

hope to gain by it! Why should he think of such a thing?"

Yves answered her patiently, his clear voice making the explanation the more lucid. "As I take it, he means to make an experiment on us. He wishes to punish de Chatillon; he deprives him of his bride. He is angry with me for pleading de Chatillon's cause; he sends me to you to make this proposal. He is still more angry with you, mademoiselle; he puts you in the awkward position of either accepting an insult or signing de Chatillon's death warrant. As you know, the play of passions is an enthralling spectacle to him; he likes to take on the part of Destiny, and inweave the threads of human fate. He has done it well this time. He is amusing himself right royally at our expense."

Tap, tap went the little foot. "It is preposterous! I won't submit to it. How dared Heinrich think of such a thing? How dared you come to me on such an errand?"

"You refuse?"
"Of course I refuse!"

Yves waited a minute; his voice fell very low and came unevenly. "Am I so repulsive to you? You love Andre no more than you love me; and my name is at least as good."

"This is intolerable!" cried Agnes, sweeping round on him scornfully. "You actually dare to ask me to submit? Is this plan of your devising, pray?"

"I do ask you to submit; yes, Andre de Chatillon is my friend, mademoiselle."

But Agnes had already repented of her not very reasonable anger. "I beg your pardon!" she faltered; and stopped, and looked at him. She did not love Yves; no, but then she did not love Andre either. Both were well-born, handsome, and young; both equally eligible. And it was no light thing to her, now she thought about it, to throw away a man's life. Agnes was very tender-hearted; she had been known to rescue drowning wasps and nurse them back to health. Perhaps she was not always consistent, but that was because she generally acted first and thought afterwards. She was horribly ashamed of the taunt she had offered to de Beaupaire. He really did not look like a villain. She stole a glance at him. He stood by the window, his handsome head slightly bent, his fine profile white as a cameo against the dark woodwork. Firm lips, a little scornful; dark grey eyes, over which the long lashes drooped superciliously; the thin features of a student, a high forehead, and a curve of dark hair over the temples. de Beaupaire had had a barrister's training; and he had the air of it, with a dash of sombre reserve. And to-day there was something else in his face, an expression which Agnes could not define. He was something of an enigma; no one knew why he stayed at Prince Heinrich's eccentric court. Agnes, like other people, felt a curiosity about him; mystery is a great attraction. Perhaps she went so far as to stare. Certainly, de Beaupaire became conscious of her gaze; he raised his head, and met it rather wearily. Agnes averted her eyes and coloured.

"I should not force myself upon you," Yves pleaded. "Of course, under the circumstances, you would be as free as you are now, except in so far that you would bear my name and live under my roof. Mademoiselle, you hold Andre's fate in your hands, and he has no one but me to plead for him; are the conditions so unbearably hard?"

"I will accept them."
"You will? You will marry me—to save his life?" Yves almost broke down over the words. What a good friend he is! thought Agnes.

"I will do just what you like," she answered, grown quite docile all at once. "I will be quite good," she went on, laying her hand on his arm and looking up. Agnes' eyes were black and clear like woodland pools, and they had the innocent look of a child. Few people had seen her in this mood; she was usually very proud, very self-willed. Her submissiveness was fascinating.

"Will you find marriage with me such a dreadful trial?" Yves asked, smiling.

"I darestay I shall be able to support it. I think you're nice; nicer than Andre. We'll be friends." Agnes clasped her hands. "I shall be perfectly free, without the bother of having a husband! Oh, I shall get on very well. I hope you will, too."

"I! I shall save my friend's life."
"What do you mean? Are you making a sacrifice? Do you love anyone else?"

The question came in such a whirl that Yves hesitated.

"You do!" cried Agnes. "Who is she? Are you giving her up to save Andre?"
"I do love a woman, you're right. But I am not giving her up. She doesn't care for me; if I did not marry you I should certainly never marry her." Yves smiled grimly. "Set your mind at rest; I'm fond of Andre, but not fond enough for that—my faith, no!"

"Who is she?" Agnes asked, with mingled sympathy and curiosity. Yves had betrayed an intensity of feeling of feeling which she had not expected.

Yves bowed. "We are to be friends, mademoiselle; I could answer that question only to my wife. And may I remind you that Prince Heinrich's commands were urgent, and that the priest is waiting?"

Crimsoning under the unexpected rebuff, Agnes accepted his arm, and passed out of the sacristy and up the aisle by his side. Never had Heinrich's picturesque tyranny created such a stir as on that occasion. Some people said afterwards that Agnes was callous; others declared that she was a great heroine. The Comte de Laignan said: "The Saints be praised that she's married!" And Agnes herself smiled, and said nothing.

Meanwhile, the Marquis de Chatillon amused himself in prison.

II.

"What a lovely morning!" Agnes remarked. She was standing at the open window, and the bright blue sky was the background for her slim, white figure. Roses were in her hair and at her waist, crimson roses, and green leaves twined round the dark window frame. This opulent richness of colour made her beauty seem the more delicate. "Is that you at last, Yves?" she went on. "How late you are!"

"I have been out for an hour, swimming. It is delicious outside," he answered, coming to her side. His face was more lined than at his wedding a month before.

"Oh, I wish I had got up early, too! But you look tired; didn't you sleep well?"

"I slept perfectly, thanks; as I always do."

"I shall give you a rose to refresh you." The flower was duly pinned into place. "Oh, dear! How shall I ever go back to Neuberg? I do hate court ceremonies, and etiquette, and all that rest of it; they make me feel exactly as if I were in a straight waistcoat. I could live here in the sunshine for ever and not grow tired!"

"I am glad you are enjoying your honeymoon; at least, it's not conventional."

"No; that is it. I hate being proper. You're a much nicer companion than Andre, Yves. Andre would have wanted to be sentimental, and make love; and I hate sentiment," said Agnes, smiling up into the sunshine. "I hate stu pidity, too; and you have neither. You're as interesting as a girl, and much more sensible. I'm growing quite grateful to Prince Heinrich, aren't you?"

"Very. I had no idea how charming you could be."

When he tried to pay Agnes compliments Yves' tone was wooden. Agnes, who was used to spontaneous admiration, was piqued into trying to attract him.

"Don't fall in love with me, then!" she laughed.

"You forget that I am guaranteed against that."

"That is true. Otherwise, you might have liked me, might you not?"

"If I had been fancy-free when I married," Yves returned, watching her pretty, upturned face with unmoved eyes, "I certainly should not be now."

"What a good thing you weren't fancy-free!" said Agnes, lulled. Then Yves' face made her repent, for she saw that this shot had told. "But no, Yves, I did not mean that. I am so very sorry that you are in trouble."

She slipped her cool, little fingers into his. Her sweet penitence was charming and tempted consolation. Yves, who as her husband had the best right to console her, surveyed her with annoying coolness. "The rose is falling out of your hair," he said.

"Oh, you are unbearable," said Agnes, under her breath; then bent her shining head. "Will you please fasten it in for me?"

Yves addressed himself to the task; he pushed the thorny stem between the moon strands of dark hair. He took

his time about arranging it, putting the flower this way and that, while Agnes' curls twisted around his fingers, and her soft breath warmed his wrist. Flower-soft, flower-sweet, the curve of her cheek and throat appeared, with the colour blooming and fading again as he touched her hair. Agnes was a tremulous and innocent coquette. But Yves seemed as little moved as if the beautiful bent head belonged to a statue. "It is right at last. I am sorry to have kept you so long," he said, formally.

"Thank you." Agnes released herself with a springy movement. "You've put it in beautifully. You're very clever, Yves."

"I am glad I have pleased you."
"You haven't," murmured Agnes, in a woeful undertone. "There's the post-man at last! I wonder if he has a letter for me."

She was running off to see when Yves prevented her. "My place, surely, is to wait on you."

"Very well, gnadiger Herr. But be quick!"

Yves was some time absent. He came up, presently, gravely smiling, a before, and holding one letter. "For you," he said. "From Andre."

"From Andre? He is out of prison, then? Oh, give it me, Yves!"

"Give you the letter?" said Yves, smiling. "Shall I?"

"I want to hear how he puts his gratitude, please!"

"What will you give me for it?"
"Anything. Don't tease, Yves. I do want it."

He held it back from her outstretched hand. "The price is a kiss."

Agnes blushed crimson. It appeared that he was not so stolid as she had fancied. She had been half unconsciously tempting him to kiss her, yet now she hesitated. This had not been included in their pact. Then she bethought herself: after all, why should she not kiss him? They were the best of friends. Moreover, Agnes was sorry for him. She fancied he did not seem well this morning. He was pale, and there was a constrained look about his lips as if he were in pain. Besides, most potent argument of all, she was certainly his wife.

She put her hands on his shoulders and drew him down. Serious, shy, mischievous, laughing, her lips met his. Agnes had never kissed a man before.

"There!" she said, colouring all over her face and throat. "Now my letter, please."

Yves handed it to her without a word.

At the far end of the room was a great mirror, which reflected the window, the sky, the red roses, and Agnes. Yves lifted his eyes on it. Agnes sat on the sill and tore open the letter. She was wearing a pretty baby face bobble, which left her throat bare, and she was still pink as a rose, even down to the staid folds of white muslin. She read the first few lines, and her attention was caught. Her colour faded; she read on swiftly to the end; turned the paper and read it through again; then put it down on her knee and looked across at Yves. When he saw her accusing eyes he turned away from the mirrored reflection towards Agnes herself, and awaited her sentence.

"What Andre says is true?" she asked. Her voice rang like steel.

"What does he say?"

"That you denounced him to Heinrich: that you stipulated for me as the price of your treachery; that the whole plan was of your contrivance."

"It is quite true."

Agnes folded up the letter very deliberately. "And you led me into kissing you," she said. "I wish one could cut off one's lips."

"Does that offend you? I am sorry."

"Sorry!" Agnes flashed at him one look of scorn. "I am ashamed. You can hardly understand that feeling. I sup-

pose; honour is beyond your ken. Was it my money you wanted?"

"No, it was you. I loved you, and I love you. Don't think I mean to insult you with protestations of devotion; but I must explain. I was jealous of Andre, who had you and did not prize you. I put him out of the way for a time, and took his place. You—you, his wife—no, I would not see that. But that is all I have done. Do me the justice to allow that I have asked for myself nothing, except that kiss which you resent so bitterly; and I took that, knowing that it was the end. Yet, I think, if I had asked for more, you would have given it; for you trusted me."

"It's easy and safe to deceive a woman. But you forget one thing. On such grounds as these I can get free from you; and as soon as I am free, I can marry the Marquis de Chatillon."

"You'll do that?" Yves barred her way to the door. "Drag the whole affair into publicity and make yourself a bye-word!"

"I have nothing to fear from the truth. Nor have you, for the law can't touch you for what you have done; and dishonour you don't regard."

"This is the only dishonourable action I have ever committed."

"What do I care whether you say you have or not? Let me pass; I wish to rid myself of your presence."

Yves stood aside. "Then you mean to marry Andre?"

"I will speak to you no more, liar and coward."

She had never seen Yves colour before, but he did then; a deep, painful flush, which overspread his face. He held the door open for her to pass out, in silence. The scent of her roses lingered after her in the empty room. Yves turned away. The blue sky and the green leaves, the sunshine patterns on the floor, murmur of wind, voice and rustle of bird, these were still here; and the sun flashed like lightning on the barrel of Yves' pistol. He had failed, and she would marry Andre; there was no more to say. He could not plead against her bitter scorn. Since she was set on it and he could not prevent it, Yves thought he might spare her trouble as far as lay in his power. He took up the pistol. This was the best way out of it. He began to polish the silver mountings with his handkerchief; the light he rubbed bright, the rest he left. It must seem to be an accident; pistols go off by mistake sometimes, while they are being cleaned. There; it was done. Yves raised the pistol and set it, pointing at his heart.

Swift as sun-shine, Agnes sprang across the room and dashed it from his hand, turned to him, and bound him with her arms from touching it again. "Yves!" she said. "Yves, my husband—no!"
"Agnes?" Yves' voice shook. He put his hand under her chin and tilted her face back; no need to look twice. Close he held her, and felt her pulses throbbing under his hand, her face glow under his kisses, and he saw her lashes droop before his passionate glance. Love and shame dyed her face with morning colours; she clung to him with a child's simplicity and a woman's tenderness. Neither spoke; the long minutes dreamed away in a mist of golden happiness.

"It was Yves who at last broke silence. 'I have brought you a sorry dower of shame, my wife,' he said, almost sadly.

"Because you married me by a disgraceful fraud? Oh, that!" said Agnes the consistent, with a toss of her head. "Yes, I am awfully vain of it."

"I'm afraid I'm corrupting you and poor Andre?"

"Andre?" Agnes dimpled into laughter. "Yes, I forgot to tell you. Andre is happily married to the daughter of the Superintendent of Prisons!"

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