

The door he opened led into another large bedroom; he limped on, until suddenly opposite a large silver dressing-table he stopped.

From a deep wooden frame his own face gazed back at him.

How had his portrait come here—in the house of a woman he had never seen until two weeks ago?

He ripped the frame open; it was clamped with a name inside. "Robert de Voex," he read aloud.

With shaking hands he placed the portrait back in its place, then eagerly, almost desperately, he compared his face in the mirror and this other one. The likeness was marvellous, incredible!

"Robert de Voex," he repeated the name, and then, suddenly, it all came back to him. His sister had written to him, how many years ago was it?—six—seven?—and had told him the De Voex history.

Somehow he had not connected the man living in the huge villa at Algiers with this Robert de Voex; yet during his wild service in the Chasseurs d'Afrique he had often dined there, discussed Paris and its scandals.

Then that man, the man with the villa, was the husband of the woman whose hands had tended him; who once, when he was half-conscious, had kissed him.

She was the Marquise de Voex, and—she had said to him, "You are at home—with me." At home!

She had believed him to be Robert de Voex!

He realised suddenly that he was trembling violently. He walked feebly back to his room and sank on to the couch.

All his life Gaston de Burgogne had followed his own inclinations, led his own life. The cadet of a big house, he had been a free lance, living where he would, doing what he desired.

An immense temptation swept over him.

None of his people believed him alive. He had arrived in Paris to refute the statements in the papers concerning his supposed death in Africa on the afternoon of his accident. By now all Paris would have heard that Monsieur le Marquis de Voex had returned; there had not been, there never would be, any mention of Gaston de Burgogne.

And the woman with the lovely curving mouth, the gracious manner, loved him.

With a sick man's fanaticism he had cherished the memory of that one night when Eve had kissed him, until it had become the main idea of his existence. From that idea sprang love, love that grew in longing as he realised that now he could never attain his heart's desire. Why not?

Long after the nurse had returned he lay, while the shadows deepened, and the faint evening sounds drifted in through the windows, and still that one insistent question surged through his brain. Why not?

## IV.

That evening Eve dined at home, and after she had dined she went up to her music-room.

A little fire burned in the open grate, and the room was full of the scent of lilac, and the resinous, clean smell of burning logs.

She bent down and began to search among the music. The door opened and Gaston entered.

With an involuntary gesture Eve put her hand to her heart.

Gaston looked at her, and a fire seemed suddenly to light within his eyes.

"You are better?" Eve said. Her voice shook a little. For the first time she saw her husband as he was. His grey eyes with their level eyebrows looked unchanged; it was the expression of his mouth that seemed to have altered, to have grown less cynical and more attractive.

"Will you not sing to me?" he asked gently.

With trembling hands she began to play the music of "Te Souviens-tu?"

Te souviens-tu de ta promesse?  
Te souviens-tu des ans passés?

Her voice seemed to hold the tears of youth in its depths.

Oh, garde-moi bien ta tendresse, j'ai tant  
Besoin de ton amour.

The beautiful voice quivered and was still. A sigh followed, and through it Eve seemed to hear the beating of her heart.

Oh, why should she deny it any longer? She loved her husband, she was his—to leave or to love; but always and for ever his.

Outside the moon rose slowly above the plane trees.

Desperately Eve began to play another song.

Across the room her eyes met Gaston's; a passion of joy thrilled every nerve in her being as she saw him rise and come towards her.

Oh, to be hurt to heart

He flung himself on his knees beside her, and laid his face against her heart. "My God, how I love you!" he whispered as he found her lips.

## V.

A cat stopped within the big courtyard.

The chauffeur told the butler that his master, Monsieur Laroux, must see Madame la Marquise immediately.

The man recognised the name.

"Madame's lawyer?" he asked.

The chauffeur nodded.

It was nearly eleven o'clock; but he would see if madame was still up.

The little lawyer followed him noiselessly up the stairs; whether madame were up or asleep, he meant to see her that night.

The maid said that madame was in the music-room.

The butler flung open the door and announced, "Monsieur Laroux."

For an instant the old lawyer hesitated. Was this woman so glorious in her splendid jewelled loveliness, Madame la Marquise? Then his eyes rested on the man behind her.

He spoke in a loud voice.

"I come to announce to you that Monsieur le Marquis de Voex, your husband, died yesterday at Algiers," he said.

There was a dreadful silence.

Madame la Marquise did not speak. Slowly the beautiful colour faded from her face, and into her eyes there came a hunted look of fear, of dread.

"Of course," she said unsteadily, almost in a whisper, "it is a joke, Monsieur Laroux, and I must not be foolish enough to believe it, must I?" A little pitiful attempt at laughter escaped her.

"Because, you see," she went on, "my husband is here, and to-night—to-night he has learnt to love me. I have loved him always, I think, from the very first; but he—"

she stopped, and for an instant the expression of fear in her wide eyes was replaced by a look of divine tenderness—"but he—"

she stopped again, and gazed at the lawyer.

"The truth—the truth," she cried aloud, and her voice held an unbearable agony.

The lawyer went close to Gaston.

"Tell her—you scoundrel—you coward!" he said fiercely.

Gaston crossed to Eve; his eyes burned in his white face.

"I am not your husband," he said. "At first I meant to tell you, but afterwards, when I loved you, I could not."

He put his hand on her arm.

She shrank back.

"Go!" she said violently, "leave me—tell to the world outside what an excellent joke you have had. Tell them you crucified a woman on the cross of her

own love. Leave me! Only go, coward and liar that you are!"

Gaston seized her in his arms.

"Listen—you shall listen!" he said, his grey spent face gazing into hers. "I love you; it is the truth I tell you, and you shall hear me. Do you think I would give you up now? Do you think love is such a common thing that you can afford to pass it by? Will you give up your hope of Heaven because I loved you and was not your husband? You loved me because you could not help it, and I love you too like that. It is the only love that counts."

He rained kisses upon her eyes and lips.

"Say you forgive me—you must forgive me. To-morrow, somehow, we shall be married. Speak to me—answer me!"

They had both forgotten the lawyer; they lived for one another alone.

"Speak to me!" Gaston insisted. He swayed as he stood, then a faint stain began to show through the bandages on his arm. His gaze, filled with pain, still met hers unflinchingly.

Then she realised that he was suffering. Suddenly into her eyes there came the wonderful mother look.

She put her arms around him.

For there is one thing that no woman can resist; it is the sound of suffering in the voice of the man she loves. Into her faithful, beautiful eyes the look of trust came back.

"God with us from the start, and no more pain," she said, and laid her cheek to his.

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