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APPASSIONATA

A MUSICIAN'S STORY

BY

ELSA D'ESTERRE-KEELING

AUTHOR OF
"THREE SISTERS," "IN THOUGHTLAND AND IN DREAMLAND,
"ORCHARDSCROFT," ETC.

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1896
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Dedicated

TO

NELLY

MY MUSICIAN

Old Mandeville says: "Many men have great liking to hear of strange things of divers countries. We—you and I—have been together in divers countries, and have heard of strange things, but of none stranger, I think, than this thing—the story of Anatol Denissow and his wife Selma.

E. D'E.-K.
TO THE READER

In giving publication to the story contained in "Appassionata," I am tempted to say a few words. It is not usual in these days for authors to write prefaces to their stories, though they sometimes, I observe, have prefaces written to them by other authors. Loath as I am to trouble any one to be apologist for me, I am also loath to publish this story without a few explanatory sentences. In writing it objectivity was aimed at, and I am alarmed to find, now that it is written, that I know not what answer I could give if asked to say with whom my sympathies lie, the wronged husband or the wronged wife who are the central characters in it. We women usually take the man's part, the men taking the woman's, and so here equilibrium is upheld; and, perhaps, I am less inclined to refuse large sympathy to Anatol Denissow than to his wife Selma. Of both of
TO THE READER

them, it appears to me, it can only be said that they made "a thorough mess of things," to quote the words used by their friend Miss Olive. Perhaps, if men and women did not sometimes do this, there would be no inducement to write their stories.

ELSA D'ESTERRE-KEELING.
APPASSIONATA

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE FINN.

'O, Finland! Who knows or cares about Finland? Not even Mr. Gladstone!'—A Lady of Kensington.

She was most rarely beautiful, and Browning has described her, 'the face of her, the eyes of her, the lips, the little chin, the stir of shadow round her mouth.' She was standing with her face pressed against a window-pane, peering into the open. The outlook was a vast one, ending in a red evening sky, broken up by ships, or so it seemed, viewed from the low window. The poles, spars and masts of the old Finnish harbour made a grating behind which the sun glowed like a fire behind bars. The hot summer day was drawing to a close, and a light cool air, having suddenly sprung up, was whipping
the surface of sea and sky, making the clouds race and the waters ripple. The little being at the window was not drinking in the beauty of it, but wore as sad a look as if all the misery in the world had at that moment come to Abo and to her.

Abo, once the capital of that wonderful land which has risen, which still is rising, up out of the sea, is a city with a story. Lying on the coast of Finland, facing Sweden, and washed by island-studded waters, whose every wave-beat brings a greeting from that whilom suzerain-country, it is proud, if sad, in its old memories. Here it was that Swedes and Russians met some century and a half ago to conclude the negotiations by which Sweden was made to cede her Finnish possessions to Russia. Abo has looked sadder ever since. Learning once flourished here, but fire and the powers that were leagued themselves against Abo, and her university was moved to the new capital of Helsingfors, which lies further eastward, fronting Russia, the new suzerain-land, and washed by the waters that wash St. Petersburg.

One thing Abo has kept—her sanctity: she has still her bishops. And she has still her shipping.

They know three languages here: Finnish, Swedish and Russian. They are proud of their grand native poetry, which, however, they read perhaps less
than we English read the poetry which Longfellow wrote in imitation of it. They say, too, that the Finnish language is of extraordinary beauty and richness, but they speak, with seeming preference, Swedish, and will probably continue to speak that language until the Russians, who are just now standing on their dignity, begin, as is their way, to stamp on it, and insist on the Russian language being spoken.

Within sight, as are they of Abo, of an ever-moving population, that upon the sea, they love tripping and travelling. Some of them trip to Helsingfors, some to Stockholm, some to St. Petersburg; some of them travel to London and to Paris. They think Helsingfors frivolous, Stockholm more frivolous, and St. Petersburg most frivolous. London they think terrible, and Paris more—most!—terrible. To all these opinions the Doktorinna adhered.

Let no one imagine that the Doktorinna had studied medicine. She was the wife of a medical man of Abo, that was all. Her mother and both her grandmothers had been the wives of medical men, and it was her boast that she could claim kinship with some dozen Doktorinnor, living or deceased, in Abo and the region round about. She had no children, and had adopted a niece—Selma—
the child flattening her face against the window-pane. In her way the Doktorinna was fond of Selma, and Selma in her way returned the feeling. Now and again the elder and the younger lady quarrelled, the one being exceedingly prim, in fact precise in every part, and the other being exceedingly unconventional, and apt to rise up against what she considered laws of decorum not brought up to date. In fact, Selma shocked daily and hourly her aunt, and it was for what the latter regarded as a grave breach of maidenly propriety that the child had, some five minutes before stationing herself at the window in the miserable attitude already described, brought upon herself ignominious punishment in the form of a sound box on the ear, accompanied by the prophecy that, as she grew up, Abo would point the finger of scorn at her, and she would never be a Doktorinna.

What a blow was there given!

The child was still smarting, both in the flesh and in the spirit, when a pleasant voice said in Russian:

'What are you doing, Selma?'
CHAPTER II.

A BRIAR ROSE.

'Compliments pass when the quality meet.'

'I was making a Russian nose,' was the not very courteous answer of the small Finn, as she opened the low window. Count Denissow seated himself on the ledge.

He was a man of about thirty years of age, tall and strikingly handsome. A wealth of ash-coloured hair, longer than an Englishman would have approved, was brushed back from his broad open forehead, and fell thickly on his neck. Heavy brows shadowed the keen gray eyes, but the quiet mouth and strong chin were not concealed. Perhaps the least satisfactory feature in the face was the nose, which was small and was depressed.

'What makes you say that, Selma?' he asked.

Selma seated herself, facing him, inside the window.
I heard aunt say the other day that Russians had flat noses.

'She has never been out of Abo, my dear.'

'Yes, she's silly.'

The little girl, who had never been out of Abo, and had not been there for very many years, lifted her eyebrows. The Count, flushing slightly—for the child's ready agreement with the proposition wrapt up in his remark did not invest it with much dignity—bent forward and took her face between his hands. It was an exquisite face, though soiled with childish grief, with tears that had been brushed away by murky hands, and with the dust of the window, which had tipped with black the charming nose—a Greek nose, though Selma had not a drop of Grecian blood in her veins.

'Why were you crying, my star?' he asked, gazing into the young clear eyes that met his fearlessly.

Instead of answering, Selma pointed to the sun, which had dropped low in the west. He spoke again.

'Do you wish you were over there, my little friend?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'Because everything's over there.'
'Name something.'

He loosed his hold of the little face, and she clasped her hands above her head, crushing the dark hair forward.

'Stockholm is over there, Christiania is over there, London is over there, PARIS is over there!'

The last words were a cry, and the arms were flung apart, as a bird flings apart its wings. She sprang from the sill and stood on the floor within the window, straining her eyes eagerly westward. It was plain that she saw the French capital in the cloud-flecked sun. Count Denissow entered the room, and, standing with the child, drew her towards him.

'My little one, you are trembling; are you ill?'

'No, I have pain.'

'Where?'

The starry eyes darkened.

'In every bit of me: in my little toe, and in my little finger, and in my hair. It's just as if every bit of me had been whipped.'

She wriggled like a little child, and shook herself in her frock as if it hurt her. His face became graver.

'My darling, what did you do?'

'I was saucy to aunt. I said—but it doesn't matter what I said. I've thought of something much saucier I might have said.'
The Count bit his lips to hide a smile at the note of regret in the voice.

Selma wriggled again.

'It was only on one ear, but the pain went all over me. She hits so horridly with her big hands, and she says—'

The voice and figure suddenly came to a standstill. Tears flushed into the eyes.

'Well, sprite, what did she say?'

'She said I shall never be a Doktorinna, but I shall!'

The tears were kept back bravely, and there was a fine note of pride in the voice. Again the Count's lips quivered; but it was only for a moment. Then a great seriousness again came to his face.

'I wish'—he stroked the dark, heavy hair—'I wish she wouldn't strike you; but really, Selma' (the tone became more and more paternal, and there was some sternness in the voice) 'you are a very naughty little girl.'

'I know I am. I'm very sorry sometimes, you know'—confidentially—'but don't tell.'

The Count laughed outright.

'No, so disgraceful a secret must be carefully guarded. They might begin to think you had a human heart, and were not an out-and-out Undine. How old are you, Selma?'
Sixteen.'
'It isn't possible!' His arm had been about the child. He withdrew it.

'You needn't get disagreeable and stiff about it, like aunt. I can't help it. And it's not quite sixteen till to-morrow. I'm going to stick up my hair and be good to-morrow. Yes, really. I'm not going to be saucy again; it's so feeble and childish. Now aunt is coming. That's her walk, clamp! clump!—imitating the gait of a heavy middle-aged person. 'Don't you pretend to know. I shall drop down outside the window, and listen to what she says to you about me.'

'I thought you were going to stick up your hair and be good.'

'To-morrow!' came the answer in a low tone from among the flowers, and a charming little face was turned up.
CHAPTER III.

A DELICATE ARIEL.

"Dost thou love me, master? No?"

SELMA had not made her exit a moment too soon. She was settling her frock, with a view to comfort perhaps chiefly, when into the room which she had quitted there strode the Doktorinna.

The Doktorinna, fair, fat, and forty, was one of the daughters of Peterkin, as described by Andersen. Peterkin—he was of a type that is not confined to Danes, and that is very common among Suedo-Finns—had lain, the Danish dreamer avers, in a buttercup as baby, and looked so yellow and buttery round the corners of his mouth that one could not help believing that, if one cut his cheek, butter would come out of it. It was precisely the same case with the Doktorinna.

"You here, Count!" she exclaimed, extending a
creamy hand. 'How careless the servants are! Nobody told me of your coming.'

The white brow crumpled a little, but not enough to suggest a frown. The red full lips wore a pleasant smile.

The Count laughed gaily.

'I'm afraid, Doktorinna, I broke into the house like a burglar, at the window. I saw Selma within.'

'How funny of you!'

The little high laugh was rather forced. One makes some allowances for a self-styled burglar who is a Count, but decorum will out.

'I wonder where Selma is now,' the lady added, the creases in her white brow deepening.

The Count approached the window again.

'She is in the garden, Doktorinna. You feel the chill air, I see. I will close the window.'

He looked straight before him as he suited the action to the word, quite conscious of Selma's furiously frowning brows, and also observing, though he did not appear to do so, a little bent figure stealing away from beneath the window. A moment later Selma was sitting in the hollow of a tree. The sky, which a few minutes before had been gorgeous with banks of reddened clouds, had grown suddenly dim. Four bright bands lay beneath the sun; all else was quiet sky. De-
pressing, rather. A cloud passed into the heart of the little Finn. She began to count up all the unpleasant people she knew. A melancholy pleasure, we have been told, is better than none; nay, verily, better than most. She did not except Count Anatol Denissow. It was so thoroughly disagreeable of him to shut that window.
CHAPTER IV.

A PROPOSAL.

'She was lovable, and he loved her.'

'Yes, it grows quite chill after sundown.'

The Doktorinna spoke in Swedish, and the Count, with a courtesy that sat well on one of the conquering nation, answered her in that language, though he spoke it with difficulty, and was aware that she spoke Russian with ease. Taking the seat to which she motioned him, he said suddenly:

'I want to speak to you on an important matter, Doktorinna. I wish to marry Selma.'

The Doktorinna fixed her large mild eyes on his face.

'Do you mind saying that again?'

'Not in the least. I wish to marry Selma.'

So wholly bewildered did the lady of Abo still look that the Count repeated a third time, without waiting for instructions to do so, and speaking very
slowly and distinctly, as if addressing a person suffering from great deafness, that he wished to marry Selma.

As dumfounded as ever, the Doktorinna looked at him with an expression of grave inquiry. Then, having been silent for more than a full minute, she asked him suddenly, as if she had just read something quite new in his face, if she was right in believing that he wished to marry Selma.

Preserving a perfectly serious manner, the Russian assured her courteously that she had divined the truth. He begged to know if she would consent to the marriage, and, with Finnish condescension, the Doktorinna confessed that she had no great objection to her niece's becoming the wife of a Russian nobleman, though it had been the custom for generations past for members of her family to marry Suedo-Finns and medical men.

Count Denissow kept his countenance and his temper, saying, as soon as an opportunity presented itself:

'I want you to allow me now to send Selma to school.'

'To school! My dear Count, our Finnish girls attend school from very early childhood. They are not usually found ignorant. But—she changed her manner as she saw the colour rise to the face
of the Russian: he had heard before—as who has not?—of the superior culture of the Finns—'you wish, perhaps, to send Selma to a finishing school at Helsingfors?'

'No, Doktorinna.'

'Ah! Stockholm?'

The offended Finnish lady had her revenge.

'Certainly not.'

'I think I understand.' The Doktorinna, feeling, probably, that she had gone as far as it was safe to go, smiled with her wonted affability. 'You desire, no doubt, that the future Countess should finish her schooling in St. Petersburg, your own capital.'

'Wrong again!' The Russian laughed good-temperedly. 'The truth is, I am so emphatically a man of St. Petersburg that I should like the future Countess to finish her education in Paris. Two years would be sufficient. Then I should marry her.'

Selma at this moment strolled into the room, and, balancing herself on the arm of a chair, looked from the Count to her aunt.
CHAPTER V.

LOVE AND A LADY'S FOOT.

'SIT down, Selma,' the Doktorinna said, with a little flutter in her voice, 'in the chair, my dear, not outside it. I have something to tell you. Our good friend, the Count'—Selma made what children call a face at him—'wants to send you to school in Paris, and then—how untidy you are! pray tie your boot-laces—then he is going to marry you.'

A look of astonishment passed over Selma's face. She had knelt to tie the laces, and rose.

'Is it true, Count?

'Yes.'

'Then I'm a grown-up. Please fasten my laces,' putting forward one foot. Much amused, the Count bent down before her, and began to fumble with the string. 'There's no tag; I point it like gentlemen do their moustaches. You know I do,
aunt' (to the scandalized Doktorinna, who frowned deeply). The Count still fingered the frayed and knotted string.

'Shall I tell you a story, Selma?' he asked.

'What's it about?'

'Love and a lady's foot.'

'That sounds pretty. Yes, tell it, please.'

'There is a flower, it grows everywhere, that bursts into blossom when it comes into contact with a pretty lady's foot. Once a lady's foot made this plant burst into blossom in a man's garden, and when it was all in flower, she trod upon it—heavily.'

'How silly! That killed it, of course.'

'Yes.'

'Is that all?'

'That's all.'

'Rather a thin little story. Where does the love come in?'

'The name of the flower is love.'

'Now, that's the kind of story I hate. It's just like a Sunday sermon, and—what are you doing?'—irascibly. 'Not that way.' She drew her foot back. 'First in a bow, and then in a knot; that's the only way with laces. That's right, thank you. I shall like to be your wife for some reasons. Am I a fiancé now, aunt?'
'Yes, my dear. I don't think you quite understand how solemn all this is. You're very childish in many ways.'

Selma sat smiling at the neat laces. Count Denisow laughed.

'Yes, you are very funny, Selma.'

The child-face clouded.

'Don't look unhappy, dear,' he added gently.

'You're not my wife yet. First in a bow, and then in a knot.'

'I don't understand.'

The child drew away from him.

'No, I see you don't.'

He turned from her to her aunt, and in a changed voice said to her:

'You must explain things to her, Doktorinna.'

So saying, he left them.

'Is he angry?'

Selma lifted a puzzled face to her aunt.

'He hasn't said good-bye to us,' she added.

The Doktorinna smiled.

'You may run after him and say good-bye.'

The lady of Abo was not so terribly silly, after all. Selma ran past the Count, and placed herself before the hall-door with extended arms. It was a high, wide door, and the little figure pressed against it, with head held up and witching eyes,
made a wonderful picture. Count Denissow did not touch her, but stood as if spell-bound before her. She was the first to speak.

‘You’re not angry with me, are you? I’ve come to say my proper good-bye, and to give you a kiss.’

Her young soft lips touched his; he caught her in his arms.

‘My darling! don’t you understand at all?’

On that same evening Selma did up her hair.
CHAPTER VI.

A PACKET OF LETTERS.

'The quarrel is a very pretty quarrel as it stands.'

Count Denissov and the Doktorinna were chatting. It would be difficult to say which bored the other more. The Doktorinna had made several comments on the obvious, and the Count had exhausted every topic, native and foreign, which it appeared to him could have any interest for the Doktorinna. The thoughts of both were occupied with Selma, but each, in courtesy to the other, enlarged on general subjects, while both listened eagerly for the quick light step.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed. Then at last someone approached the room, someone with a slow, measured tread that matched well the cautious opening of the door. A servant, no doubt, sent by Selma to say that she was not pleased to grant an audience this forenoon. The Count visibly
chafed, but only for an instant. Then his look of disappointment and annoyance gave way to one of absolute astonishment.

Through the carefully opened door there entered a small person in a lengthened frock with elaborately dressed hair, and head held breathlessly erect. The Doktorinna rose and went into the adjoining room, her shoulders shaking with amusement. The Count, with an effort keeping serious, said, as the wonderful little figure came towards him, drifting rather than walking, with eyes set and almost like those of a sleep-walker:

'You are coming towards me very slowly, Selma.'

'I can't walk quickly, Count; my dress blocks up my feet, and my hair comes down.'

'Don't call me Count; stick up your dress, and let your hair come down.'

Selma promptly began to bunch up her skirt, drawing it through the dark silk sash that was knotted about her waist. In excess of energy she looped it here and there so high as to show a dainty blue petticoat. Meanwhile the Count had not solved the mystery of the headdress.

'Tell me, Selma,' he said, laughing, 'how much iron have you in your head?'

'I stuck in a whole boxful.'
Selma put up her hands and detached some dozen pins in an instant. The short, wayward hair began to bristle, and a determined shake of the head sent a shower of pins upon the carpetless floor.

'Don't mind; I'll pick them up. What am I to call you, Count?'

This with bent face.

'By my name, of course.'

The face was lifted in a moment.

'I call you—Ana—'

The Count pretended to misunderstand.

'No, no, you mustn't call me Anna, please; but I want you, my little love, to call me Anatol.'

'I shall find that hard at first. You must let me practise it with my aunt or the miss. I shall call you for the present just you.'

She paused for a minute, then exclaimed:

'Count!'

'I thought you were going to call me just you.'

'Yes, but I can't begin a talk with that. Please don't smile.' She was sitting on a high chair, making a charming picture from little black crown to little black shoe, the darkness that prevailed in herself and her dress being set off by glimpses of blue. 'I want you to be earnest.'
A PACKET OF LETTERS

The Count sat down beside the quaint creature, and looked tenderly into the young face that quivered with excitement.

'I am quite earnest, Selma. What is it?'

'It's just this, Count. You mustn't mind my saying "Count," please'—this with raised finger. 'My aunt says, now that you're going to marry me, I should talk sensibly with you.'

'Yes, dear.'

'Well, I've a lot of things to tell you,' kicking off one shoe. 'Don't lift it up, please, because I shall be doing that all the time. I always kick off my shoes when I'm flustered.' The other shoe fell with a sharp noise. 'There now, they're both gone,' crossing the neat feet, and stowing them away. 'What was I saying before? Oh, I remember! I want you to know everything, of course. Well, I suppose you see those silly letters over there.'

'I see some letters,' the Count replied courteously; but he started. The letters to which Selma pointed formed a big packet. Was the strange child a flirt? Had she written love-letters?

His face darkened.

Selma got off the chair, picked up her shoes, and put them on again.
'Now I'm going away, because you look terrible.'

'No, my love. Explain this to me. What does it mean?'

'They're only silly letters. You may read them.'

The child flushed hotly.
CHAPTER VII.

MUCH ADO.

'Here it is—an incendiary letter.'

The Count went over to the writing-table, loosened the packet, and began to read one of the letters. It was written in a bad, childish hand—a downhill hand that told of sorrows to come. It began:

'My beautiful dear Hendrik,

'I do so love you, every bit of you; the H and the E and the N and the D and the R and the I and the K,'

'Oh, this is too nonsensical, Selma! I did not think you could be so foolish. I hope you will never write to me like that.'

'No—never—Count!'

The slow, distinct words were chillingly cold, and the small white teeth, set angrily, shone through the parted lips, as the girl looked into
the Russian's face with proud eyes. She was sitting again; her feet were joined together with a child's rigidity of attitude, her hands were clenched in her lap.

'And what will you write to me?' the Count asked, in some alarm.

'I shall write——' She threw back her head with a superb gesture. She was speaking in Russian. 'I shall write' (she here lapsed into English, spoken with a queer accent):

'SIR,

'To practise me in English I write to you this letter. I hope that you are finding yourself in good health. I make my compliments to you. My aunt also, the old fat, makes to you her compliments. I write no more to-day, sir. I hope that I have make no faults.

'Believe you me,

'Faithfully to you,

'SELMA.'

Excepting for the qualifying clause, 'the old fat' in the case of her aunt, and the ludicrously foreign construction throughout, this was a woefully stately letter, and the Count felt to the full the irony in it.

'You think me a mere pedant,' he said, hitting
the truth. 'My dear little love, that would be a very dreadful letter to receive.'

Selma still looked at him with burning cheeks.

'Oh, I shall write very sensible letters to—you.'

The Count winced, and continued to read the letter in his hand. It was certainly not very sensible.

'How old, my dear Selma, is this fascinating Hendrik?'

Selma's two shoes fell off, an annoying thing to happen just when she was making an effort to appear completely at her ease.

'I make him thirty;' she said, and pursed her lips.

The Count stole a look at her. What an exceedingly grown-up answer!

'Indeed! What—what is he?'

'He's a poet.'

Selma stole a look at the Count.

'H'm! A—Finnish—poet?'

'No.'

Selma put out first one toe, and then the other; then, with the little shoes hanging on her upturned feet, said:

'A Swede.'

'Where does he live?'

The small, high heels made a click on the floor as the feet settled into their places.
'Nowhere.'
'That can hardly be true, Selma.'
'It is true.'
'You mean to say——'
The Count sat down on a chair by the table.
'Remain sitting where you are, and don't look at me.'
Selma rose, walked over to him, and stood behind him.
'Look straight at that picture of grandfather.'
Thoroughly annoyed and furiously jealous by this time, the Count had some difficulty in keeping his gaze fixed on the genial but, to him, not particularly interesting face of the old doctor. A soft cheek touched his, as Selma, leaning over his shoulder, said:
'I invented Hendrik for myself.'
'Oh, goose, goose!'
The sage turned suddenly, and caught the girl in his arms. After awhile he said:
'Selma, my heart's love, what makes you do such mad things?'
'I wanted to live in a story.'
The starry eyes became full of wistfulness—the wistfulness of a child to be a woman.
He sighed.
'Take care! You are living in a story now.'
I have dragged you into one, or you have dragged me into one. My heart misgives me. God knows how it is to end, dear. Why do you draw away from me?

'I am afraid of you.'

'Nonsense! Let us return to the letters. I want you to burn them.—I'm coming, Doktorinna.'

This was said to the aunt, who had been busying herself in the next room, and who now beckoned.
CHAPTER VIII.

A FIRE, AND MUSIC.

'Music, too—dear music!'

So little had the Doktorinna played eaves-dropper while acting duenna, that she began to tell the Count the story of the packet of letters. It was with no surprise that he learned that his child-love had made a confession of this correspondence to her aunt before making it to him. He was listening with quiet smiles to the Doktorinna's narrative, when the latter suddenly said:

'Do you notice a smell of scorching?'

'Yea.'

Both rose from their seats.

'It seems to come from outside the house.'

The Doktorinna walked over to the window as she spoke. She was followed by the Count, and they gazed—for a moment in silence—into the small yard beneath. Here Selma knelt beside an alarmingly bright bonfire, her pale face lightened
into colour by the strong blare of the leaping flames. The Doktorinna uttered a low cry of fear, and sank into a chair.

‘Will you—downstairs—the door facing the staircase—’

The Count did not wait for further directions, but bounded down the stairs. The door was locked outside.

‘Selma! Open!’

The girl either did not or would not hear. He resolved to go round the house, and climb over the wall behind, a thing more easily planned than done. The wall was high and smooth. By the time he had procured a ladder and had run up it, Selma’s fire was no more. Beside a few charred remains of paper the girl knelt, with face and hands as black as a sweep’s. She was munching something which she swallowed with a gulp, then rose.

‘The letters are all burnt and I’ve eaten the ashes, so that’s done with.’

This quiet remark was followed by a low ripple of laughter, as she looked, first at the Russian peer ing over the wall, with hands clutching the ladder, then at the Doktorinna, with round, horrified face pressed to the window.

‘You two do look so funny.’

To be made the object of ridicule by a little
black-faced Finlander was more than Count Denissow could endure. He vanished forthwith, and when Selma, somewhat later, returned to her aunt's sitting-room, having resumed a normal appearance, she was received with marked coldness, not only by her kinswoman, but by the gentleman sitting with that lady. Not in the least depressed, she betook herself to her own room, and just as the Count was saying to the Doktorinna, 'I don't think I yet quite understand the Finnish type of girl,' a burst of music rang through the house. The Russian started, rose, and then sat down again, listening with a face that expressed delight and astonishment.

'As I live, the little girl is neither Finn nor Frenchwoman. She is a pure genius, and stands outside all countries. Who taught her to play like that, Doktorinna?'

'She has lessons,' the Doktorinna answered, with a fineness of idiom of which she was unconscious, 'from your countryman, Professor — —'

'I remember. You are right. I should not have asked who taught her to play like that, for, it is plain enough, no one has taught her anything yet; all that is her own. Well, well, she shall have teaching now, good teaching, the best. Ah, that is odious!' His face quivered as if in pain. 'No
finish, the phrasing abominable; but she has power, passion, poetry. Hear her! He laughed to himself. The playing was strange enough. It was like nothing so much as the struggle in a young fire between the smoke and the flame. That in the end the flame would be triumphant, Anatol Denissow, with the musical foresight which belongs to men in some parts of Europe, knew.

'Well done! that is superb!' he exclaimed, as the playing became more free, and the notes leaped into air like spray. The Doktorinna smiled, not ill-pleased, as she watched him walking up and down the room, blaming, criticising, praising, listening with heart and ears to every note.

Suddenly, having asked permission to go to the child, he mounted the stairs which led to her room, and, finding the door of it open, entered.
CHAPTER IX.

HER FIRST APPLAUSE.

"Does a man tear out his heart and make fritters thereof over a slow fire for aught other than a woman?"

The ambitious child was playing the Shelleyan thing called Aufschwung, Schumann's twin-poem to The Skylark, and as the last note of its wild melody passed into silence, she bent her face upon the key-board.

"Selma?" He stepped up to her in jealousy.

"I want one also!"

"No."

The red small lips closed sharply on the word.

He turned to go.

"Stop! I am playing my newest concert-program. You may be audience, and listen. Not here,' with a quick smile, 'This is my platform. I can't have you standing beside me on the platform.'"
HER FIRST APPLAUSE

A game, this, at concert-playing. She was indeed a baby! He smiled good-humouredly as he said:

'So please your ladyship, where am I to sit? In the gallery?'

'No. You may sit among the people in the parterre.' She placed a chair for him in the centre of the room. 'Now I am going to begin in a minute.'

She returned to the instrument, bowed gravely to the parterre, and sat down. The piece she proceeded to play was a volley of small shot by Liszt. She sat quite still, her little head moveless and erect. The expression on her face was hard, and could her one auditor have seen it, he must have noticed that it was soulless, must have noticed that the low troubled brow, strangely full above the eyes, was contracted, that the lips were cruelly straight. He did not notice this—noticed nothing but the fine pose of the head, the childish hair clipped short and rounding inwards to the ears, the small feet in dingy shoes, very busy with the pedal, the young, straight back, the small shoulders, somewhat lifted, the brave music.

'BraVa!'

He applauded loudly. The artist bowed again, gravely, and played a florid prelude to a new piece, then suddenly stopped, and ran across the room.
It was so nice—the first applause I ever got.

I love you—Anatol!

That's my darling!

He caught her to his heart.

Enough! Let me go!

She struggled to free herself as a little graceless child will do. The voice, too, was a child's—rude, imperious. He loosened his hold immediately, a grayness passing over his face, and his eyes filming.

Selma did not give him a glance.

Listen to this!

She was at the piano again, and played a dream of Chopin's, timing it to her own heartbeats. It was more beautiful than words can tell.

No word of praise, no clapping of hands rewarded her. Did he not like it? She listened eagerly, too proud to turn her head. It was quite evident that he meant to take no notice of her.

For a full minute she sat immovable; then she drew her hand along the keyboard, making a noise that began in a bass murmur and ended in a treble scream. Having done that, she closed the instrument, and threw herself into an easy-chair. A book lay on a little table beside it. She began to read in it. An hour and more passed, and she read on.
CHAPTER X.

'LE SONGE D'ÊTÉ.'

FIVE weeks prior to Selma's becoming engaged to Count Denissow, the Doktorinna had taken into her house an Englishwoman, who was to give her niece an hour's instruction in the English language daily, in return for a home. The rest of this Englishwoman's time was employed in giving 'visiting lessons' in Abo. By so doing she made just enough money to keep the wolf from the door of her heart; she had no house from the door of which to keep it, and was never likely to have one. As she was singularly clever, and not altogether unlearned, it perhaps goes without saying that she knew more of English than Selma did, though Selma would not believe this, being of opinion that she knew more of everything, and consequently of the language of Britain, than anyone in her surroundings.
‘Selma!’

Miss Olive spoke. The girl, with rapt face bent upon her book, did not hear the call.

‘Really, Selma’—the Englishwoman’s voice became plaintive—‘you might come when the dinner-bell rings.’

Miss Olive was one of those phenomenally big people who need much and regular sustenance, and grow sad at any postponement of the mid-day meal. She was literally fainting with the hunger which dogs the steps of the visiting teacher.

‘I come!’

Selma looked up and smiled. She liked the big, hungry woman.

‘But, miss,’ she added, ‘I have found a so charming tale, “Le Songe d’Été,” such in-ter-est-ing people, young maids quite crazed, and a canaille delicious—most absurd one Neek Bottom!—and says, too, with the names Fleur de Pois, Toile d’Araignée, and such more; the whole to burr’st one’s self with laughter. And a such pretty story! One of the canaille plays Clair-de-Lune. I must read you.’

The famished Englishwoman did not in words, but did in looks, invoke angels and ministers of grace to spare her this indiction. Sitting down, she said in a tone of remonstrance:
'My dear Selma, it's only Shakespeare.'

This remarkable answer from the countrywoman of the immortal one was followed by the wail, 'Do please shut it up, and come to dinner.'

'Whose is the book?' Selma asked.

'As if that matters now, my dear!'

Miss Olive had risen, but had to sit down again to support fainting nature.

'If you must know, I ordered it because I wanted you to learn Mark Antony's speech, and the stupid people have sent that great French translation.'

'Oh, 'tis lovely. I will read all. Yes, yes; I come! How many such tales has Shakespeare?'

"Tales"? Plays, you mean. Thirty-some-thing—I think it's thirty-seven. Really, I'm so dreadfully hungry, I can't remember.'

'But, certainly, you have read them all, miss?'

'Yes. No. I've forgotten. Come along, Selma. What are you laughing at?'

'I laugh at the sweet foolery.'

Selma's enthusiasm, when vented in English, was apt to find expression in archaisms.

'Only to think on it! You remember, without doubt, the bit, "Dieu te bénisse, Bot-Tom, Dieu te bénisse! Te voilà métamorphosé!" Queenez thus outburr'ats when Bot-Tom enters with on
him the head of the ass. It is so comic to me, I shall laugh all the day to have read it. A most charming writer!"

'Well, you're easily pleased, Selma.'

The Englishwoman, clutching at chairs and tables in a paroxysm of hunger, tottered out of the room, at the door looking back at Selma, who was reading the end of an act, her slight figure trembling with amusement, and who, having closed the book, ran across the room, saying:

'Oh, droll! Oh, pretty! I greatly like this Shakespeare.'

One makes allowances to lunatics.

Miss Olive turned back, shaking her head.

'Now, Selma'—putting her arm about the child—'do try to be sensible for once in your life, and let's have a comfortable meal.'

A minute later the two good friends sat at the table, Selma with smiles running in and out of her eyes, Miss Olive with a solemn face that said that for what she was going to receive she was most truly thankful.
CHAPTER XI.

MISS OLIVE.

"Thin in the face, but always sweet-faced, with those soft, sorrowful eyes which come to women who go in mourning for past happiness."

The mid-day meal had been cleared away, the Doktorinna had retired, and Miss Olive sat at the window, busy with the dreary work of correcting children's exercises. Selma flitted about the room, and once or twice almost fluttered out of the door.

"Come here, you uneasy spirit, and sit down."

Selma dropped upon the floor, and the English-woman patted her dark head and continued correcting, reading aloud as she did so:

"Thou hast a horse; thou too hast a mare; hast thou a foal? We have bought us a dog; we will buy us a bitch; but not we will buy us a puppy. He has a tom-cat . . ."

"How few of faults the young girl makes!"
Selma, whose written work was always deplorable, exclaimed, with generous admiration. 'Tis the little Eva Maria again. I would that I writ so well how she, but I can never remember the she-beasts. I will be long before I can go at London and speak to the Englishmen fine English.'

The difficulty in teaching Selma English—a difficulty keenly felt by Miss Olive—was that she was exceedingly voluble, and hurled some half-hundred words like the above at your head without making a single pause. Miss Olive's head spun round.

'We don't say "she-beasts" in English,' she said, with a little gasp, 'and one doesn't speak of going at London, and—and—a girl talking to Englishmen couldn't use the words in this exercise, which I think simply improper. I feel quite uncomfortable correcting it;' and Miss Olive proceeded with her work, reading the sentences in a whisper, her soul revolting against the grammarian who had set little Eva Maria writing of the pig and the sow, for in the next sentence it was stated that the pig and the sow had been seen, but not the hart and the doe.

'Such drivell!' the Englishwoman exclaimed indignantly.

'Dear poor!'
Selma kissed the plain, flushed face. Even when she contrived to find the right English words, she almost always burlesqued them by reversing their customary order. Miss Olive said gently:

'You should say "Poor dear!" Selma, and not "Dear poor!"'

'Why?'

'I don't know. Nobody does.'

Miss Olive had for twenty-five years taught in Abo the English language—the peculiarities of its pronunciation, its heterography called orthography, its syntax, the mysteries of its verb, the anomalies of its noun, and the darkness which wraps its pronoun round. This good lady's pupils began with the alphabet and ended with the chapter on interjections, in which they learnt that in physical pain it is the practice of Englishmen to exclaim 'Oh!' but that in mental stress they ejaculate 'Ah!' In the course of imparting all this, Miss Olive was by every new pupil pestered with the question, 'Why?'

Only by new pupils.

Pupils of some standing found out that this lady taught her language as certain schoolmasters of her country assert that they teach Scripture—from the non-doctrinal point. Her lessons were purely narrative, and she gently, but firmly, put down all
inquiry, saying quietly, in a tone just mystical enough to be impressive:

'I don't know. Nobody does.'

The good people of Abo, naturally reverent, were soon subdued by this manner, and ceased to rush in where Miss Olive, it was evident, feared to tread.

'My friend,' Selma said to her after a pause, 'I want to tell you something. Guess who is going to marry herself.'

Miss Olive named Kristina.

'No, no. Despite Kristina has beautiful forms' (the allusion was here to the physical charms of Kristina), 'she is a born old maiden. She will marry herself when you do. Why did you never marry yourself, Miss Olive?'

'Because'—Miss Olive's eyes grew dim as she kissed the cruel questioner—'I wanted to marry somebody else.'

'Ah, so. I see my grammatic fault. And he?'

'He wanted to marry somebody else.'

'How comic!'

The child rose.

'Now I will tell you who is going to marry. I am.'

'Don't be silly, Selma.'

'But 'tis true. I am promised, Miss Olive. Really, really! Count Denissow has offered for
me. You look still incredul. Tell me an English swear-word, and I will swear.'

Miss Olive's breath was literally taken away with horror at this proposition. Putting her books from her, she said:

'Come here and sit on my lap, you dreadful Finn! Tell me, do you love Count Denissow?'

'Moderately.'

Each syllable of the freezing word was pronounced clearly and distinctly in the staccato manner which the Finns have in common with the French.

'There is no such thing as loving moderately, Selma.'

Selma, sitting on the Englishwoman's lap, had her arm about her neck. She looked at the quiet face in some surprise, then said quaintly:

'How you are passionate and poetic, Miss Olive! For that I love you much. It is so other from my aunt, the rice-pudding.'

Selma's vituperative vein was peculiar.

The Englishwoman bit her lips.

'May I ask what you feel for Count Denissow?'

The small queer face became very serious.

'I feel a trust for him.'

Miss Olive smiled.

'Perhaps that is enough. By the way, you will
be a very grand person, Selma. The Countess Denissow—it sounds vastly fine.'

'Yes, it is more fine than Doktorinna'—with a little flash of white teeth.

'Or—old maid, Selma.'

Miss Olive raised a warning forefinger.

'Ah, that would be horrid! 'Twould be to must work, to must be teacher of pigs.'

'My dear Selma, children are not pigs.'

'Then they are not how I was, and how I remember my play-comrades.'

The dark eyes became set, as if the child saw things far off, and rather like a dream than an assurance—the accusing ghosts of old misdeeds.

'Well, well, I'm just as glad that you're not going to be a teacher, Selma. I wonder what you will be like as Countess.'

'I will not be up-stuck.'

'That's kind of you'—a quiet smile; 'but try to remember to say "stuck-up." What now! My dear little girl, you are crazy.'

She fondled the child as a mother might.

'What is all the excitement about? Look at me, Selma.'

Selma looked up. Her face was white, and the great tearless eyes were opened wide.

'I am frightened, Miss Olive. He frights me.'
CHAPTER XII.

A JOURNEY TO GO.

‘Prythee weep, May Lilian!
   Gaiety without eclipse
   Wearieth me, May Lilian.
   Thro’ my very heart it thrilleth
   When from crimson-threaded lips
   Silver-treble laughter trileth.
   Prythee weep, May Lilian!’

More tragic faces, no doubt, have been seen, but no sadder face was probably ever seen than that of the Doktorinna, as she looked after the vessel which bore away her niece from Finland. She did not accompany the child, because, as she said, she had never been away from Finland. The implication conveyed in this statement was that she never could go away from Finland, and nobody urged her to do so. Miss Olive, to the delight both of Selma and of the Count, was willing to be of the travelling party. The journey to Paris was to be
taken via Stockholm, Christiania, and London, the Count having determined that Selma should see all the towns which she saw in the western sun.

'Good-bye, Selma; God go with you, my little one!' the Doktorinna called from the shore. 'Give the Count no trouble, and do as the good Miss Olive bids.'

'Yes, aunt!' rang out the answer in Swedish from the ship's side. 'Go home, aunt, cry no more!—Ah, old poor thing!' (this in English to Miss Olive. 'She has the nose quite red for weeping. I would that I could a little cry too, but I am so happy.—Go home, aunt, cry no more!'

The last words were said in a shrill child's treble, between hands held up to her face in streeturchin fashion.

'Selma, you monkey, where do you get your tricks from?' The Count laughed at the pretty child, whose face and charming dress contrasted oddly with the primitive gesture. She lowered her hands quickly.

'When shall we get to Stockholm?'

'To Stockholm—why, we shall not be out of sight of Finland for some time. Come, Selma, you have never seen your country from the sea. Take a long look at it now.'

A little twittering laugh broke from the girl.
A JOURNEY TO GO

She had turned her back on her home, and studiously gazed in the opposite direction.

'I know exactly what it's like,' she answered. 'I have travelled through miles of it so often, when going to see the grand-parents. Dry land and lake, dry land and lake—no variation in the world.'

'No heaths, no hills, no meadows, no windmills, no roads, no woods, no birches and firs, and pines and willows?'

'Oh yes!—the child's eyes darkened—'Hundreds of little sad birches—how could I forget them? So dreary! Is my aunt still crying on the shore?'

'Yes, dear.'
The bright eyes dimmed a little, but the back was still turned to the land.

'Do you like Miss Olive?' This, in a queer chirp, with a sparrow's sharp turn of the head.

'Yes, very much.'

'So do I. She's so sensible, and quiet, and restful, and . . . is my aunt still crying on the shore?'

The Count said nothing, but nodded in assent. He watched the small, strange face with interest. A sudden whiteness passed over it, and the lips began to work.

'Why do you look at me?' the girl said
childishly, and, turning to Finland, kissed hands a dozen times to the weeping lady, then burst into loud sobs. The wash of the great water against the ship's side was not so loud. The face remained turned to Finland.

Count Denissow went away and joined Miss Olive. They walked together up and down the deck, finely acting the part of the deaf and the blind.
CHAPTER XIII.

IN SCANDINAVIA.

'To Norway,
To Norway...'

STOCKHOLM is one of those towns that one likes to think God made, and that one quietly pronounces very good. Selma's delight was boundless as the vessel which bore her to it stood alongside one of its splendid quays. The weather was glorious, the sky overhead blue, dotted with white clouds that looked like patches of snow and that melted like flakes of snow. It was the first big city that she had ever seen, and the gaieties and gravities of it equally delighted her. Almost everything about it, from the wonderful eight islands of which it is made up, to its least curious feature, had the charm of novelty, and, excepting that the young Finlander did not think that the people of Sweden's capital spoke Swedish as well as that language is spoken by the
people of Abo, she was full of eulogy for everything. During the overland journey to Christiania she became taciturn, in face of the somewhat tame scenery—monotonous valleys and hard hillsides, stretches of gloomy forest, followed by wastes of marsh and moorland, with here and there fields, jealously guarded by stone walls, with everywhere water, but the lakes at times so small that they were little better than overgrown pools; then stretches of sandy ground, yielding the sparsest of vegetation in sapless grass and stunted trees. The keen-eyed child let nothing escape her, and, indeed, the curiously clear atmosphere exposed ruthlessly the poverty of the landscape, which only at intervals, increasing in frequency as the travellers approached Norway, became beautiful, as there rose into sight on some wild hill an oak-tree, stretching its head up to the sky, or there gleamed in the distance a fjord stretching its arms out into the land; or, on still evenings, as they journeyed slowly westward through some lonely region, with not a breath of wind in the air, not a shred of cloud in the sky, a range of hills far off would stand out so clearly in the pure dry air that it was almost impossible to believe that it was not close at hand. Too soon the short Scandinavian summer began to draw to a close, and the early autumn season
brought chilly evenings and cold nights, though the days were still warm. The grass began to turn yellow, and dry, brittle leaves fluttered down; the swallows flew south and the twilight came back. The long-banished stars began once more to twinkle, and the moon shone—a small, high moon, looking cold and keen in the clear blue air. The days, however, went by uncounted; and it was past mid October when the little party began to see that winter was not far off, and bethought themselves seriously of quickening speed. It was none too soon. The day on which they entered Christiania was sharp with November's coldness, and Selma, depressed by the weather and grown critical, looked with scant favour on Norway's capital, which must not, indeed, be seen after that of Sweden, the little builder man not having particularly distinguished himself at Christiania. A sharp, fine rain was falling as the Count gave directions to drive quickly from the station, and as the day wore on it rained steadily, towards evening a mist creeping up the fjord. The atmosphere, though brighter, was not quite clear when, after three days spent in the capital, the tourists took a long last look at the Norwegian coast, as they steamed slowly out of the fjord into the sea, on their way to England.
CHAPTER XIV.

IN GLOOMLAND.

'I was reminded of Sir Walter Scott's recipe for painting a battle: a great cloud to be got up as the first part of the process; and as the second, here and there an arm or a leg to be stuck in, and here and there a head or a body. And such was London, the greatest city in the world.'

The voyage to England was unusually long, the fog growing denser as the steamer advanced, and when at last she lay alongside the London Docks the passengers found themselves face to face with a terrifying day-darkness.

A brown fog lay over everything; the streets were slippery from recent torrents of rain; the horses, going at a funeral pace, tripped and fell; here and there an angry red light flared high in air, no post or lantern visible; black, gnome-like figures passed each other in the vapour; the little children crept along with old, staid steps. For miles around the vast city steamed like a hot lake.
"How a most beastly place!" Selma exclaimed furiously, as she covered her smarting eyes with her hands and leant back in the crazy four-wheeler. When most bent on calling a spade a spade, and for that purpose choosing an adjective from the very rabble of English, she commonly made some slip in pronunciation or grammar, which betrayed the foreigner and won her a ready pardon. At any other time Miss Olive would have corrected her with a laugh, but on this occasion she frowned blackly, the indecorous words shocking deeply not only the pedagogue but the patriot in her. A passage-at-arms seemed imminent, when, to the Count's relief, the vehicle came to a standstill before a large hotel, and, in the excitement of seeking a common shelter, international hostilities were ignored. While Count Denissow ordered dinner, the insulted Englishwoman and the disgusted Finnander, the latter with tightly-shut mouth and blinking eyes, made their way to the bedroom which they were to share. Miss Olive at once extemporized a screen, modestly hiding behind which she dressed herself, if the harmless truth must be told, crimping her front hair. Only when fully and most becomingly attired did she emerge, and then observed, to her dismay, that Selma was in bed. She bent anxiously over her.
'My dear, are you ill?'

'No. But I lie in bed till we go to Paris. I lie in bed so long as we are in London. Fee! what a smoke! Tell Anatol I send him a kiss, and he is to send me a little thing what he knows I like for my supper.'

'You do mean to eat, then, you peculiar young person.'

Selma nodded, and added a request that she might not be sent 'rosbif,' which she qualified by an adjective dear to England's lower orders, using it in no slang sense, but as the word in her small vocabulary best describing meat, as it is, on the Continent, believed to be cooked all over England.

'I suppose you mean "underdone," Selma. You are really a horrid child! If there is one word more odious than another, you are sure to know it.'

Miss Olive's tone was mournful and somewhat acrid, but the kiss that she gave the girl was heartily friendly. The loveliest thing in the world is a child-girl in her night-wrapper; the lily growing is not so pretty, and Solomon in all his glory may not be named in the same breath. When, added to being child and girl, the creature is exquisite, with tumbled hair, red lips, and bright pure eyes, and she
looks at you with frank love and approval, just because you are thoroughly splendid and look, she thinks, quite delicious in your smart gown, with your hair freshly crimped, it warms the heart.

‘I must say I think you are thoroughly unreasonable, Selma,’ Miss Olive remarked, as she went out of the room; but when, on her explaining the situation to the Count, his comment was a few words to precisely the same effect, she bridled up with that lack of logic which is woman’s strength.

‘Well, well!’ the Count exclaimed dismally.

‘Perhaps the weather will clear up to-morrow.’

Miss Olive was smiling at good Master Mustard-seed (who that has been away from England for a while does not on his return hail the sight of an English mustard-pot?), and was joyously cutting a savoury chop in one of those moods when happy thoughts do not bring sad thoughts to the mind. She looked up, and said exultantly:

‘It won’t!’

She was right. The fog next day did not abate in density, and on the third day the air was still so clouded that Selma, who was persuaded to take a peep from her window, declared that she could see nothing but ‘hundreds of smoke-pots.’ She had
insisted on being given a high bedroom, in the hope of getting above the mist, and the view of chimney-pots from her window was extensive. She was only induced to descend from her bedroom on being told that preparations were made for going straight to Dover. During the journey southward the atmosphere cleared gradually, and the sun shone brightly as the odd trio sailed away from England, arriving in an incredibly short time at Calais, and eventually in Paris. Here Selma's first remark was, in substance if not in words, identical with that made by the hero of 'The Sentimental Journey' on first setting foot on French soil.

When they had been in Paris about a week, she was waiting one evening for Miss Olive to go with her to a theatre, and was urging expedition. Miss Olive looked up from a letter which she was writing, and smiled, as she caught sight of the not particularly ill-favoured creature revolving before a mirror, and eyeing herself with that frank approval which pedants call vanity.

'Yes, yes, my dear. I have just a word to add to my letter. Just you continue wheeling slowly round.'

Selma did so.

The word which the Englishwoman proceeded to add to her letter ran:
'Expect me back in Kensington on Tuesday. We have now spent a week of amusement in Paris. Selma on Monday goes to live with my good old friend, Madame Beaujean, who is to engage teachers for her in music and four languages. Now, don't you admire this romance? The young person makes first her wedding-trip, then is educated, and lastly is married. When we were young, Loo, girls were first educated, then married, and then the wedding-trip was made. The old order changeth. As I write this, Selma, in a charming new frock, is lost in admiration of the same and of herself before a huge mirror. She is not "all sublime," poor little soul! and, alas! I have the saddest forebodings.'

'Now, Selma, I'm ready.'

'Yes, dear. No flowers?—looking at Miss Olive's unadorned front. 'Oh, you must have a white rose on the bosom!'—detaching one of her own; 'tis very effecteeve'—pinning it in an 'effecteeve' manner.

'You little silly!'

The sage Miss Olive steals a peep at the mirror. The white rose is effective. (In a parenthesis be it said: the sage Miss Olive is pleased.)
CHAPTER XV.

SELMA IN PARIS.

'Wenn ich an deinem Hause
Des Morgens vorüber geh',
So freut's mich, du liebe Kleine,
Wenn ich dich am Fenster sehe.'

SELMA in Paris was happier than she had ever been in her life before, and in all his life before Count Denissow had never been so little happy.

There is, a Russian once assured the present writer, a species of patriot to whom beyond the confines of his country the sugar is not sweet, the salt not salty, the ice not cold, and the water not wet. To this species Count Denissow belonged, and consequently, in settling down for two years in Paris, he was making no small sacrifice to the girl who was to be his wife. The self-denial was all the greater that he but seldom visited her, though no day went by on which he did not pass her house, driving or walking.
His offer to take her to such of the sights of Paris as she appeared to him to have just glimpsed at during the first week of her stay there was not warmly received.

"What is there to be seen?" the girl asked.

"The Louvre."

"I have seen the Milo"—a quick smile—"I see her always: the earnest eyes that look forward, the grave mouth closed, the chin round and so pretty. One shoulder is raised—the left. I have forgotten nothing of her. There is nothing else to be seen in the Louvre."

"Oh yes"—the Count's voice was somewhat ironical—"there are a few other respectable statues, and there are one or two pictures of some repute, the "Mona Lisa"—Selma, what a horrible grimace!—"The Immaculate Conception.""

"Murillo's? The young girl standing above the clouds and moon, in white and glorious blue, but with an empty face. I know her."

"Well, then, there is the Luxembourg."

"With Louis Français' picture of Finland."

"I do not know that, Selma."

"My name for it. He calls it, I think, "A Landscape." It is made up of bare trees by water, with a red sun in the background. I have seen the
trees and the sun in Finland. This is the music to it.'

She played.

Under her hands the piano, like the harp in the nursery tale, became a thing with a voice, and spoke. It became a thing with tears, and wept.

'That is most sad, Selma,' the Count said as she stopped, and, with a queer movement that was her own, passed her hands along the notes as if quieting them.

'You want to take me somewhere.' She wheeled the piano-stool round, and her manner changed. 'Do you like shopping? Now I can see that you are offended, that is so queer. The only place that I like to go to with anyone is a shop.'

'I presume that Madame Beaujean goes shopping with you, Selma—does she not?'

'Oh yes, but I get tired of her. She is with me always. At least, she has been. She is ill to-day, by the way, and I have been reading to her. The dear old thing is fond of me, I can't think why, because we're so different. She is always wanting to give me treats.'

'What is her notion of a treat?'

'A visit to the Jardin d'Acclimation, and there a ride on an elephant's back, or on a camel's, or in a carriage yoked to an ostrich. I wonder they
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don't put a horse in a bird-cage and teach it to hop over a perch. Or else she takes me to the Luxembourg Gardens, and walks me up and down among those dreadful statues of women. Sometimes—most terrible of all—she proposes a drive in a fiacre, but I don't think she'll do that again.'

'Why not?'

'Because last Sunday we were to drive to her sister's, and just as we were in the middle of the Place de la Concorde the horse dropped dead. We took another fiacre, and in sight of Madame Didier's house the second horse dropped dead. It was annoying, because we had to get out a second time.'

'Did you not try a third fiacre?' the Count said, with a quaver in his voice.

'No. You see, we were in sight of the house, so we didn't think it worth while. I can see'—stiffly—'you think I am telling a fib.'

'No, no; I merely thought—'

The Count came to a full stop. He had thought that there might be what euphemists term a metaphor, a verbal extravagance, in the case. The indignant gray eyes reproached him for having for a moment doubted this story of Parisian horses. He decided to make his adieux at once. Selma did not press him to stay, but gave him a quick
child's kiss. When he had gone, after pausing for a moment to consider what she should do, she rang for a maid.

'Is Madame Beaujean still in bed?'

'Yes, mademoiselle. The doctor is with her.'

'Good. See here, Jeanne. I want you to go for me to—Never mind. Here she comes.'

The servant smiled as Selma, blushing deeply, waved a rapturous greeting from the window to a lady who approached the house. Here was a problem in psychology which wholly baffled Madame Beaujean's maid-of-all-work.

'You are a funny young lady, miss!' she exclaimed. 'When the handsome and grand gentleman comes, it doesn't shake you up at all; but when that strange lady comes, it really seems to make your heart go tick-tack.'

Selma, still looking out of the window, said, with a smile:

'Why, Jeanne, say, did you yourself never love anyone but a horrid man?'

The qualifying word was an unfortunate one, and that Selma was generalizing her simple listener did not guess. Her round face flushed indignantly.

'Me love a horrid man, miss! I don't know what you can mean. My young man—'

'Yes, yes. I haven't time to hear about him
now.—*You darling woman!* (this outburst was accompanied by a kiss-hands in the direction of the street). 'I meant—er—*all men*, Jeanne.'

Impossible to give an idea of the scorn with which the words 'all men' were uttered by this sixteen-year-old denouncer of male mankind.

Jeanne shook her head. A young lady who could speak of all men as horrid must be quite unhinged in her mind. Jeanne, who was eighteen, and not made of moonshine, but of such stuff as girls are made of, with the large kindliness of her class, heartily approved of men, even to the least perfect among them, and would rather have admitted that all of them were delightful, than that one in a hundred of them was horrid.

'Dieu sait quoi!' she exclaimed, in a tone of remonstrance, as she clasped her hands with Gallic fervour, and she was about to speak her mind frankly on the subject of the maligned sex, when she received an imperative summons to the hall-door.

'There she is at the bell—such a ring as she gives it, and calls herself a lady!'

These irate words were said in departing in a muffled voice. Jeanne, to a great extent, formed her opinion of visitors at the house—and very correct her opinion in most cases was—from their
mode of ringing the bell. There was the large ring and the little ring, there was the clattering and the steady ring, the full, the empty, the clamorous, the meek, the snapping and the friendly ring; there was the _diable à quatre_ ring and the ring _à la sourdine_. She marked them all, and said, very wisely, some things which she did not say aloud, therein differing from the moralist whom Jacques met in the forest. Almost all life, as led by this workaday child, was a dance to the music of bells—a forced dance, like that of the nuns in the German poem of 'Oberon'—and though she knew nothing of musical terms, she knew of all the different ways in which the music of bells might be rendered, now _adagio_, now _largo_, now _maestoso_, now _moderato_, now _con fuoco_.

'Out on you for an impatient woman!' she exclaimed vehemently, as she hurried with tired feet to the door, where Madame Goudounow was performing a lively crescendo.

'Is Mademoiselle Selma at home?'

The question was asked in a singularly pleasant voice, and the face of the speaker gave light. Jeanne was not proof against spells.

'Yes, madame,' she said, mollified. 'Will madame walk in?'

The lady on the threshold hesitated.
'Is Mademoiselle Selma alone?'
'Yes, madame.'
'Announce me. Stop a minute! I shall be with her for an hour, and we must not be disturbed. You understand?'
'Yes, madame.'
'On second thoughts, I will announce myself. You need not accompany me.'
'Good, madame.'

Jeanne departed. Midway on the stair-flight leading to the kitchen she paused, and passed her hand across her face.

'"Good," did I say? No, this is bad, very bad. I'll tell the Count.'

Every time that Madame Goudounow came to see Selma, Jeanne did the same thing, stopped on the stair-flight, said to herself that this was very bad, and resolved to lay the matter before the Count. Madame Beaujean, who also disapproved of the visits of Madame Goudounow, in like manner again and again made up her mind to tell the Count of them. But how do it? The Count was this sort of man: When you went up to him with a mien which said, 'There's something I want to tell you, Monsieur le Comte,' he looked at you out of his great calm eyes in such a way that you felt your tongue cleave to the roof of your
mouth. You know the 'do not mingle' sort of look; it was that.

So said Madame Beaujean.

And this is what Jeanne said:

When you had made up your mind just how you would gently hint to Monsieur le Comte at the undesirableness of Mademoiselle Selma's being bewitched by this Russian person, you would find that Monsieur le Comte was looking away over your head into space, and, though you stood quite close to him, you would feel considerably further away from him than from the Indies. Haughtiness some people might have considered this; Jeanne considered it a most lovely, gentlemanlike manner, and she declared that she would lay down her life for Monsieur le Comte. One cannot imagine Jeanne's doing anything so epic as laying down her life for anyone, but feels absolutely convinced that she was of those who would flee shrieking at sight of a knife or a poisoned cup; it is probable, however, that, short of laying down her life, for which she had a healthy girl's healthy liking, she would have done most things for Monsieur le Comte.
CHAPTER XVI.

MADAME GOUDOUNOW.

'Jealousy is the rage of a man.'

'Oh, my dear friend!' Selma exclaimed, on Madame Goudounow's entering her room. 'How glad I am to see you! I am moped to death.'

Madame Goudounow threw herself into a chair. 'I suppose you have sat in the house all day. Put on your hat and come with me.'

'May I? How nice!' Selma ran from the room, and in less than a minute returned to it, hatted and gloved. The two friends were soon in the street, and for a time walked on in silence. The girl was first to speak.

'Nice did I say it was to go out with you? It's delicious! Madame Goudounow'—the young voice was thick with emotion—'you have sometimes felt wicked, haven't you?'
'No, no—never!' A short laugh accompanied the words. 'What does it feel like, Selma?'
'I can't tell you'—the voice was scarce more than a whisper—'but I feel wicked now. I feel I should like to do something dreadful.'
The girl stood still in the street, her bright eyes dilating.
'What, for instance?'
'Well'—they were standing outside a café chantant—'I should like to see what is going on in that bright, naughty place.'
'Who told you that a café chantant was a bright, naughty place?'
'Anatol.'
A strange look passed over the face of the Russian, and she drew the girl's arm in hers.
'You may as well see it. Follow me.'
Selma did so. An entertainment, half musical, half acrobatical, was in full swing. The audience, which was large, was very quiet. The performance was vulgar more than anything else. A number of girls in flimsy costumes sang sentimental songs in execrable taste, though the faces of some of them were modest enough, one of them being, indeed, very noble, and, as Selma noticed with surprise, grave to sternness. Some men in would-be comic costumes sang would-be comic songs, and
leaped and danced as accompaniment. An acrobat in conjunction with a woman who wore a look of anxious seriousness, strangely different from the bold smile of the English circus-girl, performed some feats with ball and board. Selma observed all these things attentively.

'It seems to me very silly,' she said after awhile, with a nervous laugh; then she started and rose. 'Nay, it is horrid! Let us go. A priest!'

It was as she said. A clergyman, not—in justice to the priests of France, be it said—a Frenchman, was standing within a few feet of them, with glass held steadily to his eyes. The solemn, distinctive dress which he wore made him a figure strangely out of keeping with his surroundings, and the sight of him in the glare of the gay place gave the young Finnlander a rude shock. It was as if rough hands had been laid on a precious possession.

'You had no right,' she said to her companion as they left the hall, 'to take me to that place.'

'Who told me she wanted to see it?'

'A child!' was the passionate answer. 'You have taken the childhood out of me—have made me a woman at sixteen. Why should I know of this wickedness? I am not fit to be Count Denis-sow's wife.'

A smile passed over the face of the Russian,
making it terrible. The two walked on in silence, the distance between them widening, then again gradually narrowing. It was Selma who approached Madame Goudounow, and finally took her hand and slipped it into her own arm, holding it there, caressing it.

Madame Goudounow said nothing. The child was crying; her tears were falling in great drops on the pavement as she walked along—crying in the bright streets of Paris.
CHAPTER XVII.

MADAME GOUDOUNOW IN HER HOME.

'She was a charmer.'

When, after leaving Selma at her house, Madame Goudounow returned to her own home, she was welcomed by a glad-faced girl.

'I am so glad you are back, madame.'

'Are you, ma belle? Don't blush, dear child; that's only French for Mabel. You have received a letter, I see. What is the news in it?'

'I have not opened it.'

'Not opened it?' Madame Goudounow laughed softly. 'Is it not your countryman, Tony Lumpkin, who says that the inside of a letter is always the cream of the correspondence?'

'I don't know.'

'You don't know?' A look, half surprise, half contempt, came to the face of the Russian. 'My little girl, you have read nothing, seen nothing,
know nothing! Tears?' The large eyes had dimmed. 'Kiss me, and run off to bed. You have all wisdom and all happiness, for you have goodness, and those quick tears. Good-night. I love you greatly, English Mabel.'

'Are you going to study late, madame?'

'Yes.'

A cloud passed over the girl's face.

The artist gazed at her earnestly.

'You have something to tell me, Mabel?'

'Yes. That is my doing, madame. I am very, very sorry.'

She pointed to a vase which lay in shivers on the floor at some distance from them.

Madame Goudounow started, with a look of poignant regret. The vase was of rare beauty and of great value. She knelt down beside the broken fragments, then, looking up with a smile, said in a clear, steady voice:

'My little friend, I have said good-night to you; go now to bed.'

The girl burst into loud sobs, the weeping of a child whose heart is bursting.

'What is it, Mabel?'

The Russian went over to her, and laid her hand on the young head.

'Scold me!' was the answer.
MADAME GOUDOUNOW IN HER HOME 75

‘My sweetheart, I am not angry with you. Why should I scold you? Ah, dear child!’

The English arms were thrown about her, and the girl kissed her in a passion of gratitude, then rose, and left the room quickly.

Madame Goudounow once more knelt beside the broken treasure. Piece after piece she picked up, making that woman’s wail which consists in bringing the tongue into quick contact with the upper teeth, and which, put into letters as nearly as I can manage it, becomes tsigch! tsigch! At last, with a slow, sad shake of the head, she placed the fragments on a table, took off her wraps, which she threw upon a chair, and walked across the large drawing-room, at the end of which was her music-room. The door of it was ajar, and she pushed it open. The sight which met her eyes caused her to pause on the threshold. A young page was standing before a mirror, holding in his hand a blotting-pad, which he had taken from a desk near by. He was reading the writing on it as reversed in the reflection.

The artist stood and watched him with an anxious smile, then, her expression becoming very grave, advanced into the room. The boy turned with a white face and eyes wide with shame and terror. She took the pad from him, and said quietly:
'Va ten, mon enfant.'

Left alone—the boy had made his way to the door with small, slow steps of shame—Madame Goudounow sat down before the piano. Her face twitched with the grimace that quinine brings. She had laid the blotter back on the desk.

'That was nasty. Poor little worm.'

She opened the instrument and began to play. The music became a tangle; the blind hands groped among the notes. Discord followed discord . . . the memory was gone. Madam, sir, who read, do you know what it is when a musician's memory goes? It is iron laid about the heart and hands; it is terrifying. The pianist bent her face upon the key-board.

'She has the love, she has the music.'

Five, ten minutes passed; then the hour—twelve—rang out from a little clock on the mantelshelf with a titter in its quick chimes. The face was lifted; it was tearless and very white; it was curiously beautiful.

Some moments passed, then a maid in the doorway begged to know madame's pleasure, madame having rung.

'I wish you to go to bed, Elise.'

The servant still stood at the open door. Did madame herself not intend to go to bed?
"No, I shall sit up all night." This was said wheeling a fauteuil to the fireplace. "You have brought me my shoes, I see. You can take off my boots."

The maid knelt and did so.

"Does madame want anything more?"

"No"—a keen, quick smile. "Does Elise?"

"Oh, madame, only this: the little new page——"

"Is ravishingly pretty, with his dreamy face of a seventh-heaven cherub. Yes, Elise; don't you maids spoil him. Tell cook I wish him to be thoroughly sat upon."

"Ah, madame, he is desolatingly sorry——"

"Not he! He is mortally frightened, and nothing else. An ignoble person, I fancy. Charming, that little bent head of his, as he dragged his crushed atoms out of the room. By the way, Elise, you look wondrously ugly to-night. What has blown out your cheek?"

"Toothache, madame."

"Ah, poor soul! There's no cure for two things in this world, toothache and heartache, save pulling out the tooth and heart."

Would madame kindly repeat to her servant that remark, which her servant had not understood?

"A poor epigram, Elise, not worth saying twice."
Tie a hot salt-bag to the fat cheek, and if the little page is waking, tell him I forgive him. Another thing! Are you there still?

Madame Goudounow looked round. There was nobody but herself in the room. She rose, and walked up and down it.

Two things Katharine Goudounow had hungered and thirsted for all her life: to be famed as a musician, and to be loved as a wife. In the child Selma she had met her rival in music, and in the child Selma had met her rival in love. It was, so the white-faced woman told herself, as she walked up and down her room the long night through, easy and pleasant to be kind to everyone excepting to the child Selma. She pictured the latter crying herself to sleep, and even that vision was fraught with a bitter envy to one who had neither sleep nor tears. Towards dawn she sat down again at her instrument and played. She was like one inspired. The piece that she played was called 'Heartbreak,' and was made of mock laughter. It was of her own composing, and was of extraordinary power and pathos. 'I can play that still better than anyone in the world,' she said, speaking aloud to herself, like an old woman, and then laughing merrily, partly because she remembered that she was not an old
woman, and partly because she remembered that she had never written down or played for anyone the music of her wonderful composition, which consequently no one in the world could attempt to play; partly, moreover, because the little sleepy-eyed page here made his appearance at the door, looking most tragically repentant; and partly, finally, because great misery works great madness, and this woman whom the dawn found laughing was in great misery.
CHAPTER XVIII.

A BIRTHDAY MORNING.

"J'avais donc dix-huit ans! J'étais donc plein de songes! L'espérance en chantant me berçait de mensonges."

Selma had spent two years in the French capital.

It was a glorious morning in mid-June, and her birthday. She was eighteen. The pleasantness of it! She sat up and opened one half of the French window; the glad, fresh grass in the little garden-plot laughed in the sunlight, and a brown bird sang under the roof, "Oh, see! Oh, see!" It sang in English in the French capital, because English is the language of the birds. A June world is worth looking at. The girl laughed softly. The sun that makes everything double made the trees come into her bedroom. She rubbed her eyes to see better the lacework of branches and dance of leaves on her bed-cover.

Somebody knocked.
A BIRTHDAY MORNING

‘Come in!’

It was Jeanne, the maid. Having cautiously opened the door, she entered with her bright morning face, carrying a tray that was covered with gifts and letters.

Jeanne’s face was one of those that justify young mankind’s drawing of the human physiognomy, that bold and simple art-work which consists of two full stops, a comma, and a dash, framed with a gibbous circle. The type of face which results is not particularly exquisite in outline or markedly noble in expression, but it is one met with in the rural regions of all countries, and consequently in those of France. The sight of the round-faced, low-browed Breton girl almost always broke up all the composure in Selma, and as she walked across her room on this eventful morning, with her red straight mouth widening from combined goodwill and jollity, Selma laughed merrily.

‘Thank you, Jeanne’—this in reply to a courteous felicitation. ‘It’s not so bad, after all, to have a birthday. Stay! Don’t drop that heavy thing down on my tree’—as Jeanne made a movement to deposit the tray on the bed. ‘You’ll crumple all the leaves. Put it on that little table, and place it beside me. Heigho! If only nobody wanted to marry me!’
Mais, mademoiselle?
The real horror of Jeanne at Selma's ingratitude was wonderful to behold.

'You don't know what it's like, Jeanne. How old are you?'

'Twenty. I'm promised, mademoiselle.'

'You!'

The energy thrown by Selma into this word made it not precisely complimentary, but the young peasantess was not tremulously alive all o'er, and her quiet, rosy face lost none of its joviality.

'A young man in my place, mademoiselle.'

'Oh!'

Selma was politely interested.

'What is he, Jeanne?'

'He's apprenticed to a butcher, mademoiselle.'

The charming smile on Selma's face said about as plainly as words, 'How thoroughly delightful!' and quite made up for her bluntness at the beginning of the conversation.

'He's not a count, you see, Jeanne,' she added.

'That's so different. He'll let you do as you like.'

'No, he won't, not my young man, mademoiselle.'

Jeanne gave her round head a toss, which showed her pride in her young man and that fine spirit of his.
‘Come, come!’ A look of some impatience came to Selma’s face. ‘You needn’t want to make me believe that your young butcher has got the time-old prejudices of a middle-aged Russian nobleman.’

Jeanne did not understand a word of this, so her face lighted up like a sun. A fine mysteriousness is very pleasing.

Selma began to read her letters. One of them she kissed again and again. It was not Count Anatol’s. At the thought of him her face clouded, and she closed pettishly the open window, and darkened it with a blind, shutting out the glad fresh grass and the laughing sunlight, and the moving shadows of the trees, and the music of the bird under the roof. She lay with her face on her pillow, and thought. Then she rose, and dressed very slowly. Decidedly she was very unhappy. The troubled, witchingly beautiful face in the glass said that. At the breakfast-table she put from her cup and plate, and bowed her face where she sat. Madame Beaujean, who was eating bread sopped in coffee, illustrated the oft-illustrated fact that there’s many a slip ’twixt sopped bread and the lip, for the softened portion of the ‘tartine’ fell plashing into the cup. Madame Beaujean, instead of resorting to a spoon to lift it out, gave
herself up to reflection, sitting quite still, with her moist, full lips pursed in grave displeasure. To be eighteen, lovely and loved, and to sit under heaven as if you had not a good star in it, this was so far past her comprehension as to be quite past her pity. Some minutes passed in silence, then the French matron, losing her patience, stirred noisily her coffee, on the surface of which the swollen bread floated, and, having reduced it to a species of soup, ate it with the aid of her spoon, disposing of it with that cheerful celerity which so greatly shocks Englishmen, alone among human beings dismal and dawdling over their food.

Smoothing her little black apron with her little—rather black—hands (Madame Beaujean had a horror of water and a still greater horror of soap), she then said coldly, with a slight flushing of her not unhandsome dusky face, 'May I know, Mademoiselle Selma, what your plans for the day are? Is Monsieur le Comte coming?'

Selma rose and walked to the window.

'Yes—at least, I suppose so. It is one of the days on which he comes.'

'Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!'

Madame Beaujean clasped her small dark hands, and dramatically pressed her thumbs to the portion of her brow which was between her
eyes, a gesture which, with her, denoted extreme agitation, but which made her look as if she had developed a Brobdingnagian nose.

Selma smiled. ‘There is really no reason to get excited about it, Madame Beaujean,’ she said, meaning well, but blundering.

Madame Beaujean uncovered her face.

‘I was not born in an ice-cellar in Finland, and have not ice running in my veins, Mademoiselle Selma,’ she said, using, in the heat of the moment, a rather Irish figure of speech. ‘That being so, I have yet to learn that one turns to stone on being visited by a gentleman—and such a gentleman! I confess that if you’re not excited, I am.’

Jeanne, rather luckily, entered at this moment, and her mistress turned to her.

‘Clear away the breakfast, my girl, tidy the house, smooth your hair, and be ready at any moment to answer the door, just as if it were Sunday. Don’t grin, it makes you look a fool; and don’t scowl, or the Count will think that you don’t get your wages regularly. Keep your red hands out of sight, don’t stare, and don’t speak.’

‘Yes, madame.’

Jeanne’s large plain face expressed neither surprise nor indignation at these very minute directions. She quietly pondered them in her heart,
and was still standing in the doorway, lost in reflection, when Madame Beaujean left the room. She then found herself face to face with Selma, who went up to her, and, closing the door behind her so as to shut her into the room, said mischievously:

'How are you going to do all that Madame Beaujean tells you, Jeanne?'
'I don't know, mademoiselle.'
'Well, I'll tell you, Jeanne. Don't—live. When the Count comes, open the door, and then—cease to exist.'

'How should I manage that, mademoiselle?'
'Easily enough. Be no more; go out like a candle in a puff of wind; melt away. Can't you understand, Jeanne?'

Jeanne looked forlornly at her red hands. They were facts and stubborn things. She nursed no hope of their becoming invisible.

'Poor dear hands!' Selma took them in hers with a sweet, girlish grace. 'They are a problem, certainly. I don't see how you are to open the sitting-room door for the Count without showing them, and that would be the death of him, poor man! according to Madame Beaujean. Don't look so heart-struck, Jeanne. Can you dance?'

Jeanne's round eyes gleamed.
'Why, of course, mademoiselle!'  
'Well, see here. To cheer ourselves up a bit, suppose we dance round the table. . . . Oh, isn't it lovely, Jeanne? You really do dance nicely.'  
Jeanne only laughed in answer, and round and round the table the two girls went in whirls of happiness.  
When at last they came to a standstill, Madame Beaujean was sitting inside the door with her little black hands folded on her little black apron.  
Dramatists are apt to represent telling speeches as being made in supremely amazing moments like this. The flat truth is that, under such circumstances, the human tongue becomes paralyzed. Selma, who was equal to the common run of emergencies, collapsed as completely at the unexpected sight of Madame Beaujean seated within the door as did Jeanne. The two young beings stood at the table with bowed, white faces, saying not a word, and Madame Beaujean, saying not a word, remained seated at the door. Great silence reigned, and great gravity would have reigned, had not the June sun, peering in at the window, filled the room with quiet smiles, making of the whole pretty thing one of those pictures which the painter-angels paint, and which God hangs on the line, because they are very good, and, to those
who have angels' eyes to see all that is in a picture, have a meaningfulness and loveliness which will not be told in words.

When one of those minutes which is really made up of sixty seconds had passed, Madame Beaujean said, with a face that broke into sweet pleasantness—because Parisians are made up of sweet pleasantness, and it will out:

'Say, Mademoiselle Selma, can you now dispense with Jeanne? Because, if you've done with her, you see, she might go about her work. Be off with you, mon enfant'—this, tapping the Breton girl on the shoulder, and pointing to the door. 'Get done what you've got to do! And you, Mademoiselle Selma'—turning to the other—'will you help me in a little matter? Those vases must all be refilled with flowers. Clip the ends of the stalks of those that are in them, and cut off the faded blossoms, and then put them back.'

'The bare stalks?'

'Yes; in crystal vases, my dear, nothing looks so bad as a poverty of stalks. A few fresh blossoms stuck in among the old stems make a really good display, and a beautiful thing about men is that they never notice these little artifices.'

'They must be blind creatures!' Selma, clipping a flower as directed, exclaimed scornfully.
Madame Beaujean—also clipping—stole a peep at the girl.

'I don't know that I like to hear a young person like you, my dear, speak of men with scorn. They're as God made them, and He has given them two eyes, like us, and if they don't see with them, why, dear me! perhaps they do something else.'

Selma tossed her head. This was a miserably feeble remark.

'Perhaps they smell with them,' she said, with girlish irony, as she added to the growing pile of stalks.

Madame Beaujean was in no mood to keep the ball rolling. Making a neat bunch of stalks, she put them into a vase, and held it up triumphantly.

'See that?'

'Yes.'

Selma's face did not express any great admiration. What will you? Those Northern nations have slow minds. Madame Beaujean was too much used to this sort of thing for her face to fall.

'Wait a moment,' she said, smiling, 'that's only the beginning. Now see.'

Two very full-faced roses were deftly inserted among the stalks, and the vase was placed on a bracket.
'Would you say that there were only two roses in that vase, Mademoiselle Selma?'

'No. I shouldn't know how many there were in it.'

'Precisely. If you had two green stalks dangling in clear water you would, however, know.'

'Perhaps I should.'

The two continued clipping.
CHAPTER XIX.

'BOULEVERSEMENT.'

'Their spirits, as in a dream, are all bound up.'

Madame Beaujean is still making preparations. Let nobody smile. There is probably not a house in middle-class creation but One Visitor (the words are purposely written with capital initials to give some idea of their large meaning) causes a thrill of excitement to run through it from front to back, and from basement to attic. The mistress loses her head; the mistress's husband—under these circumstances one cannot, with all deference, speak of him as the master—loses his head; the mistress's daughters and sons lose their heads. Sometimes the visitor is the One Aristocrat that comes to the house, sometimes he is the Rich Acquaintance, sometimes he is the Lover. Count Anatol Denissow was all these three things rolled into one, and consequently his visits at the house of Madame
Beaujean, citoyenne, were almost life-endangering to that good person and to Jeanne.

Jeanne made no secret of it at all, and when chidden by Madame Beaujean for betraying shamelessly the fact that the house was not daily and hourly visited by the peers of Europe, and reminded that the Count was peculiarly affable and gracious, answered tartly, in sheer excitement, that he might be as good as the Bon Dieu, but that, if ever she got to heaven, she wasn't going to pretend that she wasn't afraid of the Bon Dieu, but would shake in her shoes till she got used to Him. This is the sort of remark you can't answer without going into dogma, and you don't go into dogma when you are what they call in France bouleverst.

When the Count walked up, or drove up—especially when he drove up—Jeanne lost her breath. It simply went, every whiff of it, out of her body, and by the time that it came back to her, she was in such a state of collapse that all she could do was to sit on a kitchen chair with her rosy, fat hands clutching her heart. Then the bells would begin—the Count's footman would ring without, and the ladies would ring within, and then Madame Beaujean would come fluttering downstairs, saying 'Jeanne, Jeanne!' in a screaming whisper, and Mademoiselle Selma would sing out
like a bird 'Jeanne!' And then the Count's foot-
man would ring again, and Jeanne would totter
to the stairfoot with a Macbethian 'the-bell-invites-
me' expression, and she would somehow get to the
stairtop and to the door. And she would open it.
And the footman, with a beautiful and fearful calm,
would ask if Madame Beaujean were at home. 
And he would seem to hear with glad surprise that
she was, though the Count always called at an
hour at which the exigences of Parisian house-
keeping made it absolutely impossible for Parisian
housekeepers to be anywhere but at home. And
the Count would be ushered into the drawing-
room, preceded by Jeanne, like nothing so much
as a ship in a gale become human. And Madame 
Beaujean, after keeping the Count waiting for fully
a quarter of an hour, with a suddenness quite
wonderful, would wing into the room with a twitter
of talk, and would perch first on one chair and
then on another, and then would wing out of the
door or the window, singing 'Selma!' in a high,
thin canary's note, with a world of woman's excite-
ment in it. And after that, in less than an hour,
the Count would be gone, and the wonderful event
would be a thing of the past, like the drawing of a
tooth or the amputation of a foot—these things
are done so quickly—and (this the delightful part
of it) Jeanne would find herself in the possession of all her teeth, and of both her feet, and of a silver charm, and Madame Beaujean would likewise find herself wholly sound, and would find on her hall-table some delicacy of the season; and, after that, such their pride and pleasure and gratitude, and the angels in heaven alone know what else, for a fortnight or so life would seem to be a beautiful and a grand thing to this simple poor dame and the simple poor damsel, her handmaid.

And all this time Selma would remain as composed as if counts were as common as cucumbers. You might hear her, while Monsieur le Comte was at the front-door, singing a bit of a Finnish song that would break your heart with its sadness, were it not for the anger you felt at the very great want of decorum that would let anyone sing with Monsieur le Comte on the doorstep. Hear her now! Madame Beaujean paused in dusting the entrance-hall and listened to the young thrilling voice in the room. The song which Selma was singing was to her as much a song without words as the twitter of a bird; and, pitched in saddest minor as it was, it took a deeper pathos from its meaninglessness. Madame Beaujean sat down on a hall-chair, duster in hand. All was not well with this young life, she felt suddenly. There was a love
being wasted and a happiness being lost. There
was—she started to her feet—there was a finger-
mark on that window-pane. She hastened over
to it, and removed it by means of first breathing
vehemently on it, and then rubbing it carefully
with her duster. As she retired some paces from
it to view her work, a loud footman's summons
came to the door, and in less than a minute later
she and Jeanne collided at the kitchen stairtop,
she flying to warn Jeanne, and Jeanne flying to
warn her, that Monsieur le Comte was what they
call in plays 'without.'
CHAPTER XX.

ONE YEAR MORE.

'I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell.'

HAVING been ushered into Madame Beaujean's beflowered sitting-room amid all the usual excitement, and having talked for more than a quarter of an hour with Madame Beaujean, Count Denissow began to feel some impatience at the non-appearance of Selma. At last she entered the room hurriedly, and giving him her hand, while her head was held back forbiddingly, said, with a strange new ring in her voice:

'First—for my birthday gift—a promise.'

'What promise, Selma?'

All the June sun had gone out of the Count's face.

The girl's eyes dropped, and her voice was not quite steady as she said:

'One year more—to myself.'
'Have it'

He was standing beside her, but the answer came as from one standing a long way off. She seated herself, and motioned him to the seat beside her. He did not take it, but walked across the room to the window.

There was silence for a few moments. Selma broke it.

'A year is not an eternity, Anatol.'

'No'—he laughed dryly. 'It is a thing of mere time, of months, of weeks, of days—of three hundred and sixty-five days.'

She rose and went over to him.

'That sounds quite dreadful.' She laughed, a toneless laugh enough. 'Better say fifty-two weeks; best say twelve months. You can wait twelve months, Anatol, surely.'

Her face was quite close to him, but it was bent.

'Yes, I can wait twelve months.'

He passed his hand over her hair. He did not kiss her. . . .

Some time had passed, and somebody else spoke.

'I should like to box both your ears, Mademoiselle Selma.'

It was Madame Beaujean, the Count having left the house.
Selma turned round.

'It does so bore me, seeing him. Were you never bored, Madame Beaujean, at the sight of Monsieur Beaujean? Did you feel in a very great hurry to become Madame Beaujean? Oh, I am so sorry; pray forgive me.'

Madame Beaujean had covered her face. She had indeed been in the greatest of hurries to become Madame Beaujean, though Monsieur Beaujean could not be described as other than a bore. At the time of the marriage he had been distressingly deaf, and only after his demise had Madame Beaujean discovered that she loved him passionately.

She now buried her face in her handkerchief, and wept real tears. Selma looked at her, and her thought put into her words was, 'I wonder if I shall cry like that when Anatol dies and I'm a widow.' That she might never become the wife of Anatol, and that, if she did, he might be widowed, and not she, did not apparently strike her. Her lips curled contemptuously. She was quite, quite certain that she would never cry like that when she was a widow. No man was worth it.
CHAPTER XXI.

DMITRI AND 'MAIDEN.'

'Is it warm in that sweet valley,
Vale of childhood, where you dwell?
Is it calm in that green valley,
Round whose bournes such great hills dwell?
Are there giants in the valley—
Giants leaving footprints yet?
Are there angels in the valley?
O, tell me—I forget.'

While Selma waited for Madame Beaujean to regain her wonted composure, Count Denissow, having sent his carriage home, set out walking in the direction of one of the poorest parts of Paris, only after two hours reaching his destination, a small, cheerless-looking house. A little child stood within the open door, and, anticipating the usual visitor's question, said prettily:

'Vere at home.'
'Who are we?'
'I and papa.'
'Where's mamma?'
'I and papa don't know. If you'll carry me, I'll take you to papa.'

Count Denissow lifted her. She was broken-backed, and light as a child aged three. Her age was six.

'What is papa doing?'
'Thinking.'

Count Denissow smiled, and the sprite in his arm passed a small hand over his face, in sheer pleasure at its comeliness with the brightness on it.

'How many more stairs have we to go up to reach papa, fillette?'

A little broken-backed laugh came from the child.

'We passed him long ago; didn't you see?'
'No.'

'He was in the first room we passed. The ride on your arm all through the house was so nice.'

Count Denissow laughed.

'Why, fillette, I really believe you are human, after all. Would you like a ride all round Paris in my carriage?'

'No'—a sudden total collapse, and falling back of the golden head. 'Take me to papa now... I am very tired. It was a long ride.'

The broken sentences died away in whispers.
Denissow started violently, and was relieved to hear someone come up the stairs with light, quick steps. The child was taken from him.

'She's only asleep, my friend. She never made so long a journey before on any but my arm, and the excitement of it was too much for her. How are you, dear old fellow?'

'Sick at heart, if I speak the truth. More of that later. Meanwhile, how are you? and how is the invention?'

'I am, as you see, well, and the invention is well.'

'I wish I could see the invention. Has it taken a concrete shape yet?'

'No; I shrink from the mere notion of its doing that.'

The man, as he spoke, drew his fingers through his daughter's gleaming hair, and pressed closer to him the little crippled girl.

'One feels as if the concrete were sometimes so unworthy of the abstract, Anatol. Look at the body that is given to this soul.'

They were standing in a bare, low-ceiled room.

Denissow glanced round it.

'And look at the housing that is given to her and you, Dmitri! Has it come to this, old comrade, and may I still not help you?'
‘No.’ The inventor smiled sadly. ‘What alone I want you could not give me, Anatol—something to straighten a little child’s back, and to still its mother’s thirst.’

The last words were said with eyes turned in the direction of a young, handsome woman, who entered the room with unsteady steps. She was English, and, after looking for a few moments at Count Denissow, who had risen, but did not bow, she said in English, addressing her husband:

‘Dim, my sweetheart, I don’t like your friend the least little bit.’

Dmitri, for all answer, put her arm in his, and led her from the room, returning almost immediately with a face that evinced neither distress nor embarrassment. The word that perhaps would best describe it was his daughter’s—‘thinking.’ Denissow was kneeling beside the child, who was telling him a story, half in French and half in English. She ‘made it up’ as she went on, and all things pretty were in it.

She seemed to speak the two languages equally fluently.

Denissow turned to her father.

‘Does she know Russian, Dmitri?’

‘No; we think two languages enough, don’t we, Maiden?’
The child nodded, and the men began talking in Russian.

Denissow's face was greatly troubled.

'How is this to end, Dmitri?' He walked over to a window. 'When I see that wife of yours—'

A hand was laid on his shoulder.

'Ah, not an unkind word of her, as you love me, Anatol; she is half my happiness.'

'And that is the other half?'

Denissow glanced at the broken flower called Maiden.

'Yes.'

It was veritably as if a light shone out of Dmitri's face.

Denissow shook his head.

'Poor lad! poor lad!'

'You don't understand, Anatol; you don't know the wife. Why, when she only says "Dim, sweetheart," as she did just now, all is forgotten, excepting that I love her.'

The little girl, catching at the English words, said softly:

'Dim, sweetheart!'

'Hear her!'

Dmitri laughed joyously; then, going over to the child, said, 'Hush, impudence! I bent over her, and covered her with kisses.
Denissow was still not silenced.
'Love a woman who—drinks, Dmitri?'
'My good friend, yes.'
'And who insults her husband's friends?'
Dmitri said nothing, but shrugged his shoulders very lightly. The naive gesture said that the man who is his wife's sweetheart will forgive some things, among them this thing.

Denissow was Russian enough to laugh good-humouredly, and there was silence again for a moment; then he said, looking curiously at his friend:

'What is this invention of yours?'
'It has no name yet.'
'Can you draw it?'
'Yes.'

Dmitri drew swiftly a little chair, with hollowed back and rockers, that could be placed on level ground or hung in air, that was tricked out with everything that heart could dream of, and that, as full of joints as a human body, by the touching of springs moved in every direction, an index to the springs being at the right hand of the sitter. It opened out into a bed, bent back into a couch and forwards into a chair.

'Put Maiden into it,' Denissow said, smiling at the ingenuity of it.
Dmitri, with a few masterly strokes, sketched in his little daughter, and then only did the full wonder of the chair appear. It was so made, here raised, there hollowed out, as to hide the child's deformity.

'What does she say to it?' Denissow asked.

Dmitri was trying to give to the small pictured face the living softness of Maiden's.

'She says it is everything but one thing. She insists that it must shut up into a little box, for little boxes are all her pleasure. God gives it to little children to say such terrible things.'

The hand and voice were steady, and the bowed head kept its secret.

Denissow was deeply moved.

'Do the doctors hold out no hope of her living, my friend?'

Dmitri touched up the eyes of the child in the picture, darkening them so as to give them something of the tragic questioning that is in the eyes of cripples.

'They say she may live till this year's autumn. There, that is more like her, is it not?'

Denissow took the picture, and gazed at it with an admiration which was delight.

'Care to have it?' Dmitri asked.

'Indeed I should!'
'Then sign it, Maiden.'
Dmitri gave it to the child, who wrote under it 'Maiden' in a brave large hand.
The men again talked in Russian.
'What of the little Finn, Anatol?'
'She puts off the evil hour.'
Dmitri, sitting on the floor beside the low sofa of his little girl, with hands about his knees, nodded slowly.
'Small wonder. It's an amazing thing that women should be found who keep to the marriage engagement.'
'Yet it's usual, rather than not, for them to do so,' Denissow answered dryly.
'Yes, God bless them! They're wonderful creatures.'

If Denissow had come to this quarter for sympathy, it was plain that he was doomed to disappointment. Happily he had known Dmitri for years, so he was spared the humiliation of defeated hope. With a laugh he held out his hand.

'Good-bye, old friend. It's evident that you think me in rare luck, and as I came to you sure of having that fact impressed upon me, I cannot be offended. Have you a kiss for me, Maiden? I got no kiss from my little Finn.'

Maiden put her lips to his, then asked, smiling:
'Who is your little Finn?'
'That is my secret.'
Denissow's brow contracted, and the small cripple passed her frail hand over the frown, much as she had before passed it over the smile.
'What a queer fairy it is!' Denissow exclaimed.
The world seemed fuller of daylight as he walked home.
CHAPTER XXII.

LILIES.

'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

It was a sunny forenoon towards the close of August. Denissow met Selma walking alone in Paris. She linked her arm in his before he could say a word.

'It is wholly my own fault, Anatol. Madame Beaujean did not know that I was going out. I grew so tired of the wall-papers and whitewash. I'm always so glad that the sky isn't whitewashed, and the world wall-papered.'

'Yes, it's pleasanter so,' Anatol admitted, with a smile.

They walked on.

'Where are you going to?' Selma asked, after a while.

'I hardly like to tell you.'

Selma pressed the question.
‘Well, if you must know, to a funeral.’
He glanced at the face beside him, and noticed, with surprise, a smile on it.
‘Really, Anatol, that’s quite lucky! At least——’
Her voice changed; he had loosed her arm, greatly shocked and displeased, and, the distance between them pretty wide, she walked beside him. ‘I didn’t mean quite that. You don’t understand, Anatol. I do assure you that I thought before going out to-day that I should like to go to a funeral, and I had resolved to attach myself to the first funeral party I met, so that it does seem in a way lucky that I should have met you. It prevents my having to go alone, thus bringing upon myself the very great wrath of Madame Beaujean.’

She had drawn nearer to Denissow, and put her hand again within his arm. He looked no longer angry, but perplexed.
‘What made you have so morbid a notion, Selma?’
‘Can’t say. I often have the notion. One gets so tired of the noise of life here: if the people did not die sometimes, it would be quite unbearable; but they do die, now and then, even in Paris.’
‘Yes, there is just that much of Finland about them,’ Denissow said gravely.
After that they walked on in silence till Selma asked:

'Who has died, Anatol?'

'A little child,'

Denissow told his companion of Maiden, her father and mother. She listened attentively, then said earnestly:

'The mother interests me most of these people, I think. Is she beautiful—English-beautiful?'

'She is undoubtedly not plain. I do not quite know, Selma, what you mean by English-beautiful.'

'Indeed! But you must have noticed that there is English-beautiful and English-ugly. They are so particularly striking—that's English-ugly coming towards us now.'

The girl approaching them, and described as English-ugly, was certainly English. She was a lank, muddy-complexioned creature dressed in brick-red calico, and wearing far back on her head a wintry felt hat trimmed with flowered muslin, in illustration, as it were, of the seasons' difference. She carried herself so oddly, and was walking at a pace so quick, that she seemed running away from her arms, and barely able to keep up with her feet. A hot flush over the frank, good face did not beautify it.

Denissow smiled a little.
‘Dmitri’s wife is not at all like that, Selma.’
‘Then I know what she’s like. Don’t tell me. She’s very tall, rather stout, and quite blonde, with a face like a really lovely doll’s: a little nose and red mouth, and eyes that open and shut quite slowly—like this. Isn’t she?’
‘Well, yes, rather.’
‘That’s English-beautiful. I don’t wonder that he likes her.’
‘Don’t you?’
‘No. It’s a style I like exceedingly. It never fatigues. French faces are so fatiguing. Don’t you think so?’
‘I have thought so sometimes. But I have just told you, Selma, that this beautiful woman drinks.’
‘A pity’—thoughtfully. ‘But you couldn’t hate her for that, could you?’
‘I think I could.’
‘I know I couldn’t. Such lots of musicians have done so, and other wonderful people who will be remembered in the world longer than we.’

Denissow flushed uncomfortably.
‘Tell me more about these people,’ the girl added.
‘You do not take me into your life a little bit, Anatol, and yet want to have me altogether for yours.’

A shadow fell across her face. He noticed it.
'I did not think you would care to hear about them, Selma. Their lot seems so miserable.'

'That's just the sort of people I care to hear about. Of course it's in a way pleasant'—the voice was curiously doubtful—'to be happy, but it's thoroughly uninteresting, and meeting only happy, contented people is like reading only cheerful books. The loveliest books are sad, like the loveliest music. Did the little girl love music?'

'I can't tell.'

The shadow on the girl's face deepened. She did not speak again for a considerable while, then, pausing before a florist's, she said:

'Shall we not buy some flowers here?'

'I have sent a wreath.'

'I might take some in my hand.'

'Yes, of course, if you care to.'

They entered the shop, and Selma, walking round it, looked at the flowers.

'Only those growing look quite fresh, Anatol.'

'Then take those growing.'

'But I do not want the flower-pots.'

'Then pick the flowers.'

'Do you mean that? It would cost a great deal.'

'My purse is yours, Selma.'

Selma smiled, and picked the blossoms, going
from plant to plant, and soon becoming reckless in the happiness of filling her hands with white flowers.

Count Denissow, having explained to the shop-keeper in a few words that the plants robbed of their blossoms by the lady with him were to be considered as purchased by him, watched the girl with keen pleasure, the smile on his face broadening as, having picked a rose with a pink flush on it, which apparently did not please her when placed with the others, she put it into her jacket and sniffed at it approvingly.

'I think I have enough now, Anatol.'

'Then we might go on our way.—Plait-il!'

This was said to the florist by whom he was addressed on the threshold.

'You have not told me where to send the plants, monsieur.'

'The plants? They are of no use to me, my friend. You may have the patience to tend them till they blossom afresh.'

He hastened away after Selma, who was walking on, drinking in the loveliness of the lilies. He spoke to her:

'That is the way I like to see you, my lady.'

She turned round quickly:

'My lord, I am pleased that you are pleased.'
A light danced in the young gray eyes. There was perhaps just a touch of irony in the voice. The Slavonian is not keenly sensitive to ridicule, and it wholly escaped the notice of Count Denissow.
CHAPTER XXIII.

TWO GIRLS.

"Youth is hot and bold, age is weak and cold;
Youth is wild, and age is tame."

There are dark days even in June, and the morning which ushered in Selma's birthday in the year following that on which she had first asked Anatol Denissow for a respite wore a February face. Rain beat against the window, and the girl, too sleepy to open her eyes, heard it, and covered her face.

"Hi! Mademoiselle Selma!"

Jeanne shouted as lustily as though a few folds of blanket were padded doors.

Selma sat up and inveighed indignantly, but not for long, for Jeanne listened to her tirade with an attentiveness which became embarrassing.

"What have you brought me, Jeanne?" she asked suddenly, unable to refrain from smiling at the sight presented by the maid, who stood before her with
a tray full of letters and an absolutely unmoved face.

'First I bring you my felicitations,' the Bretoness said with quiet courtesy, 'and — her round face reddened like a harvest moon — a little gift which I have worked for you.'

'Thank you so much, Jeanne. What lovely wrist-warmers! They are wrist-warmers, aren't they?'

'Yes, mademoiselle.'

Jeanne looked proudly at her work. The wrist-warmers — not a particularly appropriate gift in mid-June, some might think, just as if, quotha! it were always mid-June, and there were no such thing as taking time by the forelock — were a brilliant purple worked in what I believe to be called purl and plain, the 'plain' being ornamented by yellow silk, heart-shaped spots worked in at regular intervals.

'Are they the the right size, mademoiselle?' Jeanne asked, just to keep her heart from bursting, and with sweet modesty to hint a fault.

'Yes, I'm sure they are; at least — observing their exceeding bigness — they're not too small, Jeanne, and that's the great thing with wrist-warmers.'

'Will you try them, mademoiselle?'

Selma put her hand in one, and Jeanne's face fell.
She had certainly been more generous than discreet in the matter of size.

'Your wrists must be very small, Mademoiselle Selma.'

'I don't think they are, Jeanne, but I'll tell you what.' Selma's face became inspired. 'I'll wear them higher up. Between the shoulder and the elbow is where I really feel the cold. I'll wear them up there, Jeanne, when winter comes. It was so very kind of you to make them. I should like to give you a kiss, if you don't mind.'

All the sun that was not in the sky beamed out of Jeanne's happy eyes.

'Now sit down there, Jeanne, while I read my letters.'

Jeanne sat on a box, and Selma took up a flimsy envelope addressed in faded ink.

'That's from my aunt. She's such a queer old thing, Jeanne, and she always writes the same. "God bless you, my little one, God bless you, Selma." So I needn't even open her letter just yet,' putting it on one side, after kissing it. 'That's only giving her back her kiss, for her letter is nothing but a kiss and a cry, Jeanne.'

Jeanne sat agape, and said nothing. She did not understand this sort of talk, but liked it, because she liked Mademoiselle Selma.
And this is from Miss Olive.' Selma tore open a letter in a pretty Italian handwriting. 'That's an English lady I know. Her letter begins, "Many happy returns of the day." Pretty, but very silly, Jeanne, for no day can ever return.' A sad look came into the Finnish eyes. 'I wonder they do not think of that. I should so much like to have my last birthday over again, but I might as well cry for the moon. Don't you remember how lovely it was, my last birthday?'

'Yes, Mademoiselle Selma,'

Jeanne's face brightened. Here was something intelligible. The meaning of the remarks on the English birthday formula she had not quite grasped.

Selma threw a letter from her.

'That is from Monsieur le Comte, and is horrid; and this—take it, Jeanne, and tear it across and across in the envelope as it is, and fling it out of the window.'

Jeanne did as directed, and Selma watched her curiously. Then, her face turning white, she leaped from the bed.

'How dared you, Jeanne?'

The two girls stood facing each other, Selma, little and slight, looking rather child than girl in her gleaming night-wrapper, with her short tumbled
hair; Jeanne, tall and stalwart, looking less girl than woman in her heavy, ample dress and closely braided hair. There was a certain brave quiet about the Bretoness that made her for the moment tower, not only physically, over Selma. She said shortly:

'You told me to tear that letter, mademoiselle.'

'Yes, but I didn't mean you to do so. Look at me, and say, did you not know that?'

Jeanne's round eyes met Selma's without blinking.

'Yes, mademoiselle.'

Selma went back to her bed.

'Sit down on the box again, Jeanne. I do like you greatly and trust you. I trust Madame Beaujean, but I don't like her, and though I like—love—Madame Goudounow, I don't trust her. Do you?'

'No, mademoiselle.'

'Did you ever love anyone whom you didn't trust, Jeanne?'

'Yes, mademoiselle.'

Jeanne was not communicative, but it was plain that she had some first-hand knowledge of psychical phenomena. She confessed to having loved without trusting with a quiet candour that was infinitely strange. Selma was charmed.

'I'm so glad to hear you say that, Jeanne. You
know we might both of us talk on the subject to Madame Beaujean till we were black in the face, and she would say, "Mes enfants, c'est im-possible"—this, with a grimacing imitation of Madame Beaujean in her most prim mood, and with a wonderful flourish of both hands. "Wouldn't she, Jeanne?"

Jeanne said nothing, being full of that discretion which is not part, but all in all of peasant-valour. A discussion in the abstract was safe enough, but personal illustration was a dangerous ground. While remaining silent, however, she smiled softly, partly at the grimacing girl in the bed, partly at the idea of two girls talking to Madame Beaujean on the subject of dear love till black in the face.

'I can see that you quite agree with me, Jeanne, though you're afraid to say so, because you haven't got the courage of a fricasseed frog' (the expression 'fricasseed frog' was a bit of satire which was quite lost on the young Frenchwoman). 'Madame Beaujean is like all old people—all the fire in them burns out, and leaves their hearts in ashes; they don't know what love is, and they've forgotten what it was; but, there, we won't talk of her any more, because it makes you think you'll lose your place, though if it did I should get the Count to find you another, and when we marry we
might take you for our servant, or for one of them.'

There was just the least touch of grandeur in the delivery of the addendum. Jeanne, who, however, had the vulgar prejudice in favour of the bird in the hand, remained silent.

'To return to Madame Goudounow.' Selma sat up in bed. 'Don't you think it very strange, Jeanne, that I should have known her now for nearly three years, she visiting me and I visiting her, and that Monsieur le Comte should not have found it out?'

'No, mademoiselle.'

'I do wish, Jeanne, that you would say more than "Yes, mademoiselle," and "No, mademoiselle." Why don't you think it strange?'

'Because, mademoiselle'—Jeanne made a strong effort, attended with brilliant success, at being less laconic—'I know a young person from my home in service in this street, and she has two sweethearts in the neighbourhood, and receives them both, and neither of them knows of the other. That could only happen in Paris; if it happened in our village, it would have come out long ago, and there would have been breaking of heads. It has been going on for two years.'

Selma looked deeply scandalized.
'What a deceitful girl!' I hope you tell her what you think of her, Jeanne. She is thoroughly contemptible.'

Either Jeanne had exhausted her stock of words for the present, or she chose to make no further confidences. It was not her habit to tell people what she thought of them, and Selma might safely have assumed that the contemptible girl from Brittany was not molested with reproaches from her co-villager. There was a silence, unbroken for some minutes, then Selma spoke.

'It's quite a different thing as regards me and Monsieur le Comte, Jeanne. I do feel that he would never have wished me to know Madame Goudounow, because she makes me feel wicked, and I would not for the world that he should know of this now; but I did not want to deceive him all along. If he had found it out at the beginning, if somebody had told him, if somebody had helped me...'

She covered her face with her hands.

All Jeanne's phlegm was gone in a moment, and she bent over the weeping girl, with difficulty keeping back her own tears. It was some time before Selma regained control over herself, then she said, looking earnestly at the Bretoness:

'One sometimes does dreadful things, and goes
on doing them, hoping all the time, at the back of one's heart, that, before one has gone too far, all will come out and be set right—doesn't one, Jeanne?'

'Yes, very often, mademoiselle.'

'But see, Jeanne, I have gone too far now. I have kept this up for three years, and it has grown part of my life. I could not tell Monsieur le Comte of it now, for I could not give her up.'

Jeanne's face became almost wise in its great sadness.

Selma went on: 'Do you know, I sometimes wonder that Madame Beaujean never told Monsieur le Comte of it. I think she would have done so, afraid as she is of speaking to him, had she known at all how very deceitful Madame Goudounow has made me; but she could not know that.'

'I will tell her, mademoiselle.'

Selma jumped out of bed and ran to the door, before which she placed herself with outstretched arms. The massive peasantess, too, had risen and stood again before her. It was the case of Napoleon and the big general. The strength lay with the small girl with the proud eyes.

'You shall not leave this room till you promise me that you will tell nothing. It is too late now. Promise!'
‘I promise, mademoiselle!’
‘Good. Now leave me, Jeanne.’

The dismissal came not a moment too soon, for Madame Beaujean was already calling aloud through the house, ‘Jeanne! Jeanne!’ adding in angriest tones the exhortation which was given by Winifred Pryce to her husband.
CHAPTER XXIV.

ONLY NINETEEN.

'Well, Selma, the twelve months have passed.'
'I am only nineteen, Anatol.'
'I know it.'
'Madame Beaujean was not married till she was forty-one.'

Denissow smiled.
'I fail to see, my love, how that affects us. Do you wish me to wait for you till you are forty-one?'
'No. But I shall be twenty next year.'
'Do you wish me to wait till next year?'
'Yes.'
'What am I to do in the meanwhile?'
'What I do.'
'What do you do?'
'I read, and play, and walk, and think—lots of things.'
A curious look passed Denissow's face, his eyes becoming what Selma called 'hooded.'

'Do you ever grieve?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Ever feel lonely?'

'No.'

'How do you manage that?'

'I have friends.'

'So have I. Friends do not seem to me to fill up my life, somehow.'

The voice was cruelly cold, and hurt like steel, but she plucked up heart and answered:

'They do to me.'

A moment's silence ensued, then he asked:

'Am I one of your friends, Selma?'

'No.'

'Not even that... I am curiously unfortunate.'

Selma, gazing out of the window, watched the raindrops fall and break. It was no longer the steady onpour of the morning, but every now and then the wind stirred the sunlit clouds and sent down a sparkling shower of rain.

'Call this June!' she said at last.

The remark fell flatter than even remarks on the weather generally do, and, conscience-stricken, she added the Goethian lament:

'If only—only you didn't want to marry me!'
Denissow's lips tightened.

'What is the great objection to marriage, Selma?'

'It's so——.' She made a grimace which was funny enough, though it brought no smile to the grave face beside her. 'I don't know what to call it. To be always together, like a cup and saucer. So tedious! I feel I should hate it.' Denissow's face remained unmoved till she played her trump-cards. 'There's my aunt, the Doktorinna, and——' 'Madame Beaujean,' he completed. 'Heaven help us, Selma! Are your aunt, the Doktorinna, and Madame Beaujean the only married people in the world?' 'No.' Her face wore an aggrieved expression. 'But they're the only married people we both of us know well, and it would be settling down into captivity like theirs. The very words in which they have praised a married woman's life to me makes me hate the idea of it. It means fetters; and I do love being free—you cannot think how much.'

The bright eyes flashed into his, and for a moment the man of thirty-four forgot to be angry. She was only nineteen, after all.

'If you didn't think of only one thing,' she went
on, following up the advantage gained, 'we might talk so pleasantly of many things.'

'So we might, Selma.' He forced a laugh. 'A wife for me, for one. I am getting so very old, that, if ever I am to marry, I must really do so now. You might choose a wife for me, Selma.'

'I should very much like to do so,' she said simply.

He looked at her. Her face was quite grave.

'Really, you are very obliging, Selma.' The tone was no longer one of light banter. 'Unhappily, you see, just about the last thing that a man wants the girl he loves to do for him is to choose him somebody else for a wife.'

Selma's face became troubled, and, as he noticed her lips begin to quiver, his voice changed, and he added, drawing her towards him and kissing the dark hair tenderly:

'I want you to understand, my love, it is not a case of any wife, but of—this wife.'

A slight flush came to her face, and she smiled.

'May I ask you something, Anatol?'

'Anything.'

'How old are you?'

He was taken aback by the question, and answered it with a laugh.

'On the road to forty.'
‘So am I.’ She smiled charmingly. ‘That is no answer.’

‘Five milestones more, Selma.’
‘Does that mean that you are thirty-five?’
‘I shall be thirty-five this day year.’
‘Then my birthday is yours. How strange! I must give you a birthday present, Anatol; what shall it be?’

‘Yourself. Promise to give it me this day year.’

‘No; but I’ll give you something this day week, something that I shall have worked, as that is the sort of gift you like.’

‘I plead guilty.’

Selma’s face became mischievous. The talk had drifted pleasantly far away from matrimony.

‘Wrist-warmers, perhaps?’

This was an allusion to Count Denissow’s delight at Jeanne’s present, which had elicited from him the observation, made with rather marked emphasis, that he liked the kind of girl who put her own handiwork into a gift.

He laughed, and, pushing back Selma’s hair, pulled the little rosy ear that it had covered.

‘Yes, wrist-warmers, if you like, Selma; but remember to make them like Jeanne’s, with golden hearts.’

‘I will remember.’ The girl’s face suddenly
became quite serious again. 'It isn't old for a man, is it?'

'What?'

'Thirty-four.'

'Oh no!'

The man made this reply with alacrity. Selma looked at him thoughtfully.

'It seems as if men and married persons might be any age at all, and pass for young. Madame'—Denissow raised his finger—'well, there, I won't say her name—but of course I mean Madame Beaujean—has a son and a married daughter, both of them, I can see, long past the twenties, and she talks of them as young, and yet she told me to-day that if I didn't marry you soon you'd say I was too old; that when one was nineteen, twenty and the rest were at the door. As if I didn't know that!'

Count Denissow smiled.

'Did she say anything else?'

'Yes; she said you weren't a boy, and wanted to settle down. She spoke quite ridiculously about you, I thought.'

The smile on the Count's face broadened, and his curiosity was tickled; but it was impossible for him at this point to pursue inquiries. Some moments passed, during which Selma lapsed into
a brown study. From the remark which she next made it was evident that she had been turning over in her mind Madame Beaujean's remarks.

'You are comfortable in your lodgings, I hope, Anatol?'

The Count with difficulty overcame a desire to laugh, and answered the solemn question solemnly:

'Very comfortable, thank you.'

Selma was busy braiding the tassel-trimming of the curtain into little hard plaits.

'Servants attentive?'

'Quite attentive.'

'Meals, I suppose, always regular?'

'Always.'

'How I wish I hadn't plaited up that fringe! It so annoys Madame Beaujean.'

The row of small pigtails, and the rueful face lifted up to them, formed too comical a picture for Anatol Denissow to forbear smiling. He put himself quietly in the place of the girl, and began undoing her work. Again for some moments there was silence. Then Selma exclaimed:

'It's just as I said it would be. Of course you're perfectly comfortable. It isn't as if you were merely a doctor or an office-clerk—Monsieur Beaujean had been an 'office-clerk'—is it?'

'No, not quite.'
There was just a touch of something that was not humility in the tone of the Russian nobleman. Selma was too much occupied with other thoughts to notice it.

'I think I should like to see your rooms,' she said after awhile. 'I should know at a glance if they were comfortable.'

'No, dear, you wouldn't, for a bachelor's rooms, even the cosiest, could never realize a girl's idea of comfort.'

'I suppose you imagine that I never saw a bachelor's rooms before, Anatol?'

'Most certainly I imagine that, Selma.'

'Then you're wrong. Thank you! you've smoothed out those tassels beautifully.' (This with a pleased look at the curtain, which Count Denissow had suddenly put from him.) 'I know the most delightful bachelor's rooms you can imagine.'

'Pray be good enough to tell me whose they are, Selma.'

'Oh, Count Denissow, you are very, very formal!'

The Count's tone had been cold; Selma's was glacial.

'Are you angry with me, Selma?'

'Yes.'

'Shall we drop the subject of which we were talking?'
'No. You seem to imagine, Anatol, that I know nobody in the world excepting my aunt, the Doktorinna, and Madame Beaujean.'

'They are the only people of whom you ever speak to me, Selma.'

'Because they are the only people I know well whom you know, but I know plenty of other people, and know them well, of whom I never speak to you.'

'Why?'

'Because I should have to enter into long explanations as to who they are, and the odds are——'

She paused.

'What are the odds?'

'That you would look—I really do not like to say the word.'

'Say it, please.'

'Contemptuous.'

Denissow coloured.

'I am very sorry that you should have had that fear. Please put it away, and tell me about these persons.'

Selma's eyes flashed.

'That's exactly the way in which I knew you would speak of them. They're not——persons.'

'What are they, then, Selma?'

'They're my friends.'
The light in the gray eyes had not passed. They shone like stars.

‘Then they are kings and queens, for your friendship crowns them. Child, what glorious eyes you have! Tell me about these kings and queens.’

‘Pooh! kings and queens! I wouldn't know kings and queens if I could. Stiff things, more set up than—even you,’ the brave eyes added, though the coward tongue was silent. ‘These friends of mine are very simple people. The bachelor—do you want to hear of him?’

‘Yes.’

‘He's an uncle of mine, and lives in the most delightful rooms I know. He does everything for himself, and everything is well done, from the making of the coffee to the dusting of the books. When I only think of him I smell coffee—I do now!—and see him making it, and then I see him wag his finger at me with “Selma, Selma, you're a monkey; and when monkeys die they don't go to heaven, but turn into coffee-pots, and go to the table till they break, and that's the end of them, the very, very end.” That used to frighten me so terribly. I was a child.’

‘Yes, dear. What was his name?’

Selma gave it. It was a name that is well known in Finland.
'Do you mean the poet, Selma?'

'Yes.' Selma smiled. It was evident that Count Denissow was greatly interested. 'They say he writes with a golden pen, but that is a pitiful sort of compliment to pay him, for golden pens are sold, I find, in Paris. What is the matter with you, Anatol?'

'I just see how very late it is.'

'Have you made an appointment with anyone?'

'Yes, a most important one. I hope, Selma, that you will tell me more of this uncle another time. Do you think'—this turning back on the threshold, after having said good-bye—'Madame Beaujean could be induced to come with you to see me in my lodgings?'

'Most certainly, if you arranged a day a week beforehand. She would want a week to prepare herself and me.'

'What preparation could she and you require?'

'None, as far as I can see, but she is very strange. She will feel, you know, exactly as if she were going to die.'

'If that is so, I think she had better not come, Selma.'

'But she would like it. You don't seem to see all round the thing. One can't go to heaven with-
out dying, and it will be just like going to heaven to Madame Beaujean.'

'And to you?'

Selma laughed merrily.

'Don't think me unappreciative. I do not want to go to heaven yet.'

Who would not be nineteen?

Count Denissow kissed her.

'Make it this day week, Selma, and as it is a very good distance to my place, and you are so badly with fiacres, let me send my carriage for you.'

Selma's eyes danced. Would they have danced had he proposed to fetch her in his carriage? Count Denissow put this question to himself as he drove off, and answered it—rightly—in the negative.
CHAPTER XXV.

A VISIT IN PROSPECT.

'Surtout, point de zèle!'

'You are very happy, Mademoiselle Selma. What is the stroke of good fortune?'

These words were said with a large, genial smile by Madame Beaujean, as she issued forth from the room adjoining that in which Selma had received Count Denissow, and in which, concealed by a heavy portière, but a very small portion of which was left open, it was her custom to take up her post of duenna during the visits of the Count. Of the conversations held between him and Selma, though she heard them, and, indeed, listened to them,—shaking her head dolefully at the frequent ominous silences—she understood nothing, for they spoke Russian. Selma told her of Count Denissow's invitation and offer of his carriage, and though for some moments Madame Beaujean was so impressed
as to be unable to speak, when she did regain her voice it was to say solemnly, after fetching a deep breath:

‘I confess, Mademoiselle Selma, I think it was lamentable to leave Monsieur le Comte to conclude that you had never driven in a private carriage before.’

‘But I never have. Have you?’

Madame Beaujean was standing beside a table. She took up a book and fluttered its leaves.

‘You touch on a very painful subject, Mademoiselle Selma—a very painful subject.’

This might have meant anything, but what it did mean was simply that Madame Beaujean had never driven in anything grander than a hired vehicle. Selma, made up, as most girls are, one half of good head, and the other half of good heart, understood this by means of the good head, and smiles played in her eyes, though the good heart kept the tongue in check.

‘Any way, we have a week to calm ourselves, and to get used to the idea,’ Madame Beaujean added. ‘It’s always a mistake, my dear, to show our grand acquaintances that anything about them excites and impresses us.’

Having delivered herself of this rather worldly bit of wisdom, Madame Beaujean betook herself
to the kitchen, and, being not worldly at all, confided to Jeanne a number of things which the worldly do not confide even to their own hearts, though hearts will hold many secrets and say nothing.

It seemed to Madame Beaujean a very long week, but it came to an end at last, and found her—well, not calm, but calmer.
CHAPTER XXVI.

HORSES.

'HERE they come, Madame Beaujean. Oh, you brown beauties!'

Selma stood unashamed at the window, and smiled down on the large, handsome horses. Madame Beaujean seemed to think that a lace curtain, through which she peered, made her round, dark face invisible.

'Yes, there they are. What a beautiful noise they make! But, Mademoiselle Selma, I couldn't get into the carriage while they stamp like that.'

'Oh, but they'll do that all the time till they're off.'

'Then I can't go.'

'Not go, Madame Beaujean? and leave the Count to conclude that we have never driven in a private carriage before.' This quoting of her own words was a masterly piece of tactics, and Madame
Beaujean was half won. 'You can't expect creatures like that to stand still like dray-horses. They never do stand still for a moment.'

'Oh, my dear, my dear!' Madame Beaujean clasped her gloved hands, and used the French version of 'my dear, my dear,' which is 'mon Dieu, mon Dieu.' 'I'm dreadfully sorry, of course, but it would be like getting into a train in motion—I couldn't do it.'

'Yes, you could. I'll be behind you and help you.'

Selma, it was evident, was not at all inclined to forego the drive. Madame Beaujean had a kind heart, if not a very valiant one. She gasped, then said impulsively:

'I'll do it, Mademoiselle Selma, but it must be done quickly. If I waited to think all my courage would vanish. Allons!'

She led the way from the room, and never paused till at the house-door, through which she went with flying steps, past the amazed footman, on, never pausing till she found herself standing on the foot-board of the carriage, with the carriage door—shut. It was a terrible moment, and with the realization of her position all Madame Beaujean's courage took wings to itself, and she held on to the door with feverish terror, the horses champing and pawing.
‘Allow me to open the door for you, madame.’

The speaker was a footman, who had been surprised into inactivity until this moment.

‘Do so, monsieur, au nom de Dieu,’ the French matron answered, using words too fervent for translation into English.

‘If you will be so good as to descend for a little moment, madame.’

The footman’s tone was clerical in its extreme gentleness, and his face wore the mild look of a young priest. Madame Beaujean was in that mood when this tone and look seem veritably the last straw.

‘Descend!’ she cried indignantly. ‘Never! Open the door for me, monsieur.’

It was plain that the poor lady was not the possessor of all her wonted senses. The horses were executing their newest steps, and the plain truth is that Madame Beaujean, perched on the carriage foot-board as she was, was on the verge of tears.

‘Couldn’t you lift her down?’

Selma spoke to the footman.

‘Certainly, mademoiselle.’

It was done in a moment, and in the next Madame Beaujean was lifted rather than handed into the carriage. Selma was beside her, and they
drove on for some time in silence. Then Madame Beaujean lay back luxuriously among the cushions.

'I must, I think, Mademoiselle Selma, have been born to a carriage, for I never felt more comfortable and at my ease in my life.'

Selma was at that age when the comic, on its invading one's own life, is apt to seem serious, indeed tragic. Still deeply mortified at remembrance of the scene in which she had been obliged to act a part, she said frigidly:

'We are not yet out of the carriage, Madame Beaujean.'

Madame Beaujean smiled cheerfully. She was not minded to be terrorized now.

'No, of course we're not; but I'm resolved, my dear, not to alarm myself any further. If the horses go on skipping when we get to the end of our journey, they shall take them out before they take me out, that's all. I don't care in the least if they take me round to the stables, but I'm not going to get out of a carriage that won't be brought to a standstill.'

Here was a pleasant prospect for one endowed with the scant sense of humour of nineteen. As Selma, sitting up in her stateliest manner, glanced at her reclining companion, and saw from her tightened lips that she meant what she said—
meant, the odds were, to be driven round to the Count's stables, and there to sit in the carriage till the horses were taken out of it—a Medusa-like gravity settled on her young face, and she said irately:

'You don't seem to think at all, Madame Beaujean, in what a terrible position you place me.'

Madame Beaujean offered not a word of self-defence, and they drove on for more than an hour in absolute silence.
CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VISIT WITH MADAME BEAUJEAN.

'Now sikerly she was of gret disport
And ful plesaunt and amiable of port,
And peynèd hir to counterfeten chere
Of court, and ben estatliche of manere
For to ben holden dignè of reverence.'

THOUGH Count Denissow's horses could not be said to come to what could actually be considered a standstill on being pulled up sharply before his door, events showed that Selma had needlessly alarmed herself concerning Madame Beaujean's probable course of action, for the sight of the Count in the open doorway completely calmed that lady, if calm that may be called which is loss of voluntary motion, almost loss of sensation. Why persons, especially male persons, of what is called exalted rank should have this effect on sensible and good women of the biggest part and best part of humanity, it is not easy to explain.
It is probable that Madame Beaujean did not at all notice that the horses were stamping the ground in a real frolic of pleasure, as she let herself be handed out of the carriage by Monsieur le Comte.

'What a pretty house! Which part of it is yours?' Selma exclaimed, as she looked up at the windows.

Denissow laughed.

'Ve is all mine, Selma.'

'All yours! Think of his having a whole house to himself, Madame Beaujean.'

Madame Beaujean smiled indulgently. 'Monsieur le Comte could hardly live in less, my dear.'

'But we thought that he lived in rooms.'

Madame Beaujean bent to smell a flower. It happened to be a pansy, which flower has so faint a scent that it is really not worth while bending to it. Selma turned again to Denissow.

'You'll take us all over the house, won't you, Anatol?'

'Ves, my love.'

They entered it.

'What a big hall, and what splendid pictures! Look, Madame Beaujean, at this dear brown thing.'
Madame Beaujean lifted her eyes to the picture in question. It was one of those pictures the prevailing colour in which—brown with a curious glint in it—is that of buttered toast. This colour was given to everything in it, human figures and faces included, though there is only one part of the world in which the human face is the colour of buttered toast. Madame Beaujean missed in the picture white and red and green and blue, and her speaking face said what her silent lips withheld. Denissow smiled.

'I don’t think you like the picture; very few do like it quite at first, but it grows on one. Old Dutch School.'

'Indeed. It looks to me more like an old kitchen,' Madame Beaujean said pleasantly, peering into the canvas.

'Now, isn’t she really too silly, Anatol?' Selma whispered in Russian.

'Nay, dear; she is delightful.'

The man of thirty-four laughed softly. Superior age has some advantages, and he appreciated the simple matron.

Two hours later Selma and Madame Beaujean were back in their home.

'How very little everything looks!' Madame Beaujean exclaimed dismally.
'We don't,' Selma said quaintly. 'We looked so little in those big rooms.'

'There's something in that, Mademoiselle Selma.' Madame Beaujean spread herself out, and really looked quite big.
CHAPTER XXVIII.

YET ONE YEAR MORE.

'Should one of us remember...'

slowly as they sometimes pass, the years, after all, never stand still, and after a year which, to Anatol Denissow, consisted of three hundred and sixty-five long days, and to Selma of twelve short months, the tenth of June returned again, and Selma was twenty.

'Anatol—' She spoke with brave, raised eyes, for at twenty who is afraid?

'Child, child,' he interrupted her. 'Still the old plea! Tell me, can you not think what it is to long for something with all your heart?'

He had taken her two hands in his. She did not answer.

'This tell me, do you love me a little, Selma?'

'A little—yes.' Impossible to say how cold the voice was. 'I owe you so much.' She paused,
with the wearied look of the ingrate—so burdensome, still paying, still to owe!—then, seating herself at the piano, she exclaimed, 'Listen!'

She played.

'I owe you that, my friend. Shall I tell you who has said I play divinely?'

'No. Whoever said so spoke untruly.' Denissov's face darkened. 'Selma, Selma, you play—like a demon.'

'It's just the same.' A soft laugh broke from the girl. 'Do you want to know who said it? You don't—Anatol, how dare you!'

He had put from him the hand which she had laid on his.

'Forgive me. I beg the dear hand's pardon.'

He raised it to his lips.

'Supposing now, Selma,' his face had become quite gray—'supposing you frankly answer this question. Do you want to break off your engagement with me?'

'No. But, Anatol, I wish——'

'What?'

'That you were poor.'

'That I might live on your earnings, Selma?'

He smiled as he spoke, but rather grimly.

'Yes, I should become a public player, Anatol.'

'As my wife? Never! My love, you do not
realize what it means to be a public player, to be at the mercy of a paying audience.’

She laughed.

‘Do you think I should fear the audience? Never! I sometimes fear myself; I fear the dead composers; but fear the public—no!’

‘You are so confident of pleasing. Granted, my Selma, one hundred of your listeners praised you, one might find fault.’

‘True enough; the critic, the pin in the bundle of straw.’

‘At least’—his tone became more and more ironical—‘you acknowledge that there might be that “pin”?’

‘Certainly. But’—a fine smile passed her face—‘did you ever, Anatol, see a bundle of straw that you thought of it?’

He laughed frankly.

‘Perhaps not; but, Selma, considering your very low estimation of critics and public, why do you want to play for them?’

‘Just to sit out of them, not to belong to them.’

‘To have the bundle of straw rise up and bow to your artistship as—’

‘Now, don’t quote Joseph and his brethren, Anatol. Must I tell you for the hundredth time that I have played at concert-giving as long as
I can remember? When I was little more than six, and had learnt a sonatina, I used to place the chairs in rows about me, with antimacassars on them for ladies, and newspapers for gentlemen, and I bowed to my public of rags. When I was older—was twelve—I used to place about me all the portraits of musicians that I could muster, and I bowed to my public of pictures.'

'And the antimacassars and newspapers applauded?'

'Tumultuously.'

'And the pictures applauded?'

'Yes; not so tumultuously. The musicians smiled a little distantly at first, but then so pleasantly. One or two of them patted me on the back, and Master Liszt, on my kissing him one day—'

'Kissed you back, I'll be bound.'

'Yes. Don't you believe that pictures have life in them, Anatol?'

'Pooh! One of your crazy fancies. Where is the picture?'

'Where I keep things that I love. I sometimes fancy that some day I shall find that—that I love you. Oh, Anatol, I did not mean it so earnestly!'

He had taken her face between his hands, and, after looking into it with grateful eyes, exclaimed:
'Bless you, my darling, for saying that! I shall never forget it.'

'You never will, I believe. You never do forget anything. And I meant nothing by it; so little that, if I could unsay it—'

'You cannot unsay it.'

There was almost a touch of triumph in his voice as he looked at the girl, who had risen and stood leaning against the piano. Small and slight and very dark she was. Her gray eyes, not altogether unlike his own, gleamed from under thick lashes, and the mass of straight, black hair, still short, and cut dauphin-wise, added to her naturally odd appearance. Her complexion was clear, and just now very pale; her mouth was strong and beautiful.

'In a word,' there was a laugh in the deep, pleasant voice, 'you are satisfied, my beautiful love, with an imaginary public. Dear, you can play to your heart's content to antimacassars and pictures when—'

'Count Denissow!'

What did she mean?

One of those ominous silences set in, over which Madame Beaujean, knitting in the inner room, shook her head gravely.
'Can you have forgotten, Anatol,' Selma spoke, after awhile, 'who first said "Brava" to my music? I was sixteen, and gave a concert in Abo. You were at it.'

'I remember it well, Selma. You were a child, and it was a game, a very ugly game, I now think. I shall be proud, my dear, for you to play to my friends. For the rest, enough of the nonsense. You cannot seriously think that I would permit my wife to be a public performer. It is hardly worth while wasting words on such a subject.'

He spoke very quietly, but there were signs of anger that she knew. He had turned pale, and his eyes seemed to film; above all, his voice lost colour, a trick which it had when it became what she called 'terrible.'
She walked away from the piano, and sat down. He took the seat beside her.

'I want, Selma, to tell you a little story of my past life. Before I knew that you existed—it seems a thousand years ago, but it cannot have been quite so long—I met in Vienna a compatriot of mine. She was a pianist, brilliantly gifted, and had just finished her musical studies at the Vienna conservatoire. It was her wish to become a public performer. I liked her—I then thought I loved her—and I was on the point of proposing marriage to her, when I learnt that she was about to appear in public as a pianist.'

'You went to her concert, Anatol?'

'Yes. Before it was over I left it, and left Vienna.'

'Did she break down?'

'No; she played superbly. The case was this, Selma: I disliked to see the woman whom I hoped to make my wife sitting in a raised place, all alone, with a hundred eyes scanning her. Every man who could pay had the right to level his glass at her, and she smiled upon them all.'

Selma laughed nervously.

'What was her name?'

Count Denissow rose, and answered coldly:

'Rosaline. Your favourite poet, Shakespeare, tells of her. Romeo loved her till he met Juliet.'
The girl blushed deeply.

'The question was rude, I know. I had no right to ask her name, and I have no wish to know it. She was your first love, Anatol?'

'No; she was my first liking. My first love stands beside me. Good-bye, my Selma.'

He took her hand, and bent his face upon it, then left her. Was she playing already? He stood in the open door of the house and listened. Somebody, also listening, stood without.
CHAPTER XXX.

GIRL AND WOMAN.

' The serpent said unto the woman. . . .

'At the piano, child? Go on.'

The speaker was Madame Goudounow, who had entered Selma's room unannounced.

'Ah, you are the very person I was longing to speak to.'

The girl started to her feet.

'Never mind speaking now, my dear. Play on.'

'Afterwards.'

'No, now.'

The girl obeyed, though reluctantly. It was some minutes before the pout faded from her lips, and there returned to her face that look of conscious power that had lighted it up before, a look like that which may be seen on the face of a girl who balances herself on a rope some ten yards above
the ground, or of one who on horseback flies through ring after ring. It reaches a point that touches on exquisite pain.

'More! more!' the woman beside the instrument cried, and Selma, without stopping, played piece after piece with the vehemence and lightning rapidity of the school of music to which she belonged.

'Stop! It is enough.'

'Enough!'

The young pianist rose quivering.

'I should think indeed it is enough! It was like a mad ride over fence after fence. Another to vault, and... only a breath of air... that window... thank you.'

She threw herself into a chair, and pushed back the heavy fringe on her forehead. With the light full on it, the glossy straight hair proved to be coarse, the large hand that held it back was coarse too, and the strip of forehead displayed was narrow and low. The head was too flat from front to back, the face too short, the eyes, drawn upwards at the outer angles, were too far apart. It was the Mongolian type, though chastened. That low narrow forehead angered its owner, and even in her sudden fit of faintness she had the reticence which marks the woman who wears a fringe.
Such a woman will show us anything rather than the bit of brow which that fringe covers. As her companion bent over her, Selma lowered the hair above her forehead and, rising, stood against the window-sash, where the full blare of the noon-day sun was not upon her, but behind her. Curiously beautiful she looked, standing thus, half in light and half in shadow, with her hands folded behind her back, and her dainty figure, which they matched so ill, clearly defined against the white woodwork, clad as she was in a simple dress of a clinging dark material.

Had further foil to her appearance been wanted, it was supplied by Madame Goudounow. Not that between the blonde woman and the dark girl there were no points of resemblance. There was in both the same want of height—both had the same large hands, with a pianist's spatulate fingers, fleshy above the short nails. Here were meeting-points. In all else they were as unlike as two women could well be. Madame Goudounow had feet too small and high, was round-backed and high-shouldered, notwithstanding which disadvantages she moved with as perfect a grace as the frail girl before her. Her head had some undeniably good features. The forehead was broad and ideal, the nose well formed, the mouth
witty, the brown eyes were large and soft, and a Parisian would have noticed the delicate chin and ears. Covered with a crop of soft, wavy golden hair, the head, on the whole, was a charming one, and a fine smile at moments brought back youth to the drawn, passionate face. She took the chair vacated by the girl, and Selma threw herself on the floor at her feet with all a pupil's ardour. This was Madame Goudounow, with whom all Paris was in love, and she allowed Selma to play for her twice a week, on condition that it remained their little secret.
CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT 'TIS TO LOVE.

'It is to be all made of sighs and tears;
It is to be all made of faith and service;
It is to be all made of fantasy,
All made of passion, and all made of wishes;
All adoration, duty and observance,
All humbleness, all patience, and impatience.'

'WHY is it to remain our little secret? Tell me to-day, Madame Goudounow.'

'Because I wish it, Selma. Is not that sufficient reason?'

'Quite—quite sufficient.'

A wave of hot colour swept over the girl's face, and she added:

'I only ask because, my dear one, I almost told the secret to someone to-day. I don't know what bewitched me.'

The brown eyes darkened.

'To whom were you chattering? To that
famous music-master whom Count Denissow has given you?"

'He is a famous master, and he has taught me a lot,' the girl said loyally. 'He does not teach like you, of course. Nobody does.'

'To whom were you chattering?'

Madame Goudounow wholly ignored the blandishment.

'I was talking to Anatol Denissow.'

'Baby!' The word was rather gasped than spoken. Selma was still looking down, and did not notice the change of expression that accompanied it.

'Did I not say nobody, Selma? If you tell one, tell everyone. Let it go the round of Paris that I give you what I have refused to give everyone else. If you cannot hold your tongue, do you think that others will?'

Strangely tyrannous language this. The dark, beautiful head was still bowed. She of the brown, soft eyes spoke on:

'Since when does Anatol Denissow take so great an interest in your music, pray?'

'He has ceased to take any interest in it.'

The voice of the girl was like a bell, one of those ringing voices common in Finland. There was sweetness and childishness in it.
'Just what I thought of the egotist.'

'He is not an egotist.' The brave young eyes were lifted. 'He is very good, madame; too good for me, I think. Since I have known you, I do not like good people.'

A sharp sob, full of a child's misery, broke from the girl's lips.

'Thank you, Selma.'

'Dear one! forgive me.'

'Forgive you? I am not offended.'

'Then kiss me. I have kissed you scores of times, and you have not kissed me once. You will not? *And I have asked for it.*

The proud tears started to the girl's eyes.

'Come, do not be theatrical. Get up, Selma.'

Next minute both had risen and stood face to face.

'I hate you,' Selma said quietly.

'No, you don't.'

A smile played round the clever lips of Madame Goudounow as she looked at the child whose soul she had whipped, and she added:

'You love me with love of crazed fifteen, my dear, though you are twenty. You love me more than you love Anatol Denissow.'

'Than I love Anatol Denissow?' A ringing laugh accompanied the words. 'Do you think that I love him at all?'
Madame Goudounow's eyes lightened. Here was one who could trample under foot the love of a man, for one kind word from whom she, Katharine Goudounow, would have given—would still give—half her life. With all Paris courting her, she had tried to recapture this Russian, and his cold, grave eyes had told her what no eyes of man or woman had yet dared to tell her, that she was an admirable musician—nothing more; to him something less.

*He was a snob—a mere snob!*

She had called him that, saying the thing to herself just the number of times that it is needful for a woman to say a thing to herself to believe that it is true.

He disliked publicity for women. Good!

And the woman whom he loved hungered for publicity. Good too!

And was an admirable musician. Excellent!

‘When are you two going to marry?’ she asked the girl.

‘Probably this day year,’ was the answer, as Selma gazed cheerlessly out of the window. ‘Are you going already, madame?’ she added as Madame Goudounow rose. ‘Have you forgiven me, and may I kiss you? Dearest, how I love you!’
'Poor little fish!' was Madame Goudounow's comment on this rhapsody, as, with a smile that had really some kindness in it, she held out her cold cheek and permitted the warm lips to touch it.

Next moment she was gone.

That day year Selma was married.
CHAPTER XXXII.

ENNUI.

'There is within this tower a dolorous lady—ever she boileth in scalding water.'—The Book of Sir Launcelot du Lake.

The wedding, which took place in Paris, was a very quiet one, the only witnesses of it being Madame Beaujean and one other; that other, a rather notable personage, no less an one than the writer Turgénieff, at this time one of the few men whom Anatol Denissow called by the name of friend.

Before a fortnight had elapsed the newly-married couple were in Russia—not in St. Petersburg. Count Denissow took his young wife straight to one of his estates.

God makes some people love the country, and one whom it is deemed discourteous to name makes some people loathe the country. The attitude of these latter towards the poetry of
nature is that which was the attitude of Darwin towards the poetry of Shakespeare. They find it, to use the frank words of the great scientist, 'so intolerably dull' that it 'nauseates' them.

To Selma, not wholly untaught and exceptionally gifted, the superb scenery about her husband's home—mile upon mile of land, lovely with summer's wealth of tree and flower, with a deep, calm river running through it, and over it the deep, calm sky—was as intolerably dull as was to Darwin, somewhat more taught, somewhat more gifted, the superb blank verse of the world's mightiest poet.

Tristusna—Three Aces—was the name of Count Denissow's favourite estate, to which he took his young wife. Legend had it that the curious name was given to the place from the circumstance of its having been won at cards by an ancestor of Count Anatol's. While some maintained that the pretty place might have had a prettier name, the fantastic mistress of it asserted that, saving the name, everything about it displeased her. She was standing, some months after her marriage, at a window one evening in early autumn. The sky was full of yellow clouds like corn, and the wind swept through them, swaying them. One bird was in the sky, looking no bigger than a big brown
bee. There was no sound at all in this quiet world.

'Aunt'—Selma turned round—'I'm so glad that you made up your mind, after all, that you could leave Finland, and have come to live with me, because when I go mad, dear, you'll tie me to a bed-post, as you used to do when I was naughty, and thus I shan't be able to do any harm. Won't you?'

'Don't talk wickedness, Selma.'

Selma had thrown herself on the floor beside her kinswoman. The large white hand was laid on the small black head.

'I knew that is what you would say to me. You say that every time I open my lips. It's so strange, the way you repeat the same thing again and again. It's like the way in which we live in this lone place, doing the same thing again and again. No change at all. It's funny that you and Anatol should think it so pleasant; I think it—'

'Selma, Selma! Child, how ungrateful!'

'What have I to be grateful for? That I am dying of ennui?'

'My poor one! Hush!'

'Poor one!' The wise lady of Abo spoke truly. For miles around Tristusna the villagers spoke of
Selma as 'the rich one,' 'the rich man's wife.' They did not know of her ennui, did not know that such a thing as this French ailment existed, so blest were they with ignorance, these rich ones—poor men's wives.
CHAPTER XXXIII.

A RUNAWAY.

'This woman is one of the most violent and wilful creatures in the world.'—El Conde Lucanor.

It was the morning after that described in the last chapter. Selma entered her aunt's room with two letters in her hand.

'Read that. There seems to be no hope at all for Sergius, and yet it promises to be a long affair. Anatol, you see, thinks it possible that he may be a month longer from home. The doctor gives the poor fellow three weeks longer to live. And Anatol was to have taken us to Helsingfors this day week. How dismal everything is!'

'Yes, dear. Does Count Sergius still suffer so terribly?'

'No, they drug him. I wish'—with a terrible smile—'that we could be drugged. I really cannot stay buried alive here any longer, aunt. I am
tingling, fingers and toes, to do something, to go somewhere. I asked Anatol to let me go to him, to help him in the nursing. See what he writes.'

The Doktorinna took the letter.

'He has a kind heart, Selma.'

'That's just as one looks at things. I think it horribly unkind to leave me in this out-of-the-world place. Now read the other letter, from Helsingfors. Of course I am going.'

The Doktorinna took the letter, read and re-read it, and then put it down.

'Well, aunt?'

Selma looked impatiently at her relation as the latter, without answering, resumed her work, a gorgeous piece of embroidery, linen worked over canvas, from which she was drawing the threads.

'Have you nothing to say, aunt?'

'Dear girl'—the Doktorinna still continued her work—'it would be madness. Suppose your husband heard of it.'

The Doktorinna's morality was largely based on fear.

'Pooh! He will not. No one shall tell him, and'—with a touch of her old impetuosity—'any way, I am going, and you are going with me.'

The Doktorinna at last threw down her work, and rose and paced the room. She was a tall,
stout woman, with a curiously little head and infantile face, the lower jaw small, the chin scarcely at all prominent, and the distance from nose to chin very short. The pretty lips bulged, as did the cheeks, the nose was tilted, the forehead small, smooth, and rounded, with the flat eyebrows of a young child. Her skin was of dazzling fairness, and the shapely hands were pleasant to look at.

'Selma,' she said, as she sat down after awhile, 'listen to reason.'

'I am all ears, dear,' was the ready answer, as the bright-eyed girl knelt down, and, placing her elbows on her aunt's knees, looked up at the pretty matron with that look which the French call *gamin*.

'What have you got to say? Never mind. I know.'

'Do you?' The Doktorinna smiled. If the shameful truth must be told, she did not herself know what she had to say. Her face fell a little when Selma, with a ludicrous assumption of wisdom, said, revealing at once the actual state of affairs:

'You dear old thing, you were going to say again, "Dear girl, it would be madness." Weren't you, now?'

'Well, perhaps I was'—smiling good-temperedly.
'You are your own mistress now, my Countess, and can make fun of your old aunt and her repetitions.'

'Perish the thought.'
Selma fondled the large hand, and kissed it.
'There is nothing in the world, dear,' she added, 'so impressive as repetition. To show you that I think so'—she changed her tone ever so slightly—'
'I will only repeat what I said before: I am going to Helsingfors, and you are going with me.'
'My love, if the servants told?'
'What have they got to tell? Enough for them to know that I am going on a visit with you. Am I never to be allowed to go on a visit?'
'What if Anatol came back?'
'Has he not written that he is in close attendance on Sergius, and cannot return here for a month?'
'What if——'
Instead of listening, Selma turned to a servant who at this moment entered in answer to impatient ringing of the bell. She gave directions for immediate packing, and on the following day she left Tristusna with her aunt, setting out for the capital of Finland.
CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ARRIVAL AT MADAME GOUDOUNOW'S.

'Du hast Diamanten und Perlen,
Hast Ailes, was Menschen begehrt,
Und hast die schönsten Augen—
Mein Liebchen, was willst du mehr?'

It was the height of the season at Helsingfors when Selma arrived there with the Doktorinna. The latter stood on the platform, holding up her dress at the sides. She wore heelless elastic-sided boots, with the tags showing, front and back. Her bonnet was somewhat displaced, her fair, clear complexion had suffered from smutted air, her hair was rather dishevelled, and her general appearance was that which one fancies must belong to what Sterne termed 'the unfortunate and innocent traveller.' Never having spent a day out of Abo, prior to undertaking the long journey to Russia to join her niece, the Doktorinna was not acquainted with her country's charming capital, which has
altered considerably since good old Fortia wrote that he could truthfully say of it that he saw as many cows in its streets as passengers. With a cheerful smile the Doktorinna emerged from the station, and looked about her, full of interest and pride. Selma, too, looked about her, but not at Helsingfors. She was looking for Madame Goudounow, who was nowhere to be seen.

'How strange, aunt! She promised to come with a--'

Before the sentence was completed, a man in the dingy livery of a hired coachman stepped before the ladies and asked if he had the honour to speak to the Countess Denissow, adding that he had been sent by Madame Goudounow, who had herself been unable to come to meet the Countess, having injured her hand.

'Her hand? How unfortunate! Is the injury serious?'

The man in livery could not say. Madame Goudounow had slipped on entering his vehicle, and had been obliged to return to the house. That was all he knew.

Selma, who had turned very pale, directed him to drive at his quickest speed, and in less than half an hour she stood face to face with the woman who had so strange a fascination for her.
'My dear Selma,'—Madame Goudounow held her at arm's length—'how beautiful you are!'

It was genuine admiration. If Selma had been lovely more than a year before in Paris, she was far lovelier now. Something in the Western air had not quite agreed with the Finnish girl; she had looked less well during the last year of her stay in Paris than during the first. On the other hand, the keen country air in which she had lived since her marriage had heightened her beauty to a pitch of which she was herself too well aware to evince surprise, as a less lovely woman might have done, at her friend's ejaculation. She laughed, and, pointing to the couch from which Madame Goudounow had risen, requested her to lie down again. As she did so she touched the bandaged arm.

'Did I hurt it?'

This was said remorsefully, as Madame Goudounow tightened her lips as if in pain.

'No, no. It twinges now and again, that is all. It is nothing to trouble about; but hands, as my Job of a doctor tells me, are brittle things, and I am a coward. The fright upset me a little. You are sure you don't mind my lying down?'—this stretching herself on the sofa and looking up at her whilom pupil with a smile. 'Pray get a chair for yourself, and'—she lowered her voice a little,
but not sufficiently for her words to be unheard by the Doktorinna, who flushed crimson—'I suppose that ponderous lady is your companion?'

Selma, too, reddened, but the infatuation of the disciple for the teacher was too strong in her to make anger possible. There are satellites that throw light on the dark side of their planets; such satellites are the young friends of women and men.

'Don't take offence, aunt, at her odd way of talking,' Selma said under her voice to the Doktorinna, forcing a smile; then, in the same low tone, she said to Madame Goudounow: 'She is my aunt and very good friend. Let me'—she raised her voice—'introduce you.'

She at once proceeded to do so. The Doktorinna bowed stiffly. The lady in possession smiled and motioned her to a seat, as, with all the insolence of an ill-bred woman of the world, she let her eyes rove over the simple matron's dress.

'Do pray be seated, madame,' she said with a look which grew more and more amused as she watched the other's leisurely movements.

The pretty, childish face of the Doktorinna became troubled.

'Thank you, Madame Goudounow, I will be seated,' she said, her full lips quivering. 'I should
be glad to see Sel—, my niece seated also. This journey, Madame Goudounow, this journey was not undertaken with my approbation, not at all with my approbation—coughing excitedly, and producing a voluminous pocket-handkerchief. ‘With your permission I will pass her a chair, Madame Goudounow?’ She suited the action to the word. ‘She is not used to prolonged standing, or—ahem!—kneeling. She’—a full stop. ‘And she’—another full stop. ‘Her husband, just at present, I mean, would—’

So far the lady addressed had listened to her visitor with a large, bland stare, a course of demeanour which had vastly disconcerted the Doktorinna. At these words something like a gray shadow passed her face, and the expression in her eyes underwent a change. She turned almost roughly to the girl kneeling beside her.

‘Why don’t you sit down, Selma? Take that chair, or, if you like it, this couch,’

She rose with a dark frown, but altered her manner and her look as she saw Selma’s eyes lighten with something that was very nearly indignation.

‘My pretty one, forgive me. My temper runs away with me. Madame’—she turned to the aunt with a grace that was exquisite, and that never
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missed its effect—'forgive me, you also. I am a maimed artist. My hand is my life, and, just now— Not a word, Selma. I will not hear it spoken of as your fault. Sit in this chair, dear, and—are you quite comfortable, madame?' She approached the Doktorinna, and, sitting down beside her, began to talk in a low voice with her. They discussed the growing facilities of travelling, the freaks of the atmosphere, the servant-question—that problem of ubiquitous interest—they discussed humanity as it is now and as it used to be, shops, dress, cookery; and as all these subjects were profoundly interesting to the Doktorinna, and as Madame Goudounow hung upon her lips, and drank in every platitude as if it were the purest wine of thought, the Doktorinna naturally enough soon recovered her wonted cheerfulness. Selma, lulled by the low voices, had closed her eyes and fallen asleep where she sat. Skillfully leading the conversation into other channels, Madame Goudounow said suddenly, as she glanced at the young sleeping woman:

'I suppose the Count is a very happy man.'

The Doktorinna smiled, and a long whispered conversation followed.

'Strange, is it not'—the Doktorinna spoke—'that my niece should have wished to undertake
this journey? It would have been so much better for her to stay at home, but one cannot refuse her anything. The fact is—she is not happy; this with, as you may say, everything: youth, beauty, talent, wealth, rank, and an adoring husband.'

The list was made on fair, round fingers, and the Doktorinna clasped her hands on her lap.

'Indeed!' The speaker this time was Madame Goudounow. 'That, as you may say, is everything.'

There was so dreary a ring in her voice that the Doktorinna unclasped her hands and looked up with some dismay, which increased as she caught sight of the hard, cold glance which Madame Goudounow bestowed on her sleeping guest.
CHAPTER XXXV.

FIVE O'CLOCK TEA AT MADAME GOUDOUNOW'S.

‘Sie sassen und tranken am Theetisch.’—Heine.

BEFORE the Doktorinna had time to attack the problem offered by Madame Goudounow, a young girl entered the room, followed by a servant carrying tea.

‘You understand English, of course, madame,’ the artist said, smiling.

‘No,’ the Doktorinna bridled, ‘I do not. Why should I?’

‘Why indeed?’

Madame Goudounow laughed. Then she turned to the English girl.

‘Let us thank God that she does not. My dear, why did you let that miserable little slavey come into the room?’

Beside Mabel stood a dusky maid-of-all-work, a Finn of darkest Finland, with a small ugly
face, terribly out of drawing, and with that look in her eyes which those have who have just emerged from a dark place and are taken aback by the light.

'You might have carried the tray yourself, Mabel; but you were too grand for that, of course. Commend me to England's daughters for high notions. Now, do get that scarecrow out of the room, and make the tea yourself.'

Madame Goudounow's English, if not quite academical, was fluent, and her accent was perfect. She turned from the English girl to the Doktorinna, and addressed the latter in Swedish as faultless as her English.

'You want to know who she is?' The Doktorinna had looked curiously in the direction of the English girl. 'My English companion. We can talk of her without embarrassment. She knows no language but English, of course—the usual thing with those of her country: a cavity where the bump of language should be. You think her pretty? Well, yes, perhaps she is.' Both ladies inspected the girl, who was busying herself at a small tea-table, as if she had also a cavity where phrenologists place the observing faculties. 'Handsome, but very English. Stickish, and carries her elbows behind. Rather too high
her colour for me; but I would give something
to have that fine profile. As tall as a goddess,
too. I envy people with height. Yes, yes, she is
very beautiful, and she is a nice child, with a quite
pure mind—almost sinless, I think.—Thank you,
my dear'—this in English to the girl, and looking
up into her quiet face—'supposing you bring us a
little table to put our cups on, and sit down with
us, and take tea yourself. I fancy our friend of
Abo would like a resting-place for her teacup.
Now try to take your eyes off the Countess; you
will mesmerize her, sleeping though she be, if you
go on looking at her like that.'

'She is so very, very lovely, I can't help looking
at her. I almost wish she would go on sleeping
for ever.'

'That you might continue looking at her? My
dear, she will not ask you to shut your eyes when
she wakes. Why you girls in England are so
many of you made handsome, I never could con-
ceive. Nobody is to tell you pretty things; nobody
is to look at you in admiration. Selma is quite
used to being looked at, and told that she is
lovely. Pile up the admiration as you will, you
won't embarrass her. There now! if my fair
duenna, with her teacup before her, is not fast
asleep too. A more somnolent party than this it

FIVE O'CLOCK TEA
has not yet been my lot to preside at. You may sit and gaze at them. I will lie down again. Put that screen along my couch. A cushion now please, at my head, and the tiger over my feet. And now a book, please. I have the use of my left hand still. Is that tiresome woman beginning to snore? No, no, not a French book! One of that row of English ones. The gentlest commonplace is all I am fit for. I wish you would try not to drop things, Mabel.' The girl, with still an angry flush on her forehead, picked up the book. 'Yes, that will do. Now you may go off and practise a bit; but, if you love me, don't play hymns or Sullivan.'
CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DOKTORINNA'S LITTLE WEAKNESS.

'There is always somewhere a weakest spot.'

'Why, Selma,' the Doktorinna opened her eyes, waked by the double noise made by the fall of the book and the closing of the door, 'how you startled me!'

As she spoke she drew her mantle about her, and shivered.

'What a big, bare room this is!' she continued; 'what a hard, high chair I am sitting on! what a——'

The enumeration, which bade fair to rival that of nursery fame, was abruptly stopped by Selma, who exclaimed in self-vindication:

'I indeed startle you? Why, I haven't moved. I rather believe, aunt,' she added, with wide, surprised eyes, and in the low, impressive tone in which this announcement is usually made, 'I've been asleep.'
'I rather believe you have,' the Doktorinna replied, with an expansive smile.

She added airily:

'I half think, to tell you the truth, that I was very near nodding myself.'

The 'very near nodding' state of the Doktorinna had lasted an hour by the clock. During this time she had snored without ceasing, and with increasing loudness. In fact it was partly her own snoring that had waked her. One does not like to think that any person possessed of moral sense could be mendacious; but some truthful beings suffer from hallucinations. It was believed by the Doktorinna that she never slept in the day-time, and nothing could have made her admit that she did so. Her niece, filled with surprise at her making the confession that she had even been 'very near nodding,' replied:

'That you certainly have, aunt! By the way, are we alone?'

'Alone? Yes, my dear.' The Doktorinna spoke in a brisk voice, with some asperity in it, for her niece's amused tone displeased her. 'It was the door slamming that waked you. Your charmer has left the room.'

Oh, Doktorinna, and—oh, Nemesis!
CHAPTER XXXVII.

INSPECTION OF MADAME GOUDOUNOW’S ROOM.

'Some folks' tongues are like the clocks as run on strikin', not to tell you the time of day, but because there's summat wrong in their own inside.'

'It really is a big, bare room, now I come to look at it.'

Selma spoke, rising and stretching herself in her furs, blinking and yawning.

'It looks poor, too, doesn't it? The curtains, the carpets, and, above all, these crumpy cups and plates, not porcelain. Well, well!'

She was right. He who has had experience of middle-class lodgings will know a species of fluted earthenware—it is not confined to our islands—with a special tendency to crack, and chip, and suffer generally, from the friction of use; with, moreover, commonly a thin border of one of the cardinal colours, which no amount of sluicing will
make a paler, more æsthetic tint. The cups of this ware are usually large—bowls, in fact (the saucers and plates, as of minor importance, are small)—this, it would seem, on the assumption that man is above all things else, not, as Faraday would have it, a tool-using animal, but a tea-drinking animal. The crumpy tea-service, which offended the eyes of Selma, was no exception to these rules. Holding one of the capacious tea-cups in her hand, and looking critically at the ravages of time in it, she went on:

'What courage she has to invite us to a place like this, and hold up her head as she does. Somehow I can't put myself in her place, receiving you and me.'

The naïveté of this remark seemed to strike neither the speaker nor the one addressed. Handsomely dressed as both women were, they formed indeed a strange enough contrast with the dingy, poverty-stricken room.

The Doktorinna smiled with rather feeble sarcasm, and Selma, ill at ease, began to go the round of the room.

'Come, come, how prying you are, Selma! Tell me now, what have you there?'

Selma's hand was on a picture.

'The only pretty thing in the room, aunt,' she
answered, adding, with some indignation, 'and it is turned with its face to the wall.'

'What is it?'

Selma laughed,

'A portrait. Guess whose!'

'Your own, I dare say.'

'Right!'

Selma turned it round. It was the picture of a young girl.

'Isn't she pretty, aunt?'

'You're a vain thing, Selma!' The Doktorinna held up a fore-finger. 'Put it back. One thing is certain: she is not half as pretty as you are.' This was said with a proud glance at her niece.

Selma laughed again, replaced the picture, but with its face outwards, and dropped a curtsey.

'Granted. Still, aunt, she's pretty'—this looking at the girl in the picture with frank liking. 'Indeed, she's more than pretty.'

A cloud passed over the Doktorinna's face, and she exclaimed testily:

'So are you! Child, child'—she bent her face on her hands—'why did I bring you to Helsingfors?'

'You brought me because you had to.' The girl spoke in a voice that was too toneless to be called cruel. 'I forced you to, and someone—
something—forced me. Stop crying, dear.' Her voice changed, and she kissed the poor, flushed face of her kinswoman, still wet from the torrent of tears. 'What is the matter?'

The Doktorinna pulled herself together.

'I am ill, Selma; I am cramped with cold.' She had thrown back her fur mantle, which Selma, too late, drew round her. 'I should not be surprised, dear child, if I cannot leave my bed tomorrow. What startles you, Selma?'

The sound of heavy breathing had fallen on Selma's ears. She looked round the room, caught sight of the screen, and, going over to it, drew it aside. The spectacle which presented itself to her seemed literally to take her breath away.
CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MADAME GOUDOUNOW'S AWAKENING.

'She was a charmer.'

'What do you think of that, aunt?'

Selma held back the screen which had concealed Madame Goudounow.

'What do I think of that?'—the lady of Abo could smile not a little maliciously, and it was plain that, whether or not she thought Madame Goudounow was asleep, she took no pains to lower her voice. 'I think that, my dear, as fine a sample of your angel's unselfishness as any well conceivable.'

The answer, made with a readiness which equally took aback Selma and the lady feigning sleep, was the not unnatural outcome of a quick comparison on the part of the speaker of what had been the discomfort of herself and her niece, seated on high, stiff chairs, with what was the
comfort of their hostess, stretched full length on a couch, with a cushion at her head and the tiger-skin over her feet. So ludicrous was the aspect which the latter presented when this remark was made, that even Selma laughed merrily.

‘Did you kiss me, dear?’

‘I? No.’

It was a capital bit of acting, both as regards the tone of the question and the languid opening of the brown eyes. Nor did Madame Goudounow change her manner in the least, as, scarcely rising, she added:

‘Just touch that bell, my love, and the Murray will come—my English companion that you used to like in Paris.’

The Countess Denissow—Selma had quickly fallen into the rôle of that grand lady—went over to the bell, and pulled the frayed and faded rope with a scarcely suppressed smile.

‘The Murray!’ she exclaimed, returning. ‘Is she with you still?’

‘As you see.’

Mabel at this moment entered, and received directions to make fresh tea. Madame Goudounow continued speaking to Selma. She spoke in French, which language, though a Russian, she spoke by preference.
'Yes, yes, she stays on with me.' The artist nodded good-humouredly to the English girl, whose face flushed with pleasure, though she did not know what was being said of her. 'My people mostly do stay on with me, somehow. I believe she is fond of me after a fashion. You used to be.'

"Used to be"! How can you say that?

Selma was pupil, was child again, and knelt by the side of the hard-faced woman, fixing upon her eyes that clamoured for what crumbs of love there might fall. Mabel's eyes flashed jealously, and the little half-blind maid, who had crept in unnoticed and busied herself at the tea-tray, stole peeps at the fair, proud woman, under whose spell she had fallen no less than the others.

'I never saw such a trio of imbeciles!' Madame Goudounow cried. 'You here on your knees, Selma, the Murray crimson with rage, and that little blind scarecrow ogling in the background.'

She turned to the young peasantess, and told her in broken Finnish to depart forthwith, adding, with a smile that brought light to the dim eyes, that what tea and cake should be left she should have. The poor soul stumbled out of the room, giving what little sight she had to the lady of her love, wasting none of that very small stock
on such commonplaces as chairs and stools, past which she floundered in a way which brought tears of laughter to Selma's eyes.

'Come, come, my dear Countess,' Madame Goudounow said a little satirically; 'different people are differently affected. Suppose you rise from your knees, lest I should begin to think that you, too, have succumbed to what the Murray calls my "glamour." Bring over two chairs, Mabel, one for the Countess, and one for yourself, and let me reintroduce you, as you both seem to have forgotten that you met each other some two years ago. We can speak English; the Countess speaks English charmingly, as you should remember, Mabel.'

Selma and Miss Murray shook hands, and were soon chatting gaily. The Doktorinna was induced to approach the couch, and to renew conversation with the artist, who in less than ten minutes succeeded in completely fascinating her again.

'Confess now, aunt'—the voice was Selma's, and there was an odd laugh in it—'you yourself were as much charmed by my dear Goudounow as ever I was.'

'I won't deny it.' The poor, conscience-stricken lady blushed like a young culprit. 'I won't deny
it. She is a serpent, a serpent, Selma... How cold it is! Tell the driver to hurry, my dear.
I am ill.'

She shivered as she spoke.
CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DOKTORINNA ILL.

The Doktorinna's foreboding had come true. She had caught a chill which made her unable to leave her bed. A week or more might pass before she would be able to quit the house. Selma was the bearer of this news to Madame Goudounow, who rallied her with a smile.

"You're very solemn about it, Selma. I hope you don't expect me to put on sackcloth. I shall laugh outright if you keep up that lugubrious look. She is your aunt, and I grant you that aunts, like matrimony, are a divine institution, but I seem to remember—"

Selma rose.

"I hate people who "remember.""

"So do I. Sit down, my dear, and don't excite yourself. I place all aunts in two divisions, the long-necked and the short-necked. The second
group, to which your aunt belongs, contains my favourites. Can I say more?'

'You might say, for merc courtesy's sake'—Selma smiled, but shamefacedly enough—'that you are sorry that she is in pain. I am, upon my honour.'

Madame Goudounow's face became curiously grave.

'I might say many things, my dear Selma. For instance, if I chose, I might say that I think this sudden indisposition of your kinswoman "as fine a sample of"—poetic justice—"as any well conceivable."'

The words here quoted from the Doktorinna were said with a pompousness and gravity that would have made Selma smile at any other time. But she was in no mood to smile. With unfeigned surprise, she said indignantly:

'I should have thought you superior to eavesdropping.'

'For Heaven's sake no heroics, Selma! Never think anyone superior to anything if you want to be spared disappointment. Even a dog cannot be trusted blindly.—Quiet, Ossian!' These last words were said to a pug that lay under the couch, and snarled angrily at the acridness of the tone in which allusion was made to his race.
'You see Wolf is no more, Selma. Poor old Wolf! In point of fact, I know nothing worse of dogs than that they die; but I am brimful of suspicion, even in the case of these best creatures. With reference to eavesdropping, your kinswoman chose to act the wide-awake. She told you I had left the room. In "mere courtesy," it was not for me to give her words the lie.'

Selma forced a laugh.

'I see our notions on courtesy differ. Under the circumstances, you were, I suppose, an unwilling listener to—to—'

'Your comments on my furniture!' Madame Goudounow quietly came to the rescue, as she steadily eyed the quivering face of her visitor. 'On my easy reception of—er—the Countess Denissow—on "the only pretty thing" in my room, the picture of a young girl. Well, yes, my love, truth compels me to say that I was, as you put it, an unwilling listener to all that.'

The girl rose with burning cheeks.

'Why do I put up with you?' she exclaimed. 'Why do I love you? Why have I done this thing for you—left my home and brought illness on my friend? What if my husband should hear of it? Do you know what Anatol Denissow is like? Dear'—she calmed as suddenly as she had
grown excited, knelt beside the artist, and threw one arm over her—'do you know... Ah, forgive me! Have I hurt it, the poor hand?'

'No, no; not you. I moved it myself. It is worse to-day, I think'—compressing her lips—'I tried to play before you came. The fact is, Selma—nonsense apart—you were right: my room looks poor. Dear girl'—peering into the sad gray eyes—'I am poor...'

Selma said nothing. The pathos of poverty was very great to her. She could think of absolutely no consolation to give to this poor woman. The low tick of a clock at the other end of the room became quite distinct in the absence of all other sound.
CHAPTER XL.

AN ARTIST'S STORY—TEACHER AND PUPIL.

'Tis a common proof,
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereunto the climber upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the utmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back.

'Two years ago'—Madame Goudounow spoke with that grief in her eyes that Epictetus noticed, more than a thousand years ago, in the eyes of the woman who had broken her pitcher, and who wept by the wayside for it, within a few paces of her who had lost her son, and who wept by the wayside for him—'two years ago, Selma, in Paris, I was rich; was all the rage, and consequently rich. My rooms—you will remember it—were the talk of everyone. Wolf walked about them; Ossian, the snob, here hides himself under the couch.—'Quiet, Oss!—That pug will only be spoken of in honeyed tones. Compare with the rooms I
had in Paris this bear-garden.' She paused for a minute, her face contracting. 'When you left, I was ill. I had not been well for some time. You will remember'—Selma nodded—'you were vexed at being denied admission to my house when you came to say good-bye. I had brain-fever, and did not recover for months. Then I picked up slowly, to find—are you listening, child?'

Selma was indeed listening, and with all her might, which was made needful by the fact that her friend's voice sank lower and lower. It was in almost a whisper that, on the girl's nodding again, she said, repeating herself:

'Then I picked up slowly, to find that my memory, which had been playing me pranks for some time, was—gone. Take your face away, dear child; you can surely hear me. I gave a concert when I had been well two months—smashed. Paris was kind. I was very popular. The smash was considered to give a piquancy to the thing. I was so known for my confidence. Kind? Paris clapped more than ever. I met with quite an ovation on that first occasion of smashing. In a week I gave another concert—smashed again. Paris frowned this time. A woman near the platform, a dark woman, a musician, frowned into my eyes. That hurt. I felt myself turn white as I
looked beyond her at the others. A few took pity on me because of the white face turned on them. The hisses were stifled. But I felt it was over with Paris. I went to Berlin—smashed. I went to London, and played superbly to a handful of people. They had heard of my smash in Berlin, and were afraid to applaud. They mentioned to their friends afterwards that they had heard of my smash in Berlin. I did not go mad, but I played no more in public. I became very poor. In place of some hundred pounds a month, I had—have—scarce more than some hundred pounds a year. The Murray could live on it—she vegetates on less, poor soul! and helps some half-dozen sisters to vegetate. I can't. I am over ears in debt; have not the money to get to St. Petersburg. That is why I have arranged the pianoforte recital here. You have a programme of it. I sent you one, I think, more than a fortnight ago.'

'Yes, yes; but, tell me, would one recital bring in much?'

'My love'—Madame Goudounow laughed dryly, the tone of her old pupil hovered curiously between that of an art-patron and what in England is termed a district-visitor—'to put it into the plainest language, if every head represents a sum of money not under a certain amount, and possibly over it,
and the biggest hall in Helsingfors be full of people, it stands to reason—'

'I understand.' Selma studied the tips of her gloves. 'But—er—will the hall be full, and—and—'

She came to a full stop.

'Do I feel I can trust my memory? Well, I have toiled at the programme I sent you for six months, so I think it is fairly dinned into my head. Have you, my dear, any other fears?'

The clever face of the elder woman wore a smile, with just a suggestion of pain in its whimsicality. Selma nerved herself to look from the tips of her gloves into the great dark eyes.

'You are so hopeful, my friend. The recital is this day week, is it not? Will your hand be well by that time?'

'By that time? It must be well by to-night. Let me explain. You remember, no doubt, a certain Baroness who used to head the musical world in Paris. She is now in Helsingfors, and has arranged a party, as she declares, for the special purpose of introducing your humble servant to the elite of this city. Don't curl your lip. No one despises this sort of thing more than I do. Under the circumstances I am, however, resolved to avail myself of this silken ladder.'
‘But you surely don’t imagine that you will be able to play to-night? Supposing you make a trial now, and play for me.’

Madame Goudounow’s face blanched to the lips, then she answered with a bright, warm smile:

‘That would be a rather odd arrangement, would it not? I am so poor an actress, that I shall take years to fall into the rôle of being your protégée, my dear. Supposing, for the present, we keep to the old order, and you, Selma, play to me.’

The snub was not thrown away.

‘May I?’ the girl said, reddening, and speaking with her old eagerness. ‘I scarcely dare tell you, Madame Goudounow, what I have been learning, and yet you might guess.’

‘Yes, I think I might. You have learnt my programme, I doubt not. It was not all new to you, as I know.’

Selma rose, crossed the room, and seated herself at the piano. Then, smiling into the grave face of the artist who stood beside her, she began to play.
CHAPTER XLI.

THE BARONESS.

'Nicht alle Frauen sind Engel.'—*Mirza Schaffy.*

It was just like old times. While her pupil played, Katharine Goudounow walked up and down the room, now and then approaching the instrument to lean on it and look earnestly into the girl's face. Once she laid her hands on the slight shoulders, and pressed them down, as though seeking to give depth to the tone. Then she fell to humming, to counting, to tapping quickly and sharply with her foot. Then there was silence. She was walking up and down the passage, outside the door, stopping upon its threshold now and again to say, 'Bon!'-the little round word leaping into the room like a shot. Then the light step came nearer. She stood watching the girl once more, well knowing herself, one doubts not, that the steadfast gaze of those brown, strange eyes acted like a spell. After
awhile she left the piano, and sat down at the furthest end of the room. It was not the manner of the conventional teacher, nor was the result of this manner the result obtained by the conventional teacher. Whether teaching thus, by a species of sorcery, be desirable or not, is a debatable subject, and one that is much debated. One thing is certain, that lessons of this kind cannot be paid for with money. Selma paid for them with the love that was wrecking her life.

Without a break, and without once looking round, she played the whole programme through. As, during the second half of it, number after number was played, and Madame Goudounow ceased to comment, she felt more and more annoyed, and when the long programme was finished and still no sound broke the silence, not all her pride was proof against her chagrin. Shutting the piano with her olden vehemence, she rose and turned round. Madame Goudounow was not alone. In another moment Selma was being introduced to the Baroness von Adlerflug, and that lady was declaring herself the proudest woman in Helsingfors, because Madame Goudounow had promised to join her in entreatng the Countess to accept a late invitation, and——

'Go to your party to-night? It is impossible, quite impossible.'
Selma spoke brusquely, almost rudely, and Madame Goudounow's face showed some dismay. It was only for a moment. Then she so placed herself as to oblige the girl to look at her. The result was curious.

'I accept your invitation, Baroness,' Selma said quietly.

'Well, well!' The Baroness addressed herself to Madame Goudounow, who was escorting her to the stairfoot. 'That was as droll an acceptance of an invitation as I have ever been favoured with. Strange little person; rather tragedy-queenish. But how well she plays! What execution!'

'Yes,' Madame Goudounow assented with a smile. 'Were she not my pupil, I should be jealous of her.'

'And so young,' continued the Baroness, 'and so good-looking.' The Baroness had herself been good-looking, but her beauty was of the past—a case of poppy-head once poppy. 'A Countess, too. You're not afraid, madame?'

This somewhat ponderous piece of playfulness was accompanied by one of those strange smiles that crease the face and do nothing more, and by a wag of the large head.

'Not in the least, Baroness.'

'And you are quite sure that she will play the
programme in your stead? I should be so annoyed for there to be any break in my evening.'

'No break shall occur. I am quite sure of her.'

'Tell me'—the Baroness paused at the stairfoot, and leaned against the banister, looking up at the artist with pinched eyes—'where is the—Count?'

Madame Goudounow gazed mysteriously in the direction of the room which they had left, and put her finger to her lips.

'Aha, I see! A mystery! How delightful! I knew Count Denissow of old; you will remember. I never could make out whether he was—er—demi-god or demi-the-other-thing. I had him at two of my parties in Paris, you know. I still can't think how I managed to get him'—Madame Goudounow's face said nothing—'but I did. Is she unhappy?'

'Very.'

'How inter—how sad! You're sure you won't be able to play yourself, to-night?'

The two women looked into each other's eyes, and the light in those of the Baroness died.

'Be quite at ease. Your performer this evening will be the Countess.'

'Adieu, then.'

With shaking of hands they parted, and Madame Goudounow walked slowly up the stairs.
CHAPTER XLII.

THE DRIVE TO THE BARONESS'S.

'Christabel stretched forth her hand,  
And comforted fair Geraldine.'

'Well, Selma'—it was Madame Goudounow's voice in the doorway—'what do you think of the Baroness? Pleasant person, isn't she?'

Selma did not answer. She was sitting on a low seat, with her hands about her knees. She gazed straight before her with still eyes.

'I cannot go to this party,' she said after a while.  
'There is aunt to be thought of.'

'I have thought of her... Mabel, my dear'—Mabel looked up from a book which she had been making a pretence of reading, while stealing looks at one and other of the three women who had been in the room with her—'get me my out-of-door clothes, will you?' The girl hurried away. 'Thank you, quick child! How should I do without you?
Brr—! Your English hands are cold as frogs. Take them away! Take them away! You’re not offended now, are you? *Dieu sait quoi?*—this was said lifting hands and eyes at the British sensitiveness. ‘Selma, be nice, and help me on with this rag-bag. Where is the sleeve-hole? I keep plunging my arm into chasms.’ Selma drew the coat back with a perplexed expression, and began to examine it. The silk lining of it was in tatters, but at last she found the entrance to a sleeve. ‘Thank you, now one arm’s disposed of, that’s half the battle. I can manage the rest. Don’t think I forgot your aunt for a moment, Selma.’ The little fair woman gave a nod to herself as reflected in a mirror. The outer side of the mantle was quite presentable. ‘The fact is, I missed my occupation in not becoming a nurse. I’ll help you cosset the dear old thing, and if we give her all day, I don’t know aunts at all if she will not give us the evening. I shall tell her that I want you to go with me to a musical party. Now, dear, if you’re ready, I am.’

Before long they were at the bedside of the Doktorinna.

Madame Goudounow had not over-rated her knowledge of aunts. The Doktorinna did not, by a word, oppose Selma’s going to the Baroness’s
THE DRIVE TO THE BARONESSES

party under the wing of her friend. The artist had chatted to the sick lady, and had soothed and smoothed her till she was fairly bewitched. No hint fell from Madame Goudounow, in speaking to either the aunt or niece, that the latter was expected to play. During the drive to the Baroness's, Selma said diffidently:

'Will you forgive my broaching a subject that is evidently painful to you? Have you at all tried your hand?'

'No. To tell you the miserable truth, every time I play I make the hand worse. My playing to-night is positive madness. Were it not that to be heard in the drawing-room of the Baroness gives me a standing, I should not dream of playing.'

'Would it not do to be seen there?' Selma asked. 'Must you necessarily play?'

'Seen?' The artist laughed aloud. 'A pianist is never seen, never looked at. She is given no seat but the piano-stool, and she is expected to sit with her face to the reading-desk. Who wants to see sound? She is an incarnation of sound, nothing more. The Baroness would have a fit to know that I was in her drawing-room and did not play. She has me only for my music, which was to be the feature of the evening.'
‘What if—I played your music?’

All day long Madame Goudounow had been planning the wrestling of this proposal from Selma. Now it was made she did not say a word.

‘There is no piece you play,’ the girl continued, ‘that I have not taught myself—because you play it. Let me save that dear hand. Tell them that I am your pupil. I may pass as a dim reflection.’

‘Dim fiddlestick!’

Madame Goudounow laughed.

Nothing more was said. The sound of small, spitting rain was heard against the window of the carriage. After some ten minutes the horses stopped in front of a brilliantly lighted house.
CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BARONESS'S PARTY.

'Music. Enter the Shapes and dance with mocks and mow.'

Several eyes followed the Countess Denissow and Madame Goudounow into the house. Both women, wrapped in handsome furs, looked distinguished. When they emerged from the cloakroom the effect produced by them was greater still. The Baroness, with her face crunched up with smiles, and with both parchmenty hands extended, gave an exuberant welcome to the Countess, who was agleam with diamonds. A hand-shake, somewhat less exuberant, but fairly cordial, was given to her companion, and was accompanied by a gaze frankly commending her dress, which, old-gold in colour, matched well with the shining golden hair which fell in many curls upon her broad brow. Madame Goudounow wore not a single jewel, and the absence was regarded as intentional. She
was a study in plain gold, from golden head to golden shoe. On her left hand she wore one ring of plain gold. She was pale, and her wide, quiet eyes of wallflower tint looked strange and singularly beautiful. A few men spoke to her, and one man watched her closely. As the evening wore on, Selma attracted all eyes but his. Her small, strange face, at first tense and troubled, became radiant with happiness and beauty as she talked and played. The company was one of those odd gatherings of people belonging to that Arctic zone called society, for the moment frozen together, like drops of ice, and under the impression that they are keeping one another warm. Evening parties, all the world over, are much the same. This is a matter which they order no better in France than they do in England, and no better in Finland than they do in France. Round the doors of these drawing-rooms in Helsingfors might be seen the usual grouping of men ‘so young, so handsome, and so everything.’ Among them was not wanting the grandee, the genius, the journalist. The grandee was a prince, the genius was a poet, and the journalist was that mighty man to be met with everywhere, the Tachmonite, who with his spear can slay eight hundred men at one time. The women, like the men, were of all ages and nation-
alities. The Englishwoman, clothed on the principle of Mrs. Hardcastle, that one must dress a little particular or one may escape in the crowd, attracted the usual flattering attention. She wore a Medici collar, but she wore it on her head. Several other women wore Medici collars, but they wore them round their necks—that was so common-place. Besides the handsome Britoness, the plain Parisian was here, the gay Austrian, the soulful German, the 'spron' American, the faintly-smiling Russian. A few Finlanders might be noticed. Selma, young and svelte, stood beside a compatriot of hers, who was young but stout, and was so pinched at the waist as to look ludicrously like an egg-boiler. She was not in the least pretty, but had a wise, round face, full of kind love. Every now and again her bright, small eyes wandered to the group of men at the door, among whom there was one with a face not unlike that which sculptors give to Socrates, strong, uncouth, the nose wide, the crown of the head depressed. He was the first scholar in Finland, and when his eyes met those of the egg-boiler girl they shone like stars, and smiles passed to and fro, which were a kind of excellent dumb discourse. Impossible here to touch on half of all the others in this crowd. There was a 'chiel'
among them taking notes. He was a gentleman-novelist with blown-out hair. While he took down what he rightly or wrongly regarded as pearls of conversation (they will appear in his next book, and the world will wonder how he evolves these things), a steady shrill of talk was going on throughout the room, the topic most in vogue seeming to be absent ladies, who were spoken of by their surnames after the customs in vogue with us in early Hanoverian days. The sensation of the evening was Selma’s playing, during which the speaking, as is the custom on the European continent, ceased. The applause was hearty, in fact what would in a London drawing-room be considered riotous, the Tachmonite even sheathing his spear and saying to the man of Paris beside him, ‘Pas mal!’ which effusive praise he only gave to those with whom he was pleased to be pleased. To Madame Goudounow he whispered, ‘A fine finger,’ whatever that may mean.

Socrates and his stout love had long departed, and the late party was drawing to a close, when Selma felt, rather than saw, keen eyes fixed upon her. She turned, and noticed a man who had been introduced to her more than an hour before.

‘Why do you look at me like that, doctor?’ she asked quietly.
The doctor was taken aback.

'The question is not fair, Countess.'

'Yes, it is quite fair. Be good enough to answer it.'

'May I take this chair?'—indicating a chair beside her.

'Yes, I have wished all the evening that you would take it.'

There are, good elocutionists maintain, about one hundred ways of saying everything that can be said, from the merest commonplace to the grandest dictum. The words here spoken by Selma were said in a way that so entirely robbed them of all flattering unction, that had the man, to whom she addressed them, been the vainest fop instead of a most modest gentleman, he could not have regarded them as meaning more than met the ear.

He took the seat, and Selma repeated:

'Why did you look at me as you did before?'

A flush passed over the dark face, as the doctor continued:

'I must repeat that that is not a fair question. You cannot want me to tell you that I looked at you because you are beautiful.'

'No'—there was great vexation in the clear, young voice—'I could not want you to tell me that, because it is not the truth. You have been in
this room for hours, and have not paid attention to a single beautiful woman, though there were many in it. You have talked all the evening to two ugly men and one old woman. Where is she, by the way?'

'Who?'

'The old thing, brown-skinned and brown-eyed, in black lace and black satin—so pretty.'

The doctor laughed.

'I think she is where she wants her son. I fancy she is dressed and waiting for me.'

'Let her wait just a little. I want you more than she does.' A hand was held out frankly, and taken frankly. 'Thank you; that means friendship, I can see. I am getting into great trouble, can't help myself, nor can you help me much; but you can help me a little, because you are a doctor. I want you to come and see a sick aunt of mine, and want you to make her well enough for us to leave Helsingfors to-morrow, or the day after—not later than the day after. She has caught a chill. Please come and see her to-morrow early. This is the address.'

She wrote it on a card and gave it to him.

'Thank you.' It was evident that he was studying not only the address, but the hand in which it was written. 'I shall see you, I hope, Countess, when I come.'
'Yes.—You have not yet answered my question, asked of you some time ago.'

'Why I looked at you as I did before? I was thinking what I once heard a Finnish philosopher say. It was this, that only one prayer went up to Heaven from human creatures everywhere every day, and this was it—*My will be done!* God, he said, covered His ears not to hear that prayer, and the angels who heard it wept, for in the wish that underlay it lay all men's misery.'

Selma half averted her face.

'What is that to me?'

'Why, you beautiful woman'—the little, plain-faced doctor grew as eerie-looking as his old mother, and the unconventional words matched the unconventional speaker—'all over your face I see written that heart-breaking prayer.'

Selma said nothing for a moment, but passed her feather-tipt fan across her eyes. Then she smiled with great brightness. 'I will let you go now. Good-night—au revoir!' Next moment she was alone.
CHAPTER XLIV.

THE CONCERT ANNOUNCED.

'She was active, stirring, all fire—
Could not rest, could not tire—
To a stone she might have given life.'

'The Flight of the Duchess.'

IT was some days after that on which the Countess Denissow had been the chief attraction at the Baroness's party. Her picture was now exhibited in the window of the leading print-shop of Helsingfors, and in the papers of the city it was announced that she had signified her readiness to take the place of Madame Goudounow at the recital arranged by the Russian pianist, for the time being disabled by an accident.

Two days before the concert a telegram reached Count Denissow: 'Wife starring at Helsingfors.'

With it in his hand he bent over the dead face of his brother, then left him, and set out for Finland. On the eve of the concert-day he was
in Helsingfors. The journey had been a long one, and as he had travelled alone through mile after mile of country, Count Denissow had had ample time to reflect on past and present.

Somewhat more than four years prior to his undertaking this journey, he had first set out to visit Finland, being interested in the country as one of the most valuable acquisitions of Russia. He had wished to study the Finns in their own home, and, finding Helsingfors too cosmopolitan for him to form any opinion of Finnish life from a residence there, had betaken himself to the old capital of Finland, and in quaint, quiet Abo had met, in Selma, what he was pleased to regard as a veritable Finn; this because Selma would not fit into any category of girls, Russian, Polish, Austrian, Scandinavian, German, French, or English, of which he had come to have knowledge during many previous years of travel.

As hour followed hour in the tedious journey from Central Russia into Finland, Anatol Denissow recalled the various meetings which he had had with Selma. He saw the child as he had seen her years before, with wistful face pressed against a window-pane, gazing out into the open from that small home, which was peopled only by herself and the aunt who had told her that she would never be
a Doktorinna. He saw again the writhing figure of the punished child, and heard her telling him that there was pain in every part of her; also, that she had thought of something much saucier that she might have said to the Doktorinna. . . .

All this came back, and brought with it no smile to the heart-struck face of Anatol Denissow. He saw the child sitting among flowers under a window, with frowning face turned up to him; he saw her perched on the arm of a chair, listening with growing surprise to the Doktorinna's intimation that 'the Count' was going to marry her; he heard her exclamation, 'Then I'm a grown-up! Please fasten my laces. Am I a fiancée?' He saw the small creature standing against the high, wide door of her aunt's house, and felt the touch of the young, soft lips, with which she had said to him on that day what she called her 'proper good-bye. . . .' And all this brought no smile to his face. He saw more. Drifting into the room at Abo, there came a little person in a lengthened frock, with wonderfully dressed hair. She said, 'I can't walk quickly, Count, for my dress blocks up my feet and my hair comes down.' He heard the words quite plainly, and heard the showering of the hairpins on the bare floor. He saw the long skirt
tucked up, and sat once more beside the child in blue and black. She asked him to be earnest, and showed him her letters. He saw her burn the letters, and saw her blackened face as she ate the ashes of them. It was odd that a man should be so sorrowful as to see that, and not to break out into laughter; but there came no light at all to Anatol Denissow's face. He heard her music. It ran under the train all the way as he journeyed; it was deafening; and yet he heard every now and again above it his own Brava! that Brava! which she had forced from him at what she called her first concert. He clenched his hands. . . .

After awhile his thoughts became calmer. He remembered quiet talks with her of Shakespeare, that pleasant writer, read much by her, and recommended much because of the sweet fun to be found in him, the notable sayings, the pretty, sad tales. He saw the odd child on the steamer quitting Finland, heard her cry to the weeping lady on the shore, 'Go home, aunt; cry no more!' He heard again the childlike question, 'Why do you look at me?' and heard the loud sobs which followed it. It was strange that anyone should be so stern as to hear those sobs, and not be moved at all; there came no change to the face of Anatol Denissow. He journeyed once
more with Selma (such tricks hath strong imagination!) through Sweden and Norway to England and France. He saw again the child's delight at sight of the Swedish capital, her joy in beautiful Norway; he saw her indignation at finding London wrapped in fog. He recalled talks with her about Parisian sights, and the recollection of his various visits to her at the house of Madame Beaujean came back to him, especially the birthday visits. There had been that visit on her eighteenth birthday, when she had first asked him for 'one year more,' and had reminded him that a year was 'not an eternity.' How dark the sun had seemed that day until after he had visited Dmitri!

At remembrance of Dmitri there flitted before him a vision of Maiden in golden hair, and he felt a small hand passed over his face. The world grew quiet again, and for a time he did not hear the mad music under the train. He walked with Selma in a quiet part of Paris; her hands were full of lilies. That vision passed. It was again her birthday, and she was nineteen. He stood with her at a window, watching sparkling rain; she bade him wait, and do as she did—read, play, walk, think. She jested then, and promised him a present, wrist-warmers, with golden hearts worked into them. She made inquiries as to the way in which he was lodged, and heard with gratification
that he was comfortable; she visited him. He saw her plainly standing in his hall, beneath the old Dutch picture.

Next came remembrance of her twentieth birthday, and the music that he had heard before rang out again. All that had passed in talk that day came back to him. She had told him that one had said she played divinely. He had told her that she played like a demon. At that she had laughed and said, 'It's just the same.'

The wheels of the train took up the laugh and the words, and for a time he heard nothing else. He rose, and paced up and down the railway-compartment. Then he sat down again, and tried to read. The letters swam before him; more and more thoughts came thronging; the visions crowded thickly. All that had happened in the near past flitted before his eyes. Selma stood beside him in her marriage dress; Selma travelled with him as his wife; Selma was installed as mistress of his home. . . .

Only a few short months before he had installed her there, and heavy trouble had come upon him, and Selma was starring at Helsingfors. . . . He took the telegram from his pocket. Yes; there was no misreading of it possible:

'Wife starring at Helsingfors.'
CHAPTER XLV.

THE ARTIST DISCUSSED.

"All's over, then; does truth sound bitter?"

The day on which Selma was to play at Madame Goudounow's concert had arrived. In a fashionable public dining-room of the Finnish capital there lounged a party of men. There was among them no woman, not even fair St. Charity, who is sometimes thought to preside over men's meetings. Most of these men were young; one of them was very young and painfully blond—one of Nature's studies in monochrome, often met with in northerly nations, and especially often met with in Russia, the home of this young soldier. A glass stuck in one eye did not tend to improve an expression at all times vacuous, and 'Puffy,' as his fellow-officers called him, was not in his happiest vein.

"Beautiful!" he said, with a look that was just
foolish enough to save it from being rascally.

'Well, I'm no mean judge of beauty myself, and on the chance of her turning out only half as beautiful as the woman in the picture exhibited, I mean to go to her concert and inspect her. It's a bore having to listen to the music, of course. The piano was a loathly invention of Jubal's.'

'Why, Puffy, where did you get up Jubal?'

Puffy chuckled softly, and a soft chuckle went the round of the room, for everyone in it was fond of him. He was the baby of the regiment, none the less popular that he had all his teeth and had outgrown long clothes, his mild, thought-empty face and large, round eyes being sufficient guarantee that the inner man of him was still a baby. Having lapsed into seriousness again, he was gazing round the room with that peculiar gentleness of expression which marks alike the very young child, the fool, and the sage, when another officer spoke.

'She's little, I hear, and dark. Give me a woman who's five foot ten and a blonde.'

The words, as coming from one who was uncommonly short and swarthy, evoked a burst of laughter.

'She's married, I'm told,' the little gentleman continued, 'and the man is living. Come, you fellows' (joining in the laugh good-humouredly),
'you can hold your sides at my expense to-
morrow. Fact is'—he slapped his knee and
looked knowing—'I've got hold of a bit of the
story of this belle inconnue, vol. ii., so to speak, and
will thank you to give me vol. i.'

'Got hold of a bit of her story! How did you
manage that? Do you mean to tell us you've seen
her, spoken to her?'

'No. That is not my intention, because—well,
the odds are you wouldn't believe it. The humili-
ating truth is that I had what we euphemistically
call “a prior engagement,” which prevented my
being able to attend the Baroness's ball.'

'You were not invited?'

The fair young officer spoke.

'Precisely, Puffy, my child. You're growing too
clever. Among ourselves, within this narrow circle,
I will admit that I was, to state the naked truth, not
invited.'

'Oh, come; then you have nothing but rumour
to give us, and there isn't a bit of rumour that we
have not collected. What we want to know is
something that really is true.'

The speaker was a captain, the handsomest and,
said gossip, the fastest man of St. Petersburg, a
city so noted for its handsome and fast men that
this is saying much.
'Well now, Captain, what do you know? You certainly were at the Baroness's party. Were you speaking to her?'
'Perhaps I was.'
'That means that you were not. But, tell us—you could use your eyes—is she really a beauty?'
'Yes.'
'A Countess, too—by Jove! Where's the Count?'
'That, my dear friends, is the question that went the round of the room.'
'And the answer?'
'There were various answers. You see, none of us put the question to her.'
'How was it you didn't get introduced?'
'Didn't try to. Isn't the style of woman that I admire.'
'Indeed. May one know the style of woman that you admire?'
'Well—no.'
'Poor old Panin!'
The speaker was the baby of the regiment. He spoke to himself.
'I say!' Captain Ulianin started. 'Who is that poor broken-down chap who has just gone out of the place? Have I been talking about this mysterious creature before someone who belongs
to her? I thought there was not a man in the room that I did not know. Blest if I like to have acted the part of a cad.'

A wave of hot colour swept across the officer's handsome face, and he went from the room.

'Kind old Panin!'

The speaker was again the baby of the regiment, and again he spoke to himself.
CHAPTER XLVI.

DENISSOW BEFORE HIS WIFE'S PICTURE.

'A fool to marry this child.'—

*Rudyard Kipling.*

A broken-down man it was indeed who retraced his steps from the loungers' room, described in the last chapter, to the hotel at which he had taken up a temporary abode. He only stopped once on his journey through the noisy streets—before the gaily-lighted music-shop in which was exhibited the picture of the Countess Denissow.

She 'half as beautiful' as that! He smiled bitterly. Photographic art—especially Russian photographic art—could not but well reproduce a face so exquisite in outline. Even in the picture there was life, the life of a moment in a face that changed with every thought.

As beautiful as—that!

He laughed outright, as in thought he compared
with this pertinaciously smiling lady his beautiful, changeful wife, now glow, now gloom.

Yes; she would repay inspection, and she would get it, and—

What was that?

He raised his hands to his eyes. It lasted only for an instant. It had already passed.

'Fool! fool!' He ground his teeth.
CHAPTER XLVII.

THE CONCERT.

'By a glance of the eye she hath blinded thee.'—

Rudyard Kipling.

She was evidently not in the least nervous. She entered the hall with perfect self-possession. A pretty bow, a pretty smile. She was indeed bewitching, this Countess Denisow. The hall was full too—crammed.

She was unloosing her bracelets. She always unloosed her bracelets to play. He remembered that. She looked at her audience as she did so, deliberately, with a cool little glance peculiarly her own. The wonder was that she did not see him, seated, as he was, in the front row. She pitched her glance well away from her—she was so wise and wary. Very odd the straining of eyes to see her. She seemed to stand out so plainly. What if were they turning on more light? Yes; it streamed right into his eyes, and . . . .
Strange that his young wife should go on playing within ten feet of him—glad music, too; music that screamed with laughter. It added to the horror of it . . .

'Sir,' he said, turning to his neighbour, 'will you lend me your arm to the nearest door?'

The request was instantly granted, and amid the wild gaiety of his wife's music, Anatol Denissow left the concert-hall.

'Thank you.' His guide stood with him in the corridor. 'Dare I detain you a few minutes longer?'

The Captain started. This was the man who had recently overheard his frivolous talk in a public room. What did it mean?

'Sir,' he said, 'nothing that I can do for you will be enough. Excuse I have none to offer for the idlest words I ever uttered, but if you can pardon them—thank you!'—as Count Denissow gave his hand a grip that said more than heartiest words could say. 'Good God, sir,' he exclaimed suddenly, 'are you blind?'

The tumult of applause which here suddenly rang through the house drowned Denissow's answer. The two men went down the broad staircase together. In the street Count Denissow explained to the Captain that he had been robbed of sight.
THE CONCERT

within the last five minutes, adding, in a tone of odd resignation, that eyes were a weak point with his family, that his father had been the victim of the like sudden incurable blindness. A dimness such as there had not been in Captain Ulianin's eyes since boyhood came over them. Nothing more was said until he was in the Count's room, then he exclaimed suddenly:

'I have a friend, Count, a doctor.'

Denissow smiled, with that great calm that was so strange on the face of one so lately and so wonderfully bereaved. When a man says that he has a friend a lawyer, he does not always mean that in him Justinian is eclipsed; but when he says that he has a friend a doctor (of medicine), we know that in the mere statement there is contained the most unreserved of eulogiums.

'I should like Melitzky to see you,' the Captain added.

'Melitzky? What brings Melitzky to Helsingfors?'

'His lucky star, I hope, and long may it keep him there. Have I your leave to send him to you?'

'Melitzky—that's very odd now. What can have brought him to Helsingfors?'

The Count was talking to himself, and quite
needlessly trying to unravel this mystery. The plain question put to Melitzky would, as he probably knew, have met with a plain answer; but for one man who, like Yorick, takes up Shakespeare's 'Much Ado about Nothing,' deeming it wiser to read it than to lose time making a conjecture about a mystery which must explain itself, ten men all the world over lose themselves in conjectures. The Captain watched the blind soliloquist with some impatience.
CHAPTER XLVIII.

MELITZKY.

'I always liked the Beast better than Beauty.'—
_A Little Girl._

'Yes'—the Count looked up after one of those silences in which the minutes seem veritably tardy-gaited—'I should like to see Melitzky. I shall only learn by degrees,' he added gravely, 'that I have ceased to see. Tell him, please, I want him greatly. You have been very good to me, Captain. I hope to meet you again.' His voice became abstracted and wearied.

'Hope to meet me again, indeed, do you? Not you!' So Captain Ulianin said to himself as he went away with, for a moment, a cloud on his handsome face.

'Don't knock me down, mighty Mars!'

The speaker was Melitzky, who had come into collision with the tall officer.
'Well, if that isn't luck now! True, I have never been out at any hour of the day or night that you haven't charged into me; but to meet you now, just when you are the very man I wanted, it's—'

'Don't mind what it is, but tell me what you want me for, Ulianin.'

The Captain gasped.

'If you hadn't rammed your head right into my chest, I should be able to reel off the yarn in three minutes. As it is, I must wait to get some breath back.'

The doctor whistled.

'It isn't breath you lack, my friend. What's the matter, Panin? What's the trouble?'

'It's this—'

The Captain told in as few words as possible the story of Anatol Denissow. The doctor listened quietly, then said dryly:

'Come, we've passed the door three times. Suppose we go in. You'll come in with me, of course?'

'No, no. I should be no good, Mellitzky. You may help him. It's more than the eyes, man. It's a trouble there'—touching his friend's heart.

'Come, haven't you a heart of your own, Panin?'
'Well, perhaps I have. I used sometimes to think I had, but since the majority of folks decline to accredit me with one, I've come to believe that I haven't got any. One thing I know. The man wants you, not me. I'll stroll about for a while.'

'There he goes.' The doctor addressed himself to empty space. 'He's right, after all—quite right.' This as he mounted the hotel steps. 'It's odds but half the world mistrusts such a man as Ulianin. He's not given a fair start. What man could believe in a man with a head and figure like that, and in regimentals too? Upon my honour, it makes one feel like despising one's self—here he came to a full-stop before a mirror—'to know what advantages one's plain, ugly coat and plain, ugly face sometimes give one—eh?'

He turned round sharply. Behind him, as he stood contemplating and apostrophizing himself in the mirror, was a youth in the regulation white tie, who asked him, in the meekest of voices, whom he wished to see, and who, on receiving a short enough answer, conducted him, with the regulation smileless face and on tiptoe, to the room of the Count.
CHAPTER XLIX.

THE CAPTAIN'S REFUGE.

'Rich honesty dwells like a miser, sir, in a poor house.'

WHEN, after an interview of scarce more than half an hour, Dr. Melitzky left the hotel to find that it was raining heavily, he was somewhat taken aback to see that Captain Ulianin was still in waiting for him.

'What a good soul it is!' he muttered, 'and now that I think of it, Denissow never once mentioned him. Awkward that, if he asks me.'

Nothing was further from the Captain's thoughts than to do this. Colouring under his friend's amused gaze, he said jocosely:

'Well, do I look altogether merman-like? I never felt so like turning into a water-sprite in my life. What a time you have been!'

'Exactly half an hour and three minutes,' the doctor said quietly, consulting his watch.
'Well, it has seemed much longer to me. Let me take you a short-cut.' They walked on for some time. 'Now suppose we turn in here.'

They were in front of a small lodging-house, the door of which the Captain opened with a latch-key. Dr. Melitzky followed him into the humble entrance-hall with some surprise, and they mounted a narrow flight of stairs, at the top of which was a small, cosy room. The Captain entered it, and looking round it with an air of proprietorship, said, smiling:

'What do you think of this little den? Looks comfortable, doesn't it?'

The room was not elegant, but it had certainly every appearance of comfort.

'The people of the house know me, you see'—this as a neat-looking woman entered the room and received instructions for a supper for two with a ready 'Yes, Captain.' 'I rent this room by the year, to have a corner that I can call my own.'

'Have none of your chums found the place out?'

'Oh yes, they have seen me going in and coming out; but'—he smiled, but the fine mouth straightened—'it's such a beggarly-looking place they've made up their minds there's something
wrong about my coming to it, so they delicately avoid it. God bless their imaginations! I wouldn't enlighten them for the world. As it is, I can always come here when I want a quiet read, or a quiet think, or'—the smile on his face deepened, and lost all bitterness—'when I have been caught in a shower. The old woman speaks only Finnish; but she has taught me some crumbs of her language, and we get on swimmingly. Here she comes.—Thank you, that will do. We will wait on ourselves.'

He nodded to the dame, across whose earnest face a smile passed.

'Good old soul! And this is a tidy little set-out, isn't it? Now fall to, old friend, and then tell me, or don't tell me—just as you like—what has passed between you two.'

'You seem greatly interested in the man, Panin.'

'I am greatly interested in him.'

'In the lady, too?'

'Yes.'

The doctor held up a warning finger.

'You are not in love with her, I hope.'

'No.'

'I wish I could make you out, Ulianin.'

'Do you? I feel flattered.' The voice was a
little acrid. 'Come, Melitzky, the supper's cooling.'

Melitzky at once gave all his attention to the meal. He was a little dry man, with a little dry face, and a little dry laugh; but his keen, dark eyes had a pleasant smile in their depths, and the lines about the corners of the thin-lipped mouth told tales of merry and kindly thoughts. When, with uncommon expedition, he had made a hearty meal, he drew slightly back from the table, and, with his napkin on one knee, sat watching the Captain, who, eating with normal rapidity, was not yet half finished. The latter amiably resolved to rest content with what he had had.

'Not at all!'

Dr. Melitzky spoke, smiling benignly.

'Go on, my dear fellow; I am in no hurry whatever, and like to think my thoughts.' He straightway fell to doing so, and was still in a brown study, when the Captain drew his chair to his host. When at last he roused himself to speak, what he said was not specially lucid. Looking, not at his host, but straight before him, he exclaimed:

'Beats me completely!'

'What? Who?' the Captain ventured to ask.

'The whole thing—the whole lot of them—he, she, they, it!'
Captain Ulianin rose and busied himself, studying, not for the first time, a picture by some untrained genius which hung over the low door. It was singularly bold and free, both as regards perspective and colouring, and the subject of it was apparently a landscape in convulsions. It was some time before he turned to the doctor.

The latter was again lost in thought.
CHAPTER L.

MELITZKY’S ACCOUNT OF THE INTERVIEW.

‘Grand cœur pour grande heure.’

They who lapse into cogitations on the burden and the mystery of all this unintelligible world have many different ways of disposing of the hands. Some fold them, and some clasp them, and some clench them; some move one or other finger up and down; but the most general practice is to twirl the thumbs, which some do with such speed as to suggest a catherine-wheel. Of these was Dr. Melitzky. With a tense and serious face, he was sending his right thumb round his left with a dizzying speed, when Captain Uliania addressed him, saying:

‘There is, I fear, a very sad story, Melitzky, connected with this man and his wife. The sudden blindness is to me the most extraordinary part of it.’
'Not to me. Anything for which there is an explanation in science becomes to my deeming wonderful only in a secondary degree.'

'You are, then, not so greatly shocked? You think the Count may recover?'

'Not a chance of it. We were boys together, Ulianin. My father knew his father—old, old friends, the families. He, the father, was quite a young man when it happened to him, thirty-six or thereabouts. I have no remembrance of him, but have heard the story times and again. Care for me to tell it you?'

'Yes.'

'Well, the man was a devourer of fiction, used to read novels through whole nights, flying in the face of all advice. Eyes for generations had been a weak point with the family. He did the thing once too often, and—wheugh!—the doctor dramatically blew out the candle before him, and, as it was one of two only, a great dimness resulted, 'his sight was gone. The man was like a lunatic'—lighting the candle again. 'There is not an oculist of note, through the length and breadth of Europe, that he did not consult, and when at last convinced that there was not a ray of hope—the poor soul was a coward—he could not bear it. He shot himself. I know another case.'
MELITZKY'S ACCOUNT OF THE INTERVIEW

'The thing is not uncommon, then?'

'Nay, thank God, it is very uncommon. I never heard but of these cases. A young Englishman, studying medicine. Overstudy and trouble. He was reading up for examination, and watching by the bed of a sick mother. They were very poor—drumming a tune on the table.' Sort of thing one can't speak about.' He rose and began walking round the room. Both men were silent for a time.

'Poor chap!' The doctor sat down again. The Captain stood behind him, and put a hand on his shoulder.

'Suppose we return to Count Denissow.'

'Ay, ay! Suppose we do. I only wished to let you know that the case of sudden blindness is not unprecedented. What I do believe to be without precedent are the circumstances which in the case of Denissow led to this calamity. It is they that beat me. Look you, a child that he took from poverty and obscurity, a little Finnish rapscallion, for whom he waited for years. She was to marry him when aged eighteen. She marry at eighteen? No, no! She had taken up with Art.'

'With—Art?'

'Yes, with Art. Had fallen over head and ears in
APPASSIONATA

love with Art—with Music. Practised, it appears from dawn to dark. The years go by. My lady is nineteen, is twenty. Is it her pleasure to marry? No! It sounds past believing, for, mark you, Ulianin, all this time there wasn't a woman who had crossed Denissow's path that wouldn't have given a year of her life for a smile from him. That man, to my knowledge, has been courted as—'

'Well,' the Captain interposed, 'I suppose she broke off the engagement.'

'Nothing of the kind.'

'Then, what did she do?'

'She put it off, man, put it off. She married him on her twenty-first birthday, six months ago, and they settled down at one of his estates, the loveliest place I know. Here news comes to Denissow that his only surviving brother is at death's door. He goes off to see him, and the poor fellow has only just breathed his last, when there arrives a telegram which informs him that his wife is starring at Helsingfors. Not a word, please!'—Captain Ulianin, it was evident, wanted to speak—'I haven't done yet. The most remarkable part of the story is still to come, and that is—sit down'—the officer had risen, and was walking about the room with a strangely troubled face—'that Anatol Denissow, looking into my face with
his sightless eyes, sightless then scarcely an hour, wound up his narrative of this affair with the words: "I'm not broken-hearted, mind you; I'm not in a passion about it. She thought it a bit of fun, thought I should condone it, was led from one step to another. I can see it all. Some things are very clear to me in my blindness. She may have been tempted. I think she has been tempted. Perhaps I was wrong to shut her up in a cage. Any way, she has flown, and no one need bring her back to me. You understand me. Don't let anyone bring her back to me, that is all. She is amply provided for by her marriage-settlement; that remains to her, and I shall have a separation." I grunted something about possible extenuating circumstances: not that in the remotest region of my brain I could find one; but one has to plead for women, God help them! He had no doubt that there were extenuating circumstances. He did not judge her too severely. Call it a girl's mad freak, and nothing more. She should enjoy her freaks in future. He wanted none of them, and, above all, henceforth he wanted none of her. And then—would I touch that bell?—I did so.—An order for writing materials was given, and quickly complied with. I found myself calmly writing letters at his dictation. He put me au
courant with all his plans, and parted with me, thanking me for having facilitated his immediate departure from Helsingfors, which town he has by this time left, never to set foot in it again.

'By this time left?'

'Yes. I said that the greatest wonder had yet to be told. The man is as composed as possible.'

'And who is travelling with him?'

'Your brother, Ulianin.'

'Ivan!' (This was the name which had been given to 'Puffy' in baptism).

'Yes. He seems to have dogged your steps all this evening, poor lad! and as usual ended with hunting me out, and imploring of me to tell him what was the matter with you. He seems to think you are in some bog.' (A quick smile lighted the keen eyes of Melitzky, but it vanished as he noticed the great pallor in the face of his friend). 'I'm afraid something is the matter, Panin. I told the boy not to be a goose, and to oblige me by taking care of my blind friend. He seemed to like the responsibility, and bade me tell you that he had guessed part, perhaps all. The child will turn into a prophet, I believe. He was quite oracular.'

'Heaven bless him! Our mother was right, Melitzky. Ivan, she used to say, might be as dull as a beetle, but there was that about him that made
one feel that God in heaven wouldn't demean Himself by shaking hands with the lad. And they are really gone? Surely they might have waited till to-morrow. They cannot get far to-night.'

'No. But at least they can get out of Helsingfors, out of the sound of that.'

The small lodging-house, in a private room of which this conversation had taken place, was in a road leading off the street in which was the concert-hall. The sudden noise of carriages, driving in quick succession, here showed that the concert was over.

'Well, what is up, Panin?'

The Captain suddenly made for the door and, instead of answering, dashed out of the room, and down the stairs like a boy.

Dr. Melitzky took a survey of the room, looking along a wall lined with shelves, which were filled with the best work of the best brains of four nations.

'Pon my word, he has a capital library; a nice piano this, too,' trying it. 'Ah, that's a pity. Poor fellow! poor fellow!'—his eyes had fallen on the portrait of a woman. 'What the dickens is the meaning of it, that every Adam in the world must bite into the apple Eve holds out?' The little doctor, standing outside the world of Adams, in the high heaven of philosophers, addressed this
question to the air. 'Now, I wonder what he expects me to do with myself? That couch wheeled over to the fire wouldn't be a bad seat. Yes, now I'm thoroughly comfortable.' (In a very snug room, stretched full length on a couch, with a cushion at his head, a rug over his feet, and Plato's 'Dialogues' in his hand, there was everything to make so rational a being comfortable.) 'What's the matter with me?'—the monologist and very introspective gentleman, after a moment's perusal of Plato's book, put it from him with an expression of contempt. 'It's odd, really, what bosh a dead book seems in face of a living problem. What I want to understand is how Denissow, and Ulianin, and that little pretty Finlander, and Katharine Goudounow, and the child Puffy, have all got tangled into a black knot. Now, of course, if that little Finnish woman had taken my advice—Lord! a woman take a man's advice, when there's a wall she has made up her mind to run her head against! I must be stark crazy to have wasted words talking to her. One thing is certain—I can't stay here. Late as it is, I'll go round and see the aunt. It's wonderful how those dull-eyed women sometimes see right through a pack of cards. I'll go and ask her point-blank what is the matter.'

He started out forthwith.
CHAPTER LI.

SELMA'S AWAKENING.

'O, the most pitiful cry!'

'How now?' Katharine Goudounow spoke. She addressed herself to Captain Ulianin, who was standing beside her in the artists' room. 'If I had not promised you, my dear Panin, to wait, I——'

'Not a word, Katharine. I merit no reproach. Can you come away from these people'—the small room was crowded—'just for a moment?'

'No; I particularly want to stay here. Let me introduce you to the Countess Denissow.'

'Not now, Katharine—for Heaven's sake not now!'

A short laugh broke from Katharine Goudounow. 'You are quite melodramatic, my friend. Tell me, how did you like the concert?'

'I thought I had never seen you look so lovely.'

The great brown eyes were dropped, and the
golden head was bent in mockery. Then the clear, cold voice was heard:

'If you care for me at all, pray spare me with such banalities. How did you like the music?'

'Masterly! I never heard such playing in my life, excepting—'

'Mine. That goes without saying, of course. Your wretched taste. The girl plays a thousand times better than I, and is a thousand times more beautiful.'

The Captain shrugged his shoulders.

The artist held out her hand, and smiled. 'Kind, faithful Panin!'

All things nice were in Katharine Goudounow's smile: wit and beauty and youth. Captain Ulianin watched her face, and said—they were standing alone at some distance from the others:

'Nobody's looking. May I kiss you, Katharine?'

'No.'

'It's hard lines.'

'Yes, dreadfully. There's not a man in the world I feel so sorry for as you, Panin. It seems so absurd and horrible, but it can't be helped. What made you leave the concert before the first piece was ended?'

'A gentleman beside me was taken ill.'

'Sad.'
'Yes; it was shockingly sad. Saving one thing, Katharine'—he looked into her eyes—'the saddest thing I know of. He was struck with blindness.'

'Anatol Denissow struck with blindness!'

What did she mean by speaking in that voice? The words rang through the room. Besides themselves, there was none in it now but Selma.

She came forward.

'"Anatol Denissow struck with blindness!"'

What can you mean? Was Anatol Denissow—'

Here she broke down. It was more like a child's cry than a woman's, short and sharp, with a terror in it that cannot be described.

Madame Goudounow went up to her.

'Yes. Anatol Denissow was at the concert, Selma. This gentleman— What have I done?'

Captain Ulianin had seized her by both hands, and led her to the other end of the room.

'So it is really you, Katharine, who have brought her misery on this girl?' he cried, still holding the artist's wrists.

'Take care. You are hurting me horribly. Can't you see that my hand is bandaged?'

He loosened his hold.

'I see that it is bandaged. I wish I could be sure, Katharine, that it needed bandaging. You
have been up to some devilry!" He spoke between clenched teeth in uncontrollable passion. 'Countess'—he turned to Selma, who had raised her face, and looked about her with big, dry eyes—'in an evil hour I met this woman. I cannot shake her off. In an evil hour you met her. The wide world is open to you. Shake her off.'
CHAPTER LII.

EXCULPATION.

"There shall no harm befall Daoud Shah by cause of me."

*Rudyard Kipling.*

A servant announced at the door of the artists' room that the carriage ordered by Madame Goudounow was waiting.

Captain Ulianin approached the Russian pianist, and placed himself between her and the place of exit. She spoke.

'I presume, Captain, you do not mean to use bodily force to keep me here.'

'No; but I think you will deem it wise to stay here for some moments longer. I shall then give myself the pleasure of driving you home. Let me advise you'—he lowered his voice—'to make no scene.'

A trembling hand pointed to the door.

'You have your own home, as I have mine.
Your carriage, too, is in waiting. Here comes your coachman."

'I know.' Captain Ulianin turned to Selma. 'My carriage is at your disposal, Countess. You may wait below'—addressing the servant; 'the lady will be ready immediately. I think now'—he looked about him—'we might all quit this place.'

Selma had risen, and the three stood.

'Yes, I think so.' Madame Goudounow spoke. 'I only wish to say one thing more. Do not attempt to silence me, Panin. I have a right to put three questions to the wife of Anatol Denissow, and I will. Selma, did I ask you to study my concert-programme?'

'No.'

'Did I ask you to play at the house of the Baroness?'

'No.'

'Did I ask you to play at my concert?'

'No.'

There was no 'but,' no limitation, only to question after question the direct negative, as the gray eyes met the brown.

The Captain listened in astonishment.

'Are you speaking the truth?' he asked suddenly, addressing the younger woman.

The gray eyes flashed into his. There was no
EXCUSLATION

other answer. For a moment there was silence in the room, then Selma spoke.

'Will you leave us alone for a moment, Captain Ulianin?'

The officer bowed, and left the room.

The two women stood face to face.

'I want to tell you, Madame Goudounow, that I have ceased to love you.'

'Is that all?'

'No.' Selma blushed deeply. 'I want to tell you that I love Anatol Denissow, and to remind you that he is my husband.'

'A late announcement, and a late reminder, Selma.'

'Very late. That was my wickedness, and is my shame.'

She tightened her wraps about her, and walked to the door. She seemed unable to control her steps, and went like one in a dream.

Captain Ulianin was at the stair-top.

'Allow me to offer you my arm?'

'Thank you, I can make my way alone.'

She went steadily down the broad stairs, paused in the hall below, tottered and fell.

'Leave her to me! Nobody touch her!'

The speaker, a tall, gruff-voiced person, had entered the hall from the street.
CHAPTER LIII.

A SICK-ROOM—A NURSE.

‘What a thing friendship is, world without end!’

The gruff voice had belonged to Miss Olive, who had brushed past the Captain with scant ceremony. Then, inveighing loudly in hempen English at all present, she had put her strong arms about the fainting girl, and had lifted her tenderly into a carriage outside the hall. Here she applied restoratives, which she had had the presence of mind to bring with her. Selma sat quite quiet during the drive, only once bending forward to kiss the face of this good friend. It was wet with tears, which had been flowing unchecked for several minutes past.

‘What’s the matter with you, dear one?’ Selma asked.

‘Nothing; I’m a dolt, a soft-hearted dolt, that’s all that’s the matter with me,’ Miss Olive replied.
An hour later she was tucking Selma into her bed.

'I want to say good-night to aunt,' the girl said suddenly. She had not spoken a word for more than half an hour.

'Well, then, you can't, my dear; so don't trouble to sit up. You should have thought of that before.'

Miss Olive, still weeping, dried her face as if she were drying a plate.

'What are you saying now?'
Selma was buried in the sheets.
'I want to say good-night to aunt.'
She said the words like a lesson.

'What!'
'I want—-'

Miss Olive turned to the doctor.
'She wants to say good-night to her aunt. What, in God's name, am I to do?'

He knelt down beside the bed and drew the sheets from the face.
'I want to say good-night to aunt,' was repeated in a whisper.

Melitzky rose.
'She's delirious, and doesn't know what she's saying. I don't think she'll attempt to stir; in fact... Are you a great friend of hers?'
'I can bear to be told the truth, if that's what you mean. You think she will never leave this bed.'

'I have grave fears.'

The face of the Englishwoman twitched violently, but she kept back the tears. The doctor left the room, and she sat down beside the bed. Selma was asleep, though she talked excitedly. Miss Olive took a crushed letter from her pocket. It was from the Doktorinna, and ran:

'My dear Miss Olive,

Can you come to me for a week? I fear a second fit is impending; and what would the child Selma do? I am laid up, and things have been going wrong. If you should not find me living, take some papers addressed to you in the bottom left-hand corner of my trunk. I may be unduly alarmed, but ...'

Here the writing became unsteady, and Miss Olive put down the letter.

'The Doktorinna dead and Selma dying!' She bent her face on her hands and her lips moved.

Selma talked on with growing excitement, though she did not stir even so much as to turn
round. There was no other sound in the room but the whirr of a moth flying after his shadow on the lamplit ceiling in a frenzy of terror.

For fourteen days and fourteen nights she lay thus, and the Englishwoman watched. Years before she had told Selma that there was no such thing as loving moderately. In all those fourteen days and fourteen nights she had not rested, excepting now and again, stretched on the rug by Selma's bed. Dr. Melitzky had waxed abusive about it, and Dr. Melitzky's voice had got thick. Dr. Melitzky said of Miss Olive:

'God makes women like that once in a while to remind us that His work is very good. There are people looking at whom, and things observing which, one is tempted to grow godless, and meeting a woman like that pulls one up.'

On the fifteenth day Selma sat up in bed.

'Dear one, shall I recover?'

Miss Olive stroked the dark, warm hair.

'Yes, child.'
CHAPTER LIV.

RECOVERY—HOPE—MISS OLIVE.

'There may be a returning to favour.'

Selma recovered.

Weeks passed before she was able to quit her bed; but, when she did so, she looked extraordinarily well, and she was buoyantly happy. The news of her aunt's death, carefully kept from her until the worst phase of her illness had gone by, only evoked a child's outburst of grief, the heaviness of a night, followed by joy in the morning. One happiness and hope seemed to lift her above all sorrow. There was the child. 'He will forgive me when the child is born—believe it, believe it, he will.' This was the refrain of her daily talk.

Miss Olive smiled. She did not shake her head. She was of opinion that three-quarters of all the misery in the world is the result of the shaking of heads, and her Utopia was a place in which there
were no head-shakes, but only smiles, broad smiles, and narrow smiles. A broad smile, as defined by Miss Olive, is one that is merry, and a narrow smile is one that is merry and wise.

When the child was born, Miss Olive bravely undertook to be the bearer of the news to Count Denissow. She declared that the others might quail before him as much as they liked, but that she, for her part, was not going to be 'Rochestered' into a panic—whatever she meant by that. On being ushered into the presence of the blind nobleman, she said briskly, after a curt salutation:

'I've come to tell you, Count Denissow, that your wife has a child.'

'I know it. A boy, I believe.'

'Yes.' Miss Olive's voice became exultant. She seemed to take some pride to herself that it was a boy. 'You ask no question about the mother, Count Denissow.'

'I take no interest in the mother.'

'Then you should, and, if you'll excuse my saying so, I haven't common patience with you that you don't.'

'These blind eyes should tax some pity, madam.'

'They do. Don't think that they don't. But I've not travelled into Russia to tell you, Count Denissow, that I pity you. I've come to speak to
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you of your wife. Your wife was foolish. She erred, and was carried along into error. She made what I call a thorough mess of things, got hysterical, crazy, heaven knows what. The Lord preserve any man I care for from marrying a woman with genius, or one of these new-fangled lords-of-creation girls! But you married her. Nobody asked you to. You did it. And now she's your wife. That stands to reason.'

'Does it also, madam, afford an excuse for her conduct?'

'No. Nothing does that, and I don't make excuses for her. I don't make excuses for any of us; cannot see how, by any line of argument, it could be proven that a single one of us in humanity is worthy the two feet of ground that he stands on. She's as bad as the rest of us in her way, I make no doubt; but what right have you to cut the two feet of ground from beneath her?'

'You are agitated, madam.'

'Yes, I am.' The brave, philosophical Miss Olive was crying into her handkerchief like a child. 'I've not had much happiness myself, Count, and I do like some people to have a little bit. I want her to be happy, and you to be happy, and the baby to be happy. I can't see why you shouldn't start afresh with the baby.'
'The baby is your â·tou, madam.'

'Yes, if "atoo's" the French for "trump-card," he is. The baby, to my mind, makes everything good. My gracious, if you could see him!'

Considering that the Count was blind, this was not a particularly happy sally, and an embarrassed silence followed. Count Denissow broke it.

'Does she wish to give up the boy to me?'

'Yes.'

'Well, then'—the father became quietly business-like at once—'I should like him to be taken to my brother Sergius' place. He has a good nurse, I suppose. No Frenchwoman, I hope.'

Miss Olive braced herself for a tussle.

'The nurse is of his mother's choosing,' she said.

'No Frenchwoman, I hope,' Anatol Denissow's voice rose. It was evidently with an effort that he calmed himself, as he added, speaking with slow emphasis, 'I will have no Frenchwoman about my son.'

Miss Olive screwed her courage to the sticking-place.

'I will,' she said, 'is a word which no Englishwoman tolerates, you know, Count. I have taken upon myself some responsibility in this matter, and neither you nor anyone else shall go against the mother in her choice of a nurse. I have seen the
young woman; she is well enough, and loves the child.'

The Count was unable to bear up longer against this steady English shot.

'What is her name?' he asked, his courage oozing out.

'Madame Fournier,' Miss Olive replied stiffly.

'Married, then?'

'Yes.'

'Where's her husband?'

'Oh, it's a sad story. She—'

'Excuse me. I would fain be spared the sad story. No doubt I shall hear of it often enough from her. These nurses are always talkative. Well, I'll concede the point. I'm glad it's a boy.'

'I can see you are,' Miss Olive smiled. Women are good-tempered creatures, and the girl-babies grow up to join in the worship of the boy-babies. 'We're all glad of that.'

'Have them sent to my brother Sergius' estate,' Count Denissow continued. Miss Olive began to tap the floor with her foot, to the tune of 'Rule, Britannia!' 'I will write to the overseer, an honest fellow, married to a decent woman, who would have found me someone to attend to the child, and who will make all the necessary prepa-
rations necessary for the comfort of him and his Madame—Chose—'

'Not Shews,' Miss Olive corrected, wondering somewhat at this confusion. 'Fournier is the name.'

'And when he has outgrown frocks,' the Count continued, 'they can let me know.'

'And you intend to wait till then to meet the baby!'

No words will describe the astonishment of Miss Olive. A baby, a boy-baby, to be treated in this cavalier manner!

A light passed over the serious face of the Russian.

'Yes, I can hardly fancy myself, madam, enjoying a son in long clothes or in petticoats. Moreover—' the stern voice softened for the first time—' I have no desire as yet to go back to the old places. Death, death, everywhere, my friend. In this, my own place, the death of all my hopes; in my two brothers' places, their empty chairs. Let the child grow a bit, and when he feels that he's a man—he'll feel that when they take him out of petticoats'—again a quick charming smile brought light to the blind eyes—' and can run out to meet his father, why, then I'll come. And now let me thank you. Where is your hand?'
Miss Olive's eyes blinked as she met this appeal, extending frankly her hand, over which the Russian bent, and kissed it. Sweet courtesy is of all things very witching, the most witching, and no gentle-hearted woman aged forty was ever known to withstand its spell. A happy blush came to Miss Olive's face, and painted it, like a flattering artist, ten years younger than it was.

As urgently requested by the Count, the Englishwoman stayed for a week at Tritusna. Here is a scrap from a letter written thence to 'Loo':

'It feels quite queer, "being a real lady," as we used to say as children, being a person to be considered, a person of importance. The Count seems to like me greatly, and I like him each day greatlier, though never a question does he ask about my child, Selma. The boy, the heir, however, interests him. That's so manlike. The pride, the independence of this creature takes my breath away. The sphinx was right, Loo. Man in his prime goes on two legs, that is his leading characteristic. This blind, strong being will not have Selma even as a crutch. She wants him more than he wants her. I'm beginning to think that we women are poor creatures. (Burn
or otherwise destroy this letter, Loo.) Heaven help
the child! I've done my utmost. After some
storming, he agreed to Madame Fournier. I never
approved of that—never; but they talked me over.
It's done; and I'd do it again. Even the recollec-
tion of that girl's eyes, blind with weeping, as she
implored for help in the plot, is, to me, worlds sadder
than the spectacle of this man's eyes, merely sight-
less. God pity us all, Loo! This is a real, live
tragedy.'

Four days after writing the mingled yarn, of
which the above is a portion, Miss Olive was back
in Helsingfors. A week later she was bidding
Madame Fournier 'God speed!' on her way to
Count Sergius' country-seat with Selma's boy.
That evening at her bedside a woman in white,
Miss Olive, said this:

'God, it is written, "Devise not a lie against
thy brother; neither do the like to thy friend.
Use not to make any manner of lie: for the
custom thereof is not good."'

That was said aloud, with bowed head; then
the face was lifted up, and the eyes were lifted
up, and the woman in white, Miss Olive, made
silently her commentary on this text, and the
injunction contained in it, pointing out that,
under given circumstances, it was near impossible to obey it, and recommending herself and the other woman to mercy. After which she rose, looking mystic in her long white wrapper, with the light upon her face, and wonderful, with that thin, small twist of gray hairs hanging girlishly down her back. You know the sort of twist that results when ladies, who wear their hair in little tight knots, undo it; it was that sort, not enough of it to braid, just enough of it to make a picture—and a poem too, if poets only knew; but not even Browning, who seems to have looked at women’s hair, has written a poem about a woman’s gray hair; and Tennyson has written none; and Swinburne has written none. Shakespeare, who wrote on all things, wrote one, a beautiful thing, his best, but it was lost.

Miss Olive, having prayed, crept into her bed, and slept soundly.
CHAPTER LV.

THE END OF KATHARINE GOUDOUNOW.

'There's something in this world amiss.'

Among those who lay waking in Helsingfors, while Miss Olive lay sleeping, was Katharine Goudounow.

'I give myself still two hours to live, Mabel, my dear,' she was saying to her faithful nurse and companion. 'I am sorry to die, for I have a sneaking fondness for life. She has been with me for so long that I was beginning to think that, like you, she meant to remain with me always. I want you to try to stop crying—I am really not worth a tear—and to help me settle some things. Is that unlovely little creature in the doorway?'—peering into the gloom, where stood the small, sad-faced servant, weeping bitterly.

'Tell her not to let me see her crying, it's so prematurely ghastly, and she must look so dread-
ful. Let her kiss me when I am dead, and shall not know it, and give her all my larder. She's a good little dog, and doesn't care for money. Is that you, Panin? I didn't want you. It's horrible to have you at my deathbed. And you've brought that dreadful Dr. Melitzky. Why didn't you bring an undertaker, too? Dr. Melitzky retired into the window-niche. 'Poor Panin! You haven't been happy, neither have I. Happiness never held out more than her little finger to either of us—so cavalier. What sort of a night is it, Panin? Open the window.'

He opened it. It was a warm summer's night, and the quiet moon had come out to spend some hours with the stars. The dying woman raised herself.

'How pretty it is! All of them in white! They are going to have a party, and the stars will dance till morning. How charming it all is! but I haven't time to look. Pass me that bundle of papers, will you, Panin?'

She held out her hands. There were several bundles of papers in the direction in which she pointed. He fumbled among them, and at last took up the one which he apparently thought of most importance, and put it into her hands. The
fingers did not close on it. He looked into the face. It was set, and the eyes stared.

With a low cry, the English girl darted forward. The little maid crossed the room, and crouched at the bedfoot. Melitzky came forward and whispered to them, and they left the room together. The doctor then returned to the window, while Captain Ulianin busied himself with the dead woman, laying her back among the pillows, and closing her eyes. Melitzky after awhile approached him:

'Poor fellow, indeed you loved her!'

'Loved her? Melitzky, I worshipped her!

She was my wife!'

Steps sounded on the stairs. They were the steps of Ivan in search of his brother.

Some half-hour later Melitzky and the young officer were talking together.

'So she was his wife, Ivan?' Melitzky said, with a perplexed expression. 'Why, every man of us thought——'

'Yes, yes,' Ivan interrupted, 'Panin's luck. They were married years ago in Switzerland. She did it in a pique against some other man, and left him in a week. She never called herself by his name. Compromised him a bit; he was so easily compromised. Shouldn't think there's
a man at this moment living in the world is more respected up there'—indicating the sky with his thumb; 'but, lord! a man that stands out as he does is sure to have dozens down here ready to knock him over. Quite too dazzling to escape jealousy. Why, if a handful of mud could have knocked the sun out of the sky, we'd have been left in the pitch-dark long ago. Nice moon, that, by the way—bright thing, for a mere reflection. Wonderfully beautiful, the world, if it weren't for the humans. 'Night, Melitzky;' and, shaking hands, not with immoderate cordiality, with the doctor, the young man left him.

'H'm! Now he's off back to Panin. Not at all such a fool as he looks, and a nice chap—a nice chap.'

The doctor walked home slowly through the quiet streets of Helsingfors. It was long past midnight, with no light anywhere, excepting in the moon and stars.

The doctor's thoughts were wholly occupied with the brothers, and, pausing in the midst of one of the silent streets, he said, speaking aloud, as was his fashion: 'Some of the humans are not bad. 'Night, Ivan.'
CHAPTER LVI.

THE BABY.

"Each least glance gives gifts of grace, redressing Grief's worst wrongs."—

Swinburne—of little children.

Sometimes an hour in the life of a woman or man is so fraught with incident, that to write down all that happened in it would take many months, and to read the long narrative concerning it would take many hours. And sometimes a year, two years, three years, in the life of a woman or man, are so little marked by incident, that to write down all that happened in them would occupy only what Germans call 'a little hour,' and to read the small record thus made would occupy only some minutes. Of this latter description were the three years which passed after Madame Fournier's leaving Helsingfors with Count Denissow's baby. Madame Fournier nursed the baby, weaned the
baby; she made long clothes for it, and made short clothes for it; she taught it to walk, and taught it to talk; she carried it, and led it by the hand; she spoke to it, and sang to it; she lived for it. There are always millions of women thus occupied in the world; every man who reads this page has thus occupied one, which is why he loves women and honours them. At the end of the three years spent in this quiet wise by Madame Fournier and the baby, an important event took place. The day on which it occurred was in itself an important one—it was the baby’s birthday, and he was strutting about in male attire for the first time.

‘Dame Fou’nier,’ he piped, ‘baby’s a boy.’
‘Yes, baby,’ came the answer.
‘Yes, Boy,’ the baby corrected, frowning.

When the baby frowned it was to Madame Fournier exactly as if bright day had turned into dim night, and a black air without stars was overhead. She knelt down before her king and craved his pardon, with arms held up to him. This was necessary, because the king had got on to a chair to look at himself in a mirror. This is what young Solomon in all his glory looked like. He was crowned with living gold, and had a fair white brow, and wide blue eyes; he had round, rosy
THE BABY

cheeks and a round, rosy mouth, the latter just now wide open, the better to see himself. How the king was helped to see himself by opening wide his mouth, this writer knoweth not, but it was so. He was more beautiful than can be said in words, and he was clad, as befitted a king, in purple and gold. He was shod in purple and gold.

Now think of the woman in faded black expecting of him to look at her!

'Boy's beautiful,' he said, and smiled at boy. You who read can have no conception at all of the beauty of the king's smile. It was like four-and-twenty sunbeams rolled up into one, and the laugh that followed it was like that bit of the fall of Lodore where the water comes curling, and whirling, and pearling, and twirling. The woman in the dim dress still held out her arms. The king felt the spell of her witching eyes and turned slowly. And in his graciousness he said:

'Catch me!'

And he flung himself into her arms, and she strained him to her heart.

'My baby! my baby!' she cried, and kissed him with laughter and tears.

The king frowned more blackly than ever, wriggled, and slid to the floor.
'Boy, 'Dame Fou'nier!'

It was the voice of Stentor, when Stentor was three years old—a prodigiously big voice to come from so little a body. The woman in the dim dress turned pale. The king was terrible.

At that moment a man in the doorway said:

'Boy, yes. Come to me, my son.'

Madame Fournier stole from the room.
CHAPTER LVII.

CHILD AND FATHER.

"How near are two hearts when there is no deceit between them?"

THE Count stood in the doorway a full minute. The baby did not move a step. He did not even speak till the silence became annoying; then he said stiffly:

'You're not the blind man that's my papa.'

'Yes, I am, my boy.'

'Blind men have little dogs.'

'I have my boy for a little dog.'

A boy for a little dog! That to the baby was so funny a notion that he laughed till the room rang again, and straight went forward.

'That's my hand,' he explained, putting it into his father's. Nobody could have taken the small warm thing for a cucumber, or anything else in the wide world excepting a baby's hand; but how is a
baby—even when three years old—to know this sort of thing?

'Yes, lad,' the Count said gravely. 'Take me to a chair.'

The Count stepped out like a man, and the baby stepped out like a boy, and nine steps did it, three by the Count, and six by the baby.

'This is a chair—it's yellow. You like to know what things are like, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'Dame Fou'nier said you did.' The baby was sitting in his father's lap, with his father's arm about him. He wore his most engaging expression, and seemed to feel the sentiment of the thing for a moment, but then the cool boy-baby head asserted itself again.

'I should like to look into your eyes, if you please. Do you mind?'

'No.'

The little knees were posed on the big knees, and an earnest examination took place.

'I think'—there was a good-humoured laugh in the voice—'you're making fun. I think you see me, because there are glints, like when I look into Dame Fou'nier's eyes long. Is it a game?'

'No, lad, it's earnest. Kiss me, my little son.'
The boy kissed him, hand and face. Then he said softly:

'Is it a pain, being blind?'

'No, my son. It's only a darkness always, and'—patting the small head—'sometimes thoughts, like stars, make my night beautiful.'

This way of putting things was quite lost on the baby. He looked a little bored.

'I should like to get down now. Wait a minute. I shall tell you when I'm on the floor.' He jumped down lightly. 'I'm on the floor now. I want to take you about the house, and tell you things. What colour is the chair?'

'Yellow,' the Count said solemnly.

'Yes'—briskly. 'You must try to remember.' (The baby dealt more in exhortation than in eulogy; all babies do.) 'I won't tell you too much at once. This is my hand'—putting it into his father's again, and walking off with him.—'Dame Fou'nier!'—this in a shout outside the room—'I see you standing on the stairs. Come, and I'll show you my papa. This is Dame Fou'nier, my nurse, papa. She is standing right before you. You mustn't walk on till I tell you to.'

'Thank you, Madame Fou'nier,' the Count said courteously, 'for kindness to my little son.'
Madame Fournier's lips moved, but no words were heard.

'You must speak when my papa speaks, please, 'Dame Fou'nier,' the boy said, a little nettled at the silence. 'He can hear, you know, and he's waiting for you to speak, 'Dame Fou'nier.'

'I have nothing to say.'

Madame Fournier quickly left them.

The Count walked on with the child. He was taken into room after room, and given, in the broken French which the little lad employed, and of which it is not possible to give here any idea, an inventory of the furniture. When three rooms had been shown to him in this careful manner, Count Denissow craved permission to sit down.
CHAPTER LVIII.

A BOY'S DILEMMA.

'There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword.'

EXCEPTING for its loneliness, the position of Madame Fournier in the house of Count Denissow was one which to most people would have seemed a position of exceptional advantages. With a suite of rooms set apart for her and her charge, without a mistress, and with a master who never interfered with her, she was waited upon and supplied with not only every comfort, but every luxury, her whole duty consisting in being the companion of a child who was greatly attached to her, and of whom she was passionately fond.

Of course there was the loneliness of it. She was a homeless, friendless woman in a foreign country. During the first year, from the time of the Count's coming to the house, she saw him but at rare intervals, and beyond the common greetings
—the good-morning and good-day, said on bad mornings and bad days, that nothing could make good—no slightest word passed between them. The others in and about the house evidently shunned the sad-faced, silent nurse. Some centuries ago, a poet, depicting hell, described its most unhappy inmates as in a place where they were up to the chin in ice; where their tears froze, and could not fall. Dante knew. The heart of Madame Fournier was breaking in this loneliness and coldness.

At the end of a year there came a change. Count Denissow gave directions that his son, with his nurse, was henceforth to dine with him. So Madame Fournier took her seat at the Count's table. A third person might have wondered to see one not devoid of courtesy allow himself and his son to be waited on at table before a woman whose every movement and whose every word proclaimed her ladyhood. Years passed by, and this thing remained unaltered. The child grew bigger, and the Count began to absent himself at intervals with him. Sometimes the father and son would be away for weeks. Once on his return Count Denissow suggested that the French nurse should be discharged, and only withdrew the suggestion on the child's showing passionate grief.
‘You are too old, my boy’—he took the little fellow on his knees—‘to cry about a nurse.’

‘I grow older every day, papa; when I grow up I mean to marry her.’

‘Bah! She will be too old then.’

‘Ladies never grow old, Madame Fournier says. But she isn’t a lady, is she, papa? Would you let me marry a nurse?’

‘Men marry whom they please, my son, but—to tell you the frank truth—I should not be especially pleased at the marriage. None of our family ever married a nurse. You must give up the notion.’

‘I suppose so’—resignedly. ‘I must tell her so’—a sigh.

No man of the world brought suddenly face to face with the necessity of breaking off, and the scene that this would entail, could have looked more distressed. He seized the opportunity that evening at supper of bringing the matter to a close. Putting down his knife and fork, and looking honestly sorry at having to make the announcement, he said slowly:

‘You are to stay on with us, Madame Fournier, but I can’t marry you, after all, because you’re a nurse, and I’m a gentleman, and—there now, I knew she’d cry. Help me down, papa; help me down.’
The youth who had thus early become entangled in an unpleasant love-affair was seated on a chair too high for him to be able to reach the ground without assistance. His father lifted him down; and in another minute he stood beside Madame Fournier. If she fancied, however, that he meant to change his mind, she was mistaken. With a haughtiness in his manner that would have been exquisitely comical had the woman to whom he was speaking not turned on him a face quivering with pain, he said, just touching her with his baby-lips:

'Don't cry, please. No one in our family ever married a nurse. We must give up the notion. Good-night. Good-night, papa. I won't have any supper.' And, uncommonly upset by the whole affair, he trotted out of the room.

When he had gone some steps along the passage outside, he turned back.

'I am still your little friend, Madame Fournier, though I can't marry you.'

Madame Fournier took him on her knees.

'Hush, hush, boy Anatol. When love burns low, to call it friendship, that is cruel, that is horrid. Never do that.'

The voice had a most sweet cadence, but the words were lost on the child. His forehead creased.
'What says Madame Fournier, papa?'
'Madame Fournier spoke to boy Anatol. Has he not ears?'

The Count rose. The boy was standing beside him. He took his hand, and went with him from the room.

Madame Fournier bent her face on the table. Her thoughts went back to her youth, and the home of her youth, a fair, far land, where one might lie down in green pastures and beside still waters—a land full of still waters. The thought came into her mind that it would be pleasant to lie there under the green grass.
CHAPTER LIX.

WANTED, A WOMAN.

'There came forth little children out of the city and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head!'

Whether it was shame at having broken off with her an engagement of some years' standing, or that young Count Anatol really wearied of the patient Frenchwoman, who, from being his nurse, was promoted to be his teacher, he began to show less interest in her, less liking for her. It was evident that he avoided her company as much as possible, and even when with her he would not speak to her, and would look at her with those dumb eyes that say no word. Becoming more and more the companion of his father, he closely imitated the cold, distant manner of the latter towards the Frenchwoman. One day he went so far as to order her to speak Russian, and on her
continuing to speak French, he took upon himself to dismiss her. An apology, which his father insisted on his making, was accepted, but Madame Fournier's heart had now become a Pandora's box from which even hope had fled, and she herself expressed a desire to leave the house of Count Denissow. The day of her departure was fixed, and was near at hand, when the boy fell sick, and became baby again.

'Madame Fournier! Madame Fournier!' was the immediate cry, with a child's shamelessness. From Madame Fournier alone would young Anatol take food; Madame Fournier only would he have about him. A woman with a mother's heart has royal hands, the touch of which will banish pain. There were times when the little head was only at ease when pillowed in one of those patient hands of Madame Fournier's. Happy days and nights those for the lone woman! The boy's eyes lighted into smiles at sight of her, as of old; Denissow, too, was kind, so kind that one day, gathering up all her courage, Madame Fournier went to him. She had a speech all ready. She had had it ready for seven years, and in seven years had not found courage to utter it. It was very short; it was only this:

'Forgive me. I am that Selma.'
With her hand on Denissow’s arm, the power to say it forsook her. She stood beside him, trembling.

‘I know it.’

It was he who spoke.

_He knew it._ Now she understood his recent kindness; he had found her out.

‘I have known it all along.’

‘What! all along! You have known it all along!’ The wretched woman took her hand from his arm, and staggered to a chair. ‘Oh, Anatol, are you a man at all? Can you——’

At that moment a shrill cry rang through the house.
CHAPTER LX.

THE END.

'The past was a sleep, and her life began.'

'It is the boy; you had better go to him, Madame Fournier.'

'The boy!' she repeated. 'He is my boy! Mine! Mine! Anatol'—she was by his side again—'he is ours. Who knows how long we may have him? I cannot bear it longer. Come and tell him that I am his mother.'

'Never!'

Denissow put her from him.

'Are you mad? Is this house a theatre?' He made a step forward, and groped to find her; then paused. 'Madame Fournier, where are you? I have something to tell you. Madame, you are young, you are beautiful, you are clever, you are enchanting. I love you. But—there's a "but," madame. We Denissows are proud. You ought
to understand us. You have some touch of pride yourself. You have waited seven years to tell me this thing, and the boy is no baby now. He, too, is proud. You ask too much of me, when you ask me to go to his bedside, and say to him: "This woman, my son, whom you have known for seven years as a paid servant in my house, is my wife, your mother."'

'Then the boy is between us. Oh, Anatol, God help me!' A great whiteness passed over Selma's face. 'Go to him, you! I cannot. Stay—I will.'

'Madame Fournier!' A servant appeared in the doorway. 'One word with you alone, please.'

The maid speaking beckoned Selma into the passage. There was a moment's talking, then a gray-faced woman came back.

'Your hand, Anatol.'

He gave it.

'Do you know where you are now?'

'Yes; in my son's room, beside my son, and—Selma, he is dead.'

'Yes, Anatol, and—' With a wild cry like that she had once, only once, before uttered: 'O, Anatol, I did not pray for it!' she fell forward into his arms, which clasped her tight.

'Selma! Wife!'
‘Seven years—oh, my husband! I am punished.
Am I forgiven?’

She lifted her face to his, and kissed the blind eyes. He held the lifted face, and kissed the lips. The little child said nothing, and they began life anew.
A List of
Mr. William Heinemann’s
Publications and
Announcements

May 1899.

The Books mentioned in this List can be obtained to order by any Bookseller if not in stock, or will be sent by the Publisher on receipt of the published price and postage.
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THE WORKS OF LORD BYRON.

EDITED BY WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY.

IN TEN VOLUMES.

VOLUME I. LETTERS, 1804-1813.

To be followed by

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THE PAGET PAPERS.

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