

of her fortune, by means of which he must on the day of sale outbid all competitors. The marquise awoke, therefore, one fine morning legal proprietress of the domain of Valtravers, which did not change her habits, since she continued to live with Madeleine in the chateau of Fresnes, where her daughter had died and where she also wished to die.

Alas! this was the last act of the amiable and beloved marquise. For a long time she fancied herself gently but irresistibly drawn by the impatient soul of her old companion.

'You see,' said she at times to Madeleine, 'we were never separated. Without speaking of the marquise, whom you never knew, I am certain that my poor chevalier is wearied there alone waiting for me. It is ungenerous in me to have kept him waiting so long. But I am somewhat embarrassed to know what to answer when he asks me for news concerning his son.'

The eve of her death, waking from a long slumber, Madame de Fresnes turned towards Madeleine, who was seated at the side of her couch, and said: 'I just had a strange dream that I wish to relate to you. I saw Maurice at the bottom of a dreadful gulf. Hideous reptiles were crawling and hissing at his feet, and the unhappy child was exhausted by the desperate efforts made to remount to the light of day. I wanted to run to his assistance, but I felt my feet chained to the ground, and I was stretching towards him my powerless arms, when all at once I saw you coming in the distance, calm and serene. Having arrived at the edge of the abyss, and removed the white scarf that encircled your neck and floated about your shoulders, you threw it smiling to Maurice, who seized it, and was drawn forth without effort, and appeared to me radiant and transfigured. That is my dream: what do you think of it, my daughter?'

A pale ray beamed upon the lips of Madeleine, who remained pensive and did not answer. The marquise died on the morrow, or, more exactly, she expired in the arms of her young German; her beautiful soul passed away gently in a last smile.

'Little one,' said she quite gayly some hours before her end, 'I have not forgotten you in my will. Since you have a taste for painting, I have bequeathed you my colours and brushes. Try with those to find a husband.'

In fact, upon opening the will Madeleine saw that Madame de Fresnes was not jesting. Only, to this little legacy the marquise had added the domain and chateau of Valtravers, leaving still a good share to her natural heirs, who had, however, no need of it.

In this manner this young and beautiful

girl was left in absolute possession of that house where, one autumn evening, five years previously, she had presented herself, her whole fortune consisting of a little bundle under her arm.

CHAPTER V.

MISTRESS AND MISERY.

Less elated with her new position than one might believe, Madeleine re-entered religiously into the chateau, in which the domestics, who had seen her grow up and who loved her, received her as if a young queen. She lived as in the past, modestly, unostentatiously, solely preoccupied with the beings confided to her care. Her authority was revealed only in the profusion of good deeds that she spread around her; except for this, it would have been difficult to infer any increase of fortune; except for this, she might still have passed for the little orphan sheltered by the charity of her uncle. She had declared at the outset that she intended that nothing should be changed in the former routine of the house, and that all the customs of the good chevalier should be respected, precisely as if he were not dead and liable to return at any instant. As to herself, she did not wish any other apartment than the little room in which had melted away the last days of her childhood and the first days of her youth. Whenever they came to receive her orders upon something of some importance, she never failed to consult with her people to ascertain what the chevalier would have done in similar circumstances. If it was necessary to admonish or chide any one (which latter happened very rarely), she always prepared the way by some such phrase as this: 'I think, my children, that this is what your excellent master, M. le Chevalier, would have said or done.' She reminded herself often that the best way to honour the memory of the beings that we have loved is to do nothing which would have pained them, and to reflect, before acting, upon what they might have thought in like cases. Finally, whenever she spoke of Maurice, it was only with respect, and as of a young prince whose kingdom she was administering during his minority. She was less queen than regent.

The report of her prosperity having spread in the country, suitors were not slow in presenting themselves. Valtravers became a sort of Mecca or a kind of holy sepulchre assigned to the fervent piety of all the celibates of the department. During several months a long file of these pilgrims might have been seen wending their way to the

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