Shall it be as Carmen, Madame?" I sank into a chair in dismay, Carmen! This was the creature's idea of originality. It was too ludicrous for anger. I laughed, and then, as I raised my eyes to Mme. Virot's indignantly bewildered countenance, my glance fell upon a dress in a wardrobe behind her, and I pointed to it in a flutter of excitement.

"Some one has originality, after all!" I cried. "What does that dress represent?"

"An ice palace, Madame."

"It is superb." 'Certainly, Madame, it is superb; it is a miracle," and then, carried away with enthusiasm, she brought it forth and dilated upon it. A pale green dress, covered with a shimmering, sparkling network that looked

You see, Madame, the headdress forms er, and the eau de Nil embroidered skirt follows the frosted outlines of building, which is a fac-simile of ce palace raised last winter upon va. An emerald satin mask, tiny crystal icicles hanging from edge, in place of the usual fringe ace, completes the costume." "I must have it," I cried; "it

"It is sold, Madame." "I will pay double."

"Impossible!" "Treble!"

"I would willingly give it to Madame, as it pleases her fancy, but cannot; it was designed according to sketches sent me." "Tush!" I impatiently exclaimed

'Make a duplicate." "It is impossible, Madame, for the dress is for the same bal masque that you will attend."

be thought a princess in disguise.

"I make for no such people!" Mme. Virot exclaimed, with a reflection of I turned my eyes from the dress

that tormented me and racked my cel its splendor, but no idea came to in diplomatic circles, and knows that anything so liable to be discovered. "No; who can say?" he replied, me, and with a contemptuous glare our final proposal will be made to Besides, she suspects—and more," I with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

to be original. I will go as Car

The daintiness of my epigram pleased me so well that I was almost content, yet as I drove toward the Bois the desire for the costume came upon me again, and I was disconsolate. For it was no ordinary bal masque, where everything was to be pretence, from the characters represented to ejaculated; "you are not the simplethe fable that the dancers knew not ton that I feared you were. But you need one another. It was all to be real, go too far, my friend, for all is true be no unmasking time, but every one spy, and that is—"
was to be incognito from the begin"Let us be diplomatic," he interwas to be incognito from the beginning to the end. It was rumored that rupted, "until we are sure. Take the even the host and hostess would missing quantity X." drive up to their own house and enintroductions or formal presentations hand. worthy of her who had brought it to Paris — the Countess Zarfine, wife of the Russian Ambassador, and since perforce I must be masked, I would have described by a describe yet it was not to be, and I grew peevish as I nursed my discomfiture. My landau pulled up as we entered the gates, and Monsieur Roche, the Premier, from whom I had recieved in

"Madame, the gods love me." "Monsieur, you are too modest; you hould have used the feminine." "I wanted to see you more than any other woman in Paris," he answered, "and therefore I repeat, 'the

ods love me. "Those whom the gods love, Mon-eur"—and I smiled, for I would ive given worlds to quarrel with one, and preferably my best of

"Die young, eh?" he chuckled. "Well the danger for me is past." And then, without waiting for an invita-tion, he calmly stepped into the car-riage and seated himself beside me. Here was, indeed, candor too won

rful for words, and I gazed reprov-You must help me, ma chere," he d, gravely. "It is no pleasantry, t a serious matter—one that touch-

my reputation nearly."
Well, and then?" You know our relationship with

"The pretty girl with inviting aces to a gallant who hesitates."
'Precisely," he answered, in a tone appreciation at my simile; "but pretty girl's love letters are be-

More than that," he cried, im-"detrimental to me. Three nously, "detrimental to me. Three nes in the last month has the most ret cipher of the government been

nged, because side by side with receipt of our message by Rus-its import has become public erty in the capitals of Europe." Then ineffectually changed," I ob-

"Utterly. I have just left Count arfine, the Russian Ambassador, and has dared to imply, in almost unplomatic language, that his government suspects us of trifling. Money!" Monsieur Roche cried, in an interpretation of the superior of the



awestricken voice, "trifling with Rus-

Who holds the cipher?" 'Myself and Count Zarfine. When it is changed the new cipher is sent to St. Petersburg by him direct to the Minister, and the documents by me, through the diplomatic departments. We have varied the cipher three times, we have sent different messengers each time, but the result has always been the same. The world learned the message at once, and we are fast becoming the laughing stock of Europe, for the pretty girl is ready to offer so much for alliance."

"And the Count could not help you, mon ami?" "He was brusque almost to ness, but his wife-" "Ah, Monsieur, his wife, what of her?" I asked, with a smile, for I

well knew the fascinations of the Countess Zarfine. "She knows, as I know," Monsieur answered, "that, as in France, so in Russia, there are powerful influences against this alliance.

He lowered his voice and continued impressively: "Influences so powerful that it might be possible for them to obtain our secret papers, open them, read them, and then reseal them and pass them on to their destination." "But that would be useless without

the key to the cipher." 'That is stolen in Paris." "Ah! from whom?"

cipher-that is stolen here."

"The Count himself, and dispatched at once to those awaiting it." "Childike in its simplicity," murmured, with a world of satire. "And for whom?" I superciliously "The Countess is a wonderful wo-queried, for I was beside myself with man," he admitted, and then continexation. "Some nobody who has se- ued: "You see how easy it is. These cured a card by chance and wishes to people can gain access to the documents passing between France and Russia, but not to the key of the

> 'And, of course, the thief is known shall catch him in the very act. Of hand.

band's secretaries. "You have enlisted a new and pow- might see much." erful ally, Monsieur," I cried, with a jealous tremor in my voice. "Tut, tut," he answered, mildly,

frankly, I do not believe a word the Countess says," "Then the saints be praised,"

and no dissimulation. There was to excepting one thing, the name of the

"Why not Z?" I replied, and then I ter amid the throng. No one was to own started with slight surprise at know any one, and yet every one was the coincidence, for the Countess herto know every one; no master of the self cantered up to the side of the ceremonies, no host and hostess, no carriage, and I took her profiered

The fact that one was there was an official stamp upon one's passport of reputation. It was a Bohemian idea "I do not believe in Z," Monsieur Roche cried, raising his voice a little. "'Zero' cannot win the race,

have dazzled by art instead of nature, recreation in horse racing, Mon- Monsieur." sieur," she exclaimed, with an arch smile.

ed anxiously toward her and whispthe past many diplomatic commis-sions, raised his hat and extended his "What can there

"What can there be until then?" she asked. "On the night of the day chosen I shall know. At the bal masque I will tell you his name."

Monsieur Roche looked the picture

lost to him, spoke in an undertone to gaucherie. the Countess, said something that 1 judged, from her dainty frown, she did not favor, but in an instant the cloud had passed and she smiled again, and answered, "As you will."
Yet to me it still seemed that she

Then Monsieur Roche, still a little embarrassed, turned to me. "A message — a written message — is to be conveyed to me at the bal masque; I cannot be there, and '-how charmingly he was confused - "will you

receive it for me?" "And take it at once to Le Quai d'Orsay," the Countess interjected. "Bring it myself?" I cried, in sim-

ulated surprise. "Yes," Monsieur answered, and tactfully continued, "I, am ashamed at the greatness of the favor I ask, but it is vital."

he murmured his thanks. "At midnight I shall pass the head of the staircase and slip a note into

your hand," the Countess exclaimed; 'that will be the message.' "But we are all incognito," I observed, with my most ingenious

smile. "You will-easily recognize me represent the Franco-Russian Alli-ance," she answered, with the ready lie of a Russian. "The national emblems and the national colors — the double eagle and the fleur de lis. And

"The Lost Provinces," I replied, meeting her lie with diplomatic evas-

pleasantries, nodded gayly to us both and rose off. "You are well matched in one thing," Monsieur Roche suavely remarked as he watched her retreating

figure, "your originality of costume. "And in another," I replied; "the fact that neither will wear what she has said she will." The dear man's eyebrows shot up-

ward in bewilderment. "She will represent 'An Ice Palaace,' I, 'Carmen.' He looked at me for a moment in undisguised admiration, and then sank back and whispered with con-tented appreciation, "Mon Dieu, you

tented appreciation, "Morare a wonderful woman." "And a fortunate one," I replied "to win the approbation of so ac-complished a diplomat."

"Ma chere," he murmuted, "men are diplomats by education, women

Nature." "The dresses we have mentioned," I continued, "will be worn by our maids, leaving the Countess Zarfine at liberty to carry out her work, and been watching Therese as she decertain now that it is she who reveals the cipher. Had I not known the cortume she really intends to wear, I should have devoted the staircase, and I continue him lightly upon the arm.

"The Provinces are lost, Montieur," I said, softly. "Be content with operatic Spain," and I hummed

the Countess will be deceived, and I shall be free. So I require another card for the carnival-get it secretly for me." "Success is assured," he cried, en-

thusiastically. "Not so fast, mon ami. She already suspects me-I could see it in her eyes-and therefore you must act with consummate tact; you must delay the delivery of the key on some pretence until an hour before the ball, and so render it impossible for it to be revealed to any one except at the carnival. Then I know when it will be done-directly I have left."
"After you have left?" he cried, in bewilderment.

"After my maid has left with the Countess Zarfine's message for you." world of admiration in the utterance of that monosyllable, but a moment answered, after his face became grave again as sures." with a reflection of my own annoyance. "The dress is for the Countess Zarfine. If Madame will suggest something else—"

Alth, of collect, disdainfully. I cried, disdainfully. he suggested, "Perhaps the key may "See," I cried, "that woman dressed in the frosted green gown — intended, I should think, to represent the counters are the suggested, "Perhaps the key may be given in such a way that you cannot prevent it—another note, for intended, I should think, to represent fested, "almost. On Wednesday we stance, skillfully passed from hand to an ice palace?"

brains for something that should ex- one thing we are certain. He moves "I think not. She would not risk faced the inoffensive milliner, who Russia by the end of the week. On continued, "does not the whole idea I faced the inoffensive milliner, who had tried to please me for years, and had never more than half succeeded. "To be original nowadays," I said, indifferently, "is, after all, so commonplace that to be commonplace is morning in the week. On the week. he would see nothing, but a woman Monsieur smiled again complaisant-

> Then, too, if I fail, it is not you are the ally I must have, for, ruin," I said, "for the documents will not be dispatched until youhave If I succeed, the heard from me. evidence against her will be strong enough to give you all the proofs you

"But-" "No more suppositions, my friend; you weary me."
"You're the cleverest woman Paris," he said, with a glance warm admiration, as he alighted and

stood by my carriage. "And you, for one who has left youth behind, are the most gallant man in France," I answered, with a glow of merriment, for I already counted my mission as accomplished "Left you behind," he murmured, despondingly.

'You said so." "It was in an undiplomatic mo-

"Therefore true, and you tongue at least is still youthful. Au revoir,

Therese created a sensation. There are women even amongst my chosen "Age has its follies as well as acquaintances who insist upon their youth," he answered, and then lean-maids being stiff, and, if possible acquaintances who insist upon their ugly. Perhaps they fear the comparison which I am too satisfied with myself to be concerned about, on that night I was thankful my choice had fallen upon a girl who could so admirably play the part 1 of despair, and then with a gesture, as though the whole world had been depret my success by some value. had selected for her, one who I need danger my success by some vulgar

Therese created a sensation, Her pretty auburn curls were sur-Yet to me it still seemed that she was being forced into some action she would not have elected of her own free choice.

Then Monsieur Roche, still a little the arms of France were more than half eclipsing those of Germany.

For a moment there was a silence of admiration as she entered, and shout as each loyal heart caught the ously proud. symbolical meaning of the fading colors of the German arms, almost hidden by the simple sweetness of our own dear fleur de lys, and patriotic voices cried, "Vive la belle Alsace! Vive, vive Lorraine!"

And Therese bore the sensation as would have done myself. I turned "Very well," I reluctantly consent-ed. "If that be so I will do it," and flecting it was the last time I should do so, for to-morrow it should

Strictly obedient to my instructions she danced but little, always following, with some ostentation of per-sistence, the movements of a lady who had attracted passing attention the embodiment of the Franco-Russian Alliance. It was a quaint sport we favored—the maid watching the maid.

Midnight struck, and from a seclud ed corner I saw the note passed to Therese, who quietly descended the steps, mingled for a moment in the kaleidoscopic throng, and so depart-

The look of annoyance still slumbered in the depths of her dark eyes, and I thought, too, there was the glint of a dawning suspicion, but it was swiftly chased away as she turn was swiftly chased away as she turn and with a jett to Magazine. Part of a criffic of artific of a criffic of a cr ed with a jest to Monsieur Roche, and after the interchange of a few

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her eyes, save for that man whom I

knew still had the three in his pos-

session. What a thoughtless fool I

had been; I who held all I needed in

my grasp had myself destroyed it! The cigarette had burnt down to my

fingers. I was compelled to drop it

But he still had three. With an

abandon worthy of Carmen herself I

turned my fascinations upon him;

nothing loth to be the centre of a

mission was over, encouraged them,

and kept them from her with the arts

All men are young-or, at least, feel

"You are the incarnation of Car-

'Merci, Monsieur, you flatter me

am afraid that the credit is to my

"No, it is the sparkle of your eyes

of each gesture, the soul of music in

your voice, the poetry in every mo-

tion that proclaims you the ideal

s'il vous plait, Monsieur," and I ex-

that he was being drawn into a trap, he took one of them from his pocket

and hesitatingly handed it to me. Half suspiciously, half in a fashion of tenderness, he held a match to

the cigarette, and then, almost be-

fore the paper had caught, it dropped

to the ground, and I, with a laugh at my carelessness, placed my heel upon it and edged it beneath my

I saw his features tighten as

eyes followed my movements, yet what could he do? Realizing that I

had discovered him, and I could not

For a second we measured glances,

"You are a clever woman," he

"You have a cigarette under your

"Perfectly. I have only to raise my

I looked disdainfully at him

"You are too clever to waste your-

sphere worthy of your talents, and

"I fail to understand, Monsieur."

He leant forward until his eyes

"I am going to stoop and take

"Becuase if you attempted to re-

He bent as he spoke, and then, as

sist I should prevent it. See, I slow-

the inspiration flashed upon me, my

scattered upon the balcony.
"My pearls!" I cried in dismay, and brushing past him to save them

"You are a clever woman," he

I smiled, for the key to the cipher

But men count for nothing in such

the challenge and removed mine. She

matters, for men can even hold ad-

miration for a victorious enemy -

was safe in my possession.

eyes that blazed with fury.

her ancesters.

from under your chair a cigarette,

and you must perforce permit me.':

looked straight into mine, and spoke

said, with almost a touch of appre-

"Save for one thing; a cigarette,

Slowly, even as though he realized

men herself," he whispered, as

found ourselves excluded from

group surrounding the Countess.

of one born to coquetry.

am a pretty woman.

tended my hand.

place it.

ciation.

"Monsieur!"

"You are sure?"

"You are sure?"

make you a duchess."

"Why?"

with deliberate emphasis.

ly stoop to regain my own,

and he trod it to dust beneath

diamond ring, for what other girl half consumed, and those around were could have left a carnival where she obligingly burning the others before was the belle, because she had been told to do so?

Like a modern Cinderella, she left it all, and yet, wiser than the damby intuition, It is civilization against sel of the fairy tale, left before she was discovered, and I, a common-place Carmen-for I remember there were three of us-now felt the decisive moment had arrived. A man had me free to frustrate her, for I am scended the staircase, and I touched

night to watching the 'Franco-Rus-sian Alliance.' As it is, my maid, the "You, madame?" he cried, as he group of admirers, elated because her recognized my voice.

sian Alliance.' As it is, my maid, the "Lost Provinces," will do that for the sake of diplomatic appearances, "Yes, I. "I thought she who just left was you," he said, as though anxious to explain the attention he had devoted

to Therese. "And I, monsieur, know my friends too well to be deceived by a mas-querade," I answered, and, of truth, I believe that there must have been a tell-tale trace of sentiment in my tones. And why not? Even a pretty widow may have sentimental mo-ments at times when her dearest friend is near at hand. He looked straight into my eyes as though he would read my inmost thoughts.

"Do you mean that?" "I mean this, Gaspard, mon cher ami. I want you to do me a favor. Indeed, before the night is out there Carmen. may be many favors I need to ask, "Ah!" he sighed, and there was a and I want you to grant them all. "Then they must be renamed," he answered, "not favors, but plea-

"Yes.

"Do you know who she is?" "I must be near her for the rest period of Louis XIV., and quickly grasping my meaning, Gaspard strolled aimlessly in the same direction, carrying on an animated conversation with me all the while, which raised

him greatly in my estimation as a but feel that he knew it, he gave an-budding diplomat. other, and I lighted it. "They are going to sit on the balcony," I found an instant to whisper, and we followed them, my nerves

other, and I lighted it.

For a second we measured glances
and I knew that he fathomed my
per, and we followed them, my nerves
plans as truly as I did his. thrilling with delight as I realized the strength of my position, for now the Countess would feel herself secure, thinking that I had departed.

She was seated in a basket chair upon the balcony overlooking the shoe, but what of that? In a minute Champs Elysees, talking, in a voice I shall offer you my arm, you will that challenged criticism, of the new take it, we shall go to the ballroom play at the Renaissance, and Gas- and dance the cotillon." pard skillfully led me to a seat facing them and took one by my side. And then the clever boy entered with zest into the Bohemian conceit, voice and say 'The air is cool,' and of the bal masque, for without a the Countess will understand, she will

word of introduction he joined in rejoin us, and that being so, a lady their conversation, and in an instant cannot search for a half-burnt cigarwe were a quartet discussing the ette. You have the desire of your frivolities of life. quest within your reach, and yet as Gradually an idle group grew round far removed as the north is from the us—flattering gallants, who protested south."

with glowing compliments that it I looked disda was too cruel of their hostess to hide calmly smoked. all the lovely faces of Paris behind self upon such pettiness," he whisp-ere. "In Russia I would find you a silken masks.

"It must be because she is jealous," the Countess cried, with a smile that showed for an instant the gleam of her teeth; "she fears the contrast." But then-for men, despite their deceit, are strangely truthful some-times—no one dared to dispute the beauty of his hostess, and her eyes gleamed with gratified pride as sneer was left unsupported in the silenceyet perhaps they were suspicious.

"Still, Messieurs," she exclaimed, with a ripple of laughter, "since our faces are hidden our freedom is greater-we may be more Bohemian. And in an instant she produced a gold case, and, extracting a cigar-ette, placed it with a gesture of im-and with a sudden clutch I snapped "Those my necklace, and a shower of pearls pudence between her lips. "Those who love me join with me," she continued, handing the case to the surrounding group.

It seemed to me that there was a as they fell, I picked up the cigar-falseness in this ingenious mood that ette from beneath my skirt and lookthen a hum of applause burst into a sat but ill upon one so contemptu- ed mockingly into his face.

In an instant the blue smoke curled said, with a chagrined appreciation. in the air from a dozen cigarettes. "Carmen," she cried, reproachfully, with a glance at me, "you who should have led the way still hesitate," and she extended the case and carefully lighted the cigarette for me here there was a woman to

"And you, Monsieur," with a Whi,e the gallants who had cluster-glance at the man who had been her ed around the Countess were collectcompanion from the ballroom. 'It was a privilege I had never anticipated, and so came unptepared. 'Then she who grants permission supplies the means of enjoyment. Take two, or three, or four, or what

you will; their fragrance may be even greater in the morning." There was an intonation in the last words that struck me with a sense of hidden meaning, and as the man carelessly took seven, and, after light-

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with a swift glance at Gaspard, who Phone: Office Main 592. instantly comprehended, I sent him Phone: Residence Main 2075. to the side of the Countess, and she,

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they are when a pretty woman smiles Assurance Co. upon them. He was what a diplomat Head Office-MANCHESTER, Eng. would have called middle-aged; but I H. S. MALLETT, Manager and Secretary

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"And yet," I murmured, "meing my truant pearls she walked thinks these charms of Russia must across and glared into my face with be enjoyed by you alone, and swiftly too, for surely-His Excellency will In passion she tore the mask from resign at once. "Ah!" she cried, "if I had you

her face, and so, because she was "Ah!" pleased to confess herself, I accepted Russia!" I turned away, but stole a forgot her civilization, her breeding, ward glance at her as she stood, her her position, everything, and dropped whole body trembling, her fingers back into the barbarous language of clutching the balustrade to support her quivering figure, and then "If I only had you in Russia!" she cavalier came forward and handed me

gasped, her lips almost touching my my pearls.

It was the third time he had said ing one, slipped the remainder in his pocket, the truth burst upon me in a flash—the key to the cipher had been passed.

On each cigarette paper was the key. I held it between my fingers

On the cipher had been in the passed i Legal

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