacqueline you would have married formerly. She has paid dearly for her experience of life, and has profited by its lessons, so that she is now worthy of you, and sincerely repentant for her childish peccadilloes."

"Giselle," said Fred, "look me full in the face--yes, look into my eyes frankly and hide nothing. Your eyes never told anything but the truth. Why do you turn them away? Do you really and truly wish this marriage?"

She looked at him steadily as long as he would, and let him hold her hand, which was burning inside her glove, and which with a great effort she prevented from trembling. Then her nerves gave way under his long and silent gaze, which seemed to question her, and she laughed, a laugh that sounded to herself very unnatural.

"My poor, dear friend," she cried, "how easily you men are duped! You are trying to find out, to discover whether, in case you decide upon an honest act, a perfectly sensible act, to which you are strongly inclined --don't tell me you are not--whether, in short, you marry Jacqueline, I shall be really as glad of it as I pretend. But have you not found out what I have aimed at all along? Do you think I did not know from the very first what it was that made you seek me?"

"I was not the rope, but I had lived near the rose; I reminded you of her

continually. We two loved her; each of us felt we did. Even when you said harm of her, I knew it was merely because you longed to utter her name, and repeat to yourself her perfections. I laughed, yes, I laughed to myself, and I was careful how I contradicted you. I tried to keep you safe for her, to prevent your going elsewhere and forming attachments which might have resulted in your forgetting her. I did my best--do me justice--I did my best; perhaps sometimes I pushed things a little far in her interest, in that of your mother, but in yours more than all; in yours, for God knows I am all for you," said Giselle, with sudden and involuntary fervor.

"Yes, I am all yours as a friend, a faithful friend," she resumed, almost frightened by the tones of her own voice; "but as to the slightest feeling of love between us, love the most spiritual, the most platonic--yes, all men, I fancy, have a little of that kind of self-conceit. Dear Fred, don't imagine it--Enguerrand would never have allowed it."

She was smiling, half laughing, and he looked at her with astonishment, asking himself whether he could believe what she was saying, when he could recollect what seemed to him so many proofs to the contrary. Yet in what she said there was no hesitation, no incoherence, no false note. Pride, noble pride, upheld her to the end. The first falsehood of her life was a masterpiece.

"Ah, Giselle!" he said at last, not knowing what to think, "I adore you! I revere you!"

"Yes," she replied, with a smile, gracious, yet with a touch of sadness, "I know you do. But her you love!"

Might it not have been sweet to her had he answered "No, I loved her once, and remembered that old love enough to risk my life for her, but in reality I now love only you--all the more at this moment when I see you love me more than yourself." But, instead, he murmured only, like a man, and a lover: "And Jacqueline--do you think she loves me?" His anxiety, a thrill that ran through all his frame, the light in his eyes, his sudden pallor, told more than his words.

If Giselle could have doubted his love for Jacqueline before, she would have now been convinced of it. The conviction stabbed her to the heart. Death is not that last sleep in which all our faculties, weakened and exhausted, fail us; it is the blow which annihilates our supreme illusion and leaves us disabused in a cold and empty world. People walk, talk, and smile after this death--another ghost is added to the drama played on the stage of the world; but the real self is dead.

Giselle was too much of a woman, angelic as she was, to have any courage left to say: "Yes, I know she loves you."

She said instead, in a low voice: "That is a question you must ask of her."

Meantime, in the next room they could hear Madame d'Argy vehemently

repeating: "Never! No, I never will consent! Is it a plot between you?"

They heard also a rumbling monotone preceding each of these vehement interruptions. The Abbe Bardin was pointing out to her that, unmarried, her son would return to Tonquin, that Lizerolles would be left deserted, her house would be desolate without daughter-in-law or grandchildren; and, as he drew these pictures, he came back, again and again, to his main argument:

"I will answer for their happiness: I will answer for the future."

His authority as a priest gave weight to this assurance, at least Madame d'Argy felt it so. She went on saying never, but less and less emphatically, and apparently she ceased to say it at last, for three months later the d'Etaples, the Rays, the d'Avrignys and the rest, received two wedding announcements in these words:

"Madame d'Argy has the honor to inform you of the marriage of her son, M. Frederic d'Argy, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, to Mademoiselle de Nailles."

The accompanying card ran thus:

"The Baroness de Nailles has the honor to inform you of the marriage of Mademoiselle Jacqueline de Nailles, her stepdaughter, to M. Frederic d'Argy."

Congratulations showered down on both mother and stepmother. A love-match is nowadays so rare! It turned out that every one had always wished all kinds of good fortune to young Madame d'Argy, and every one seemed to take a sincere part in the joy that was expressed on the occasion, even Dolly, who, it was said, had in secret set her heart on Fred for herself; even Nora Sparks, who, not having carried out her plans, had gone back to New York, whence she sent a superb wedding present. Madame de Nailles apparently experienced at the wedding all the emotions of a real mother.

The roses at Lizerolles bloomed that year with unusual beauty, as if to welcome the young pair. Modeste sang 'Nunc Dimittis'. The least demonstrative of all those interested in the event was Giselle.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

As we grow older we lay aside harsh judgments and sharp words
Blow which annihilates our supreme illusion
Death is not that last sleep
Fool (there is no cure for that infirmity)
The worst husband is always better than none

End of this Project Gutenberg Etext of Jacqueline, v3
by Therese Bentzon (Mme. Blanc)
of Jacqueline, v3

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