

would have said that it was because she had lived so long alone with her father that now, faded haired and feeble eyed, she found in Besson's neglect of her and his mode of living a likeness to the parent who had made himself the controlling thought of her existence.

On the afternoon of the 23d Dalcour, going by, stopped a moment at the window to say that through unappreciated efforts he had managed to get the tombstone into such condition that it would be completed on the day he had promised. She was a woman of her word, and he wished to be a man of his.

Mamzelle felt a sudden stinging up in her hand. The pieté was conveniently at hand, but there was nothing to pledge unless it was her father's tail hat, and it was more than doubtful that she could get any considerable sum on that, especially as the wheels of a wagon had gone over it that time its wearer had fallen in the fit and they brought him home white and still, with the hat reposing upon his motionless breast.

Besson must do it. He must pay up. She decided it all at once. She became quite warm thinking of it. It was scandalous in the man to treat like this a woman of her age and with so little in the world. He was young, he had his health, and yet he let her house him for nothing. It was scandalous. He should pay up.

She did not go to her sleeping room that night, but waited in the parlor for him. She knew that he would not come home early, yet it was a satisfaction to sit there and weave and unweave the speech she should employ when he arrived, for she intended to tell him what she thought and how execrably he was acting.

While she sat there beguiling the time thus, Besson was at the theater. The false history of Sardon attracted him to the usual degree. Suddenly a feeling of aloofness seized him. He was near nothing and no one. The man occupying the seat next to his was more than miles away from him. He recognized the fact that the feeling had often approached him before, but now it was here. He was alone. This dramatist had honor; these actors had applause; this audience had entertainment. He had nothing. He rose and went out into the street. He must elude something that was doing its best to incorporate itself into his very being.

Tragic faces passed him. Sounds of false joy smote his ear. This was his life. There was nothing more for him. Up rose before him strange revelations



He got the revolver from the drawer.

of his one time hope and aspirations. More than that, there appealed to him that which had given the impetus to all the rest—a woman's love—Marie's. And it was all gone, Marie farther away than the rest. Only he lingered, and for what? And should this continue? No; a thousand times no. He had been a fool to suffer it so long, but now he would end it. The river! It was cool there, and quiet, and dark, and lonely. No; he would go on to his room at Mamzelle's, look into a beautifully polished little American cylinder, with a revolving chamber at one end of it, and in a moment there would be a quiet length lying on his bed, and it would be all over! He could scarcely wait to get to the Place Labrosse, only that it would be too much a part of his new loneliness to be rocked about in the river, his wide open eyes turning every now and then up to the stars that should not heed. He reached the house, his latchkey in his hand. On the step he glanced up at the dull little dome. He to call this life, to creep into a hiding hole in this poor place—who had known so much that was different! He was of no importance now, but in a few hours he would have made even little Mamzelle of the utmost importance and given her name to thousands of readers of the newspapers. A gardien would pace back and forth in front of the house. The whole machinery of the nation would be set in operation.

Wild to get it over, he dashed the key into the lock, but Mamzelle was at the door before he could turn the knob. Her face was scared. Beyond her in the dim entry the lamp flared on its table and outlined a blotch on the wall which Besson knew to be her father's hat.

"Monsieur," she stammered, "Monsieur," and could get no further. "Anything wrong, Mamzelle?" he asked her.

"Not at all," she answered. "Oh!" he said. "I have been to the theater, and a bad play it was. Sardon is as correct in his French history as you would be, very likely. But I believe I have said as much to you before."

"Several times," she returned. He laughed.

"It is a way I have," he reminded her. "Good night!" and prepared to ascend the stairs. "I shall rest—rest!" The moment had arrived, the moment to meet which she had been so long serving herself.

"Monsieur," she said, trembling in every limb, "will you do me the favor to step into my parlor?"

He turned round, his hand on the baluster of the stairs. She saw the flash of the ring on his finger. What right had he to wear rings when he owed half a year's rent?

"Then there is something the matter," he said. "You—you have not been frightened during my absence?"

"I am used to being alone," she answered, with dry mouth. "It is not that."

"Then what is it?" he queried. "Is it the mice? These old houses are overrun with mice. You should keep a cat."

"Monsieur," she said, "you have not found me unreasonable?"

"Assuredly not," he told her. "I am not easily put into bad humor."

"Indeed, no."

"You do not find me annoying or insistent?"

"You are the most retiring of creatures."

"Then it is this," she said—"that is, I mean, if monsieur will pardon me for being so bold, I should find good use for a little money just now—not much, say 60 francs. I could not accept more than 60 francs. The fact is, I have ordered a tombstone for my father's grave. Dalcour, who makes it, is a great friend of Carriere, across the way, so he lets me have it at a low price. Indeed, it is quite an occasion! But he has been so deceived he knows not whom to trust, and a tombstone made for a certain person is not pleasant goods to have returned on one's hands. He asks me for 90 francs on account on the 25th, which is the day after tomorrow—it is my father's birthday—and at noon, when he pays his men. Then the tombstone goes up. The rest of the money I pay in a year, which is certainly most reasonable of Dalcour. But I have not the 60 francs. I have promised it, though, and it grieves me to think I may not keep my word. If monsieur would kindly let me have that amount, not a franc more, I should be infinitely obliged. I should not be so pressing only that my word is pledged that Dalcour shall have the money, and in honor I must pay him."

Besson was rolling the ring round and round on his finger. He looked down at the little faded creature who used such fine expressions.

"Honor!" He smiled. "Honor!" Mamzelle was on fire in an instant.

"Yes, honor!" she cried. "What have I but honor? I have no wealth. I have lost my youth. There is no one who cares for me. I have only honor. My word is not doubted because it has always been sacred to me. Honor! I know how it is with those who have it not. I have sorrowed and shamed for one who let his honor fall to the dirt. It was my father. He was believed of no man. He had no friends. Alone I followed him to the grave. Honor! It is all I have in the world, and I will carry it with me unsullied up to the good God."

She was panting, her hand up over her heart. Besson was looking straight before him, a strange expression in his eyes.

"But monsieur does not attend," said Mamzelle.

She had to speak to him a second time. Then he pulled himself together.

"Mamzelle," he said, "you shall have the 60 francs on the day you have promised to pay it away," and pressed upward on the stairs.

But she ran after him and caught him by the sleeve. "Monsieur," she said, "will you forgive my heated words? Have I ever shown doubt of you? Then forgive me! I had no one else to go to, and then, monsieur, you seem a trifle careless."

"Yes, yes," he said. "I know. Careless is a very good word. But I am not worth your thought, Mamzelle, though I am as I wish to be. But you shall have the money by noon on the 25th."

He went to his room. It was not quite daybreak, so he lighted the lamp. His head was heavy and hot. He got the revolver from the drawer of the table.

"But not just yet. I will work at those things for Clavie," he said. "There will be time for that other afterward."

He slipped the weapon in his pocket. He picked up the water jug and dashed its contents over his head.

"So! That cools the oven," he said. "How do you like it, Mlle. Absinthe?" The water streamed down his shoulders. His face was varnished with it. He seated himself at the table, where there were a dozen pointed pencils and a quantity of dusty paper.

"Honor!" He took a pencil and drew it across the paper.

"Jean Paul Marat was born"—he wrote, when he let the pencil drop. He picked it up and wrote again: "Jean Paul Marat was born"—

He threw the pencil aside.

"Of course he was born," he said, "or how else did he get here?"

He selected with care a new pencil. His fingers grasped it till the knuckles whitened. He drove it over the paper. Sheet after sheet was filled with writing and fell to the floor. The pencil wore out. He took another.

Day came, and the outside light paled the yellow struggling of the lamp, though he did not heed. He wrote and wrote. He wore out pencil after pencil. The lamp died out, with an evil smell, but he knew it not. From the storehouse of his memory he drew forth the knowledge he had acquired years ago, when he had been hailed as a rising man whom the world would yet be proud to acknowledge. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon the last word was set down. The ten biographies ordered by M. Clavie were finished.

His hand was cramped. His neck had pains darting through it. Every bone in his body seemed wrenched. It was too late to deliver the manuscripts that day.

He threw himself across the bed and tossed about. At last he slept. He

awoke with a start. All was dark round him. Night had come again.

"You have gained a day, my little heart," he said. "If I had but one small glass! But, no. I must keep cool of head, for I must have more for these articles than a hundred francs. I have made them twice as long as I promised to do. The extra money will console Mamzelle for the trouble I shall cause her in this room." He tapped on his pocket. "And I will not look on Mme. Smithandwesson till I have been to Clavie, or I should surely be tempted."

He tried to light his lamp and found that the oil was exhausted. He went round in the dark and gathered the sheets of paper from the floor.

"Honor!"

With the first arrow of light he arranged the pages in sequence. When the light was more fully come, he left the house, in many months he had not seen the streets at this hour of the morning. The noise had scarcely begun. A blue frocked ouvrier here and there was going to work. A commercial traveler, with his bag of samples, was hurrying to catch an early train at the Gare d'Orleans. Two pea shellers, with sabots on their feet, were making for the markets.

The markets! He had once thought he would write up the markets.

"In the twelfth century they were pretty near where they are now. In 1551 they were destroyed by fire. Under the Fronde they suffered—But am I writing them up now?"

Six o'clock! The noise was increasing. Seven o'clock! Eight!

Clavie did not reach the office till 11—three hours—and no one he could visit so easily, and so get rid of the time. He wandered into the older part

of the town, now rapidly becoming the newer. He had once thought he should like to write a history of old Paris. How far off the time of that thought seemed now—as far off as everything else! Yet how interesting Paris was! At half past 10 he found that it would be close on to 11, even if he walked briskly, by the time he reached Clavie's.

Francois was alone in the office. M. Clavie had been out of town for a few days, but was expected at the office that morning.

"Good!" said Besson. "I will wait." When 11 struck, he asked if this were not the usual time for Clavie to arrive.

Francois answered, "Before this some days, but then he might have come home late last night and slept an hour or so beyond his usual time."

"True," said Besson and fastened his eyes on the clock.

Mamzelle had said she had promised the money to the tombstone man at noon, so there was a full hour yet.

Francois drummed on the table in front of him. A messenger entered with a letter. Francois read it.

"Unfortunately," he said, "this informs me that M. Clavie will not return until tomorrow."

Besson bounded to his feet.

"But," he said, "I have brought the biographies."

"I did not like to mention it," returned Francois, "but you will remember they were promised for the 15th. Today is the 25th. We could not wait longer than the 20th. Then we gave orders to have them written elsewhere. Some are already done, the others promised in a week."

Besson was dumfounded. Mamzelle had said she must pay the money at noon today. He had no means of getting the 60 francs save through the biographies. He had expected to settle his backstanding rent when he was paid for his papers on the Sorbonne, but that would not be until next month. He had trusted his food and drink even till he was paid for these papers on the Sorbonne.

"Monsieur," he said to Francois, "it is urgent. I must have the money."

"It is not my affair," returned Francois.

"Yes," argued Besson, "but the biographies were ordered from me."

"By a certain date," Francois retorted.

"True," urged Besson. "But I have written them. I will let you have them for 60 francs. Really 60 francs is necessary to me. I must have the money before noon. Oh, do not say no! See, the manuscripts are much longer than 500 words. They are correct in every particular. I will vouch for it. Only 60 francs! Surely, you will not refuse me? See how well they look! Sixty francs! Monsieur, I must have the money by noon. An honor is at stake."

Francois had grown pale as he listened to the words that drove like the wind.

"It is not my affair," he said more courteously. "We have already three of the biographies in the hands of the printer. You did not keep your contract as to time."

"But 60 francs," Besson cried, "only 60 francs!"

"I dare not," protested Francois.

"But,"

"Monsieur," said Francois, "I will take a risk on myself. I will accept two of these for 40 francs. It may be a complete loss from my own purse."

"Sixty francs for them all!"

"Forty francs for Roland and Tiville!"

The clock struck the half hour. Besson looked down at the manuscripts. The ring on his finger caught his eye.

"Take them," he said.

He threw the papers on the table, grasped the money held out to him and hurried from the place. He had only 30 minutes. He tore off his ring as he went along. He meant to pledge it.

He darted into a shop. They would advance no more than 10 francs on it. If he wished more, he might go to an honest man in the Rue Scarelle, who would buy it by weight for old gold.

Out hurried Besson. A clock in a window told him that ten minutes of the half hour were gone. Only 20 minutes till noon!

The Rue Scarelle was another ten minutes off, but then it was only five or six minutes from there to the Place Labrosse and Mamzelle.

He ran now. At the corner of the Rue Scarelle he stopped abruptly. He was dripping with perspiration; his face was ghastly.

He looked at the ring lying in his palm. It had been Marie's ring. She had given it to him when she had thought to marry him—before he had begun to make those mistakes which forced her to cast him off.

He had always kept the ring. No privation had caused the suggestion that he should part with it. It had belonged to her. She had worn it. It had been warmed by the blood that coursed from her heart, and the possession of it had seemed to keep her not quite so far away. To part with it, it appeared to him, would sever him entirely from the past, when he had been hopeful and respected and loved.

"But Mamzelle's word would be broken. She relies on me—my honor."

He made for the shop. He was offered 25 francs for the ring after it had been tested with acids.

"Of course," said Besson. "You take it merely as old metal?"

"Of course."

"And you would give as much for it if it were broken?"

"Certainly."

"Will you lend me a hammer?"

The hammer was given him. He stooped to the stone floor. He looked inside the ring and saw Marie's name there. Then he laid the ring on the floor and with a powerful blow of the hammer crushed it into a shapeless mass. The ring had been the last tie. He was now irrevocably separated from the past.

He handed the gold to the man and received 25 francs.

"The time?" he asked.

"It is 5 1/4 minutes to 12," was the answer.

Besson left the shop. He now had the 60 francs, and 5 over.

"Yes," he said, "the 5 will get me several small glasses. I need them. What! From the proceeds of that ring?"

He dashed the 5 franc piece into the road, crowded with vehicles, and pressed on to the Place Labrosse. He entered the house as the noon hour sounded.

Mamzelle glanced at him and nodded pleasantly.

"The 60 francs," he said and laid the money on the table among the blossoms of her manufacture.

"There, now, Dalcour," she said.

A man Besson had not noticed came from a corner and pointed to the little flower maker.

"Mamzelle never breaks her word," he said. "The tombstone goes up this afternoon. Bon jour, Mamzelle! Bon jour, monsieur!" And he took his leave.

Mamzelle laid aside the flower whose petals she was forming and rose to her feet. She put out her hand.

"You have saved me so much," she said. "Let me be your friend. I am old enough to be your mother. I am not learned, like monsieur, but we women give love, and that is sometimes as valuable a learning. You have helped me so much. Let me help you. Monsieur, my father was as you have been. He died, and he was forgotten before he died. You are young. You must live and vindicate your worth to the world, as you have vindicated your word to me."

Besson stood there, tall and grim.

For a moment a smile twitched the corners of his mouth. Mamzelle took his hand and held it up to her cheek.

"Do not be like my father," she pleaded softly. "Honor is dear to you. You have shown me that. You will promise me?"

A shiver passed through Besson. Marie's face seemed to loom in the distance.

Mamzelle regarded him with streaming eyes.

"You promise?" She appealed to him. "Surely there is some one you love. If it be a woman, think what your honor must be to her. You promise?"

Marie was near, so very near, and she felt that he might touch her, and she was smiling, pleading.

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