

you are twenty-one, I feel it is my duty to give you every opportunity of finding out which of your admirers you intend to make happy.

'And when I have found out, father,' she said, 'are you going to let me please myself, or do you mean to decide for me even against my own wishes, like a cruel Spartan parent?' She spoke lightly, but there was a serious undercurrent to her words.

'Even if I wished to act the Spartan parent, you know I could not do so now,' he replied. 'You are of age, and therefore free to do as you please. I suppose,' he hesitated for a moment, and the anxiety that he suddenly began to feel betrayed itself in an unwonted tenderness of tone—'I suppose, from what you say, that you have already made your choice? I might have guessed as much, considering the number of refusals I have had to give for you.'

'Yes, father,' said the girl, gently but firmly, 'I have made my choice.'

Ever since Germaine had grown up, her father had often thought of this interview, which, sooner or later, he knew would come; but, now that it was taking place, there was something in it that he had not expected, that he could not understand.

'And am I to be allowed to know the name of the favored man? I own I am curious to hear whose shrine it is that so many hopes are to be immolated upon.'

The girl's hand was resting on the arm of the chair, and he laid his own upon it. Her fingers closed on his; and, pushing aside her low seat, she slipped on to her knees beside him. Her answer came in a voice that was low, but very calm.

'Father, I have chosen to be a nun.'

She raised her head and looked up openly and fearlessly into her father's face. But he had turned so deadly white that she was frightened; and, getting up quickly, she was about to call for help; but he signed to her to come back. He had been obliged in his public life to cultivate a habit of self-control, and even now, when he saw what for years he had built up with so much care crumble to dust before his eyes, this habit stood him in good stead.

'How long have you been thinking of this?' Despite his efforts, he could not steady his voice to speak as usual.

'For three years.'

'Have you talked it over with Mademoiselle?'

'No, father. I could not tell any one until I had spoken to you.'

'But what can have given you such an idea? One of your associates or friends must have suggested it, or at least encouraged you to think of such a thing.'

'Listen, father, dear, and I will tell you everything. One day when we were in the country—it is four years ago now—Mademoiselle and I came upon one of the wayside shrines that people used to erect long ago, and that the peasants honored so much. This one had been a Calvary, but the cross was broken and the figure of Christ lay in pieces amongst the grass. Mademoiselle sat down upon the stone steps of the shrine; but I was not tired, and whilst she rested I amused myself by collecting the pieces of the broken crucifix and putting them together again. I did it only as a child puts the pieces of a puzzle together. But when Mademoiselle saw what I had done she got up and—she, father!—kicked the figure, that was complete now, though all broken and desecrated, and scattered the pieces farther even than they had been before. I did not dare say anything to her then, and we continued our walk; but from that day, from that moment, somehow, I began to see things—life—in a different light.'

'No one ever told me all that since then I have felt to be the truth. I simply knew that it was so. When you and Mademoiselle have spoken of there being no hereafter, when you told me that death was an endless sleep, I knew that, though my body might fall asleep, there was a light in my soul that must burn forever. Mademoiselle used to give me scientific reasons as to how the world was formed, but all the time I knew that God had made it. Father, dear, when by degrees I learned more about God, it made me very, very sad to think of you. But the remembrance of that broken crucifix was always a comfort, because it reminded me how much He loves us when He was willing to suffer so much for our sake. When I thought of all that He had won for us by suffering, I wanted to suffer too. And I asked God to show me how best to help you to see the truth again; for I want you to love Him as much as I do, and I have offered my life to Him for that intention.'

Whilst Germaine was speaking her father never moved; it almost seemed as though the shock of what he heard had turned him to stone. But when at last she bent and kissed his hand as it lay still and rigid on his knee, the soft touch of her lips brought him to himself. He could not answer her, he could not speak as yet; but with an effort he motioned to her to leave him, and unwillingly she obeyed.

He had to be alone; his self-control was deserting him, and he could not bear that any one should see the bitterness that his own work had brought upon him. The shrine laid waste—the scene came suddenly and vividly before him. Every detail was familiar to him, because it was he himself who had planned and approved that laying waste. He had gloried in his successes; he had congratulated himself on having dechristianised his country, on having banished Almighty God from France; and at the hour when his hopes seemed about to be fulfilled he found that in his own home Jesus Christ had triumphed. He had thought, by banishing God's image, by forbidding all mention of His name, to rear his daughter in ignorance of everything spiritual; and God Himself had lit the light of faith in her heart, and faith had taught her love and sacrifice.

He rose from his seat and began to pace the room. The hours passed by, till at length, chilled and exhausted, he threw himself down again, this time on his knees, and buried his face in the cushions of his chair. His brain was numbed, he could think no more; only the words of another apostate more famous far than he—words spoken centuries ago—echoed dully in his ears:

'Galilean, Thou hast conquered!'—*Ave Maria.*

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