sand suspended as he had released it, then slowly falling. A moment's silence; the glow faded from the sky, and from her face, too; then suddenly the blue eyes glimmered with purest malice:

"Having neglected to bring your ladder this time, monsieur, pray accept the use of mine." And she pointed to a rustic ladder lying half-buried in the weedy tangle behind him.

He gave himself a moment to steady his voice: "I suppose there was a ladder here—somewhere," he said quietly.

"Oh! And why do you suppose——" She spoke too hurriedly, and she began again, pleasantly indifferent: "The foresters use a ladder for pruning, not for climbing walls, monsieur."

He strolled over to the thicket, lifted the light ladder, and set it against the wall. When he had done this he stepped back, examining the effect attentively; then, as though not satisfied, shifted it a trifle, surveyed the result, moved it again, dissatisfied.

"Let me see," he mused aloud, "I want to place it exactly where it was that night——" He looked back at her interrogatively. "Was it about where I have placed it?"

Her face was inscrutable.

"Or," he continued thoughtfully, "was it an inch or two this way? I could tell exactly if the moon were up. Still"—he considered the ladder attentively—"I might be able to fix it with some accuracy if you would help me. Will you?"

"I do not understand," she said.

"Oh, it is nothing—still, if you wouldn't mind aiding me to settle a matter that interests me—would you?"

"With pleasure, monsieur," she said indifferently. "What shall I do?"

So he mounted the ladder, crossed the wall, and stood on a stone niche on his side, looking down at the ladder.

"Now," he said, "if you would be so amiable, madame, as to stand on the ladder for one moment you could aid me immensely."

"Mount that ladder, monsieur?"

She caught his eyes fixed on her; for just an instant she hesitated, then met them steadily enough; indeed, a growing, and innocent curiosity widened her gaze, and she smiled and lifted her pretty shoulders—just a trifle, and her skirts just a trifle, too; and, with a grace that made him tremble, she mounted the ladder, step by step, until her head and shoulders were on a level with his own across the wall.

"And now?" she asked, raising her eyebrows.

"The moon," he said unsteadily, "ought to be about—there!"

"Where?"

She turned her eyes inquiringly skyward.

But his heart had him by the throat again, and he was past all speech.

"Well, monsieur?" She waited in sweetest patience. Presently: "Have you finished your astronomical calculations? And may I descend?" He tried to speak, but was so long about it that she said very kindly: "You are trying to locate the moon, are you not?"

"No, madame—only a shadow."

"A shadow, monsieur?"—laughing.

"A shadow—a silhouette."

"Of what?"

"Of a—a woman's head against the moon."

"Monsieur, for a realist you are astonishingly romantic. Oh, you see I was right! You do belong in a book."

"You, also," he said, scarcely recognizing his own voice. "Men—in books—do well to risk all for one word, one glance from you; men—in books—do well to die for you, who reign without a peer in all romance——"

"Monsieur," she faltered.

But he had found his voice—or one something like it—and he said: "You are right to rebuke me; romance is the shadow, life the substance; and you live, and as long as you live living men must love you; as I love you, Countess of Semois."

"Oh," she breathed tremulously, "oh, you—you think that? You think I am the Countess of Semois? And that is why——"

For a moment her wide eyes hardened, then flashed brilliant with tears.

"Is that your romance, monsieur?—the romance of a Countess Is your declaration for mistress or servant?—for the Countess or for her secretary—who sometimes makes her gowns, too? Ah, the sorry romance! Your declaration deserved an audience more fitting——"

"My declaration was made a week ago! The moon and you were audience enough. I love you."

"Monsieur, I—I beg you to release my hand——"

"No; you must listen—for the veil of romance is rent and we are face to face in the living world! Do you think a real man cares what title you wear, if you but wear his name? Countess that you are not, woman that you are, is there anything in Heaven or earth that can make love more than love? Veil your beautiful true eyes with romance, and answer me; look with clear, untroubled eyes upon throbbing, pulsating life; and answer me! Love is no more, no less, than love. I ask for yours; I gave you mine a week ago—in our first kiss."

Her face was white as a flower; the level beauty of her eyes set him trembling.

"Give me one chance," he breathed. "I am not mad enough to hope that the lightning struck us both at a single flash. Give me, in your charity, a chance—a little aid where I stand stunned, blinded, alone—you who are still see clearly!"

She did not stir or speak or cease to watch him from unwavering eyes; he leaned forward, drawing her inert hands together between his own; but she freed them, shivering.

"Will you not say one word to me?" he faltered.

"Three, monsieur." Her eyes closed, she covered them with her slender hands: "I—love—you."

Before the moon appeared she had taken leave of him, her hot, young face pressed to his, striving to say something for which she found no words. In tremulous silence she turned in his arms, unclasping his hands and yielding her own in fragrant adieu.

"Do you not know, oh, most wonderful of lovers—do you not know?" her eyes were saying, but her lips were motionless; she waited, reluctant, trembling. No, he could not understand—he did not care, and the knowledge of it suffused her very soul with a radiance that transfigured her.

So she left him, the promise of the moon silvering the trees. And he stood there on the wall, watching the lights break out in the windows of her house—stood there while his soul drifted above the world of moonlit shadow floating at his feet.

"Smith!"

Half roused he turned and looked down. The moonlight glimmered on Kingsbury's single eyeglass. After a moment his senses returned; he descended to the ground and peered at Kingsbury, rubbing his eyes.

With one accord they started toward the house, moving slowly, shoulder to shoulder.

"Not that I personally care," began Kingsbury. "I am sorry only on account of my country. I was, perhaps, precipitate; but I purchased one hundred and seven dolls of Mademoiselle Plessis—her private secretary——"

"What!"

"With whom," continued Kingsbury thoughtfully, "I am agreeably in love. Such matters, Smith, cannot be wholly controlled by a sense of duty to one's country. Beauty and rank seldom coincide except in fiction. It appears"—he removed his single eyeglass, polished it with his handkerchief, replaced it, and examined the moon—"It appears," he continued blandly, "that it is the Countess of Semois who is—eh—so to speak, afflicted with red hair. . . . The moon—ahem—is preternaturally bright this evening, Smith."

After a moment Smith halted and turned, raising his steady eyes to that pale mirror of living fire above the forest.

"Well," began Kingsbury irritably, can't you say something?"

"Nothing more than I have said to her already—though she were Empress of the World!" murmured Smith, staring fixedly at the moon.

"Empress of what? I do not follow you."

"No," said Smith dreamily, "you must not try to. It is a long journey to the summer moon—a long, long journey. I started when I was a child; I reached it a week ago; I returned to-night. And do you know what I discovered there? Why, man, I discovered the veil of Isis, and I looked behind it. And what do you suppose I found? A child, Kingsbury, a winged child, who laughingly handed me the keys of Eden! What do you think of that?"

But Smith had taken too many liberties with the English language, and Kingsbury was far too mad to speak.