

*soubriquet* of the fair dancer. As soon as it was known that a young and beautiful opera dancer was to make her *debut*, all Paris was in a tumult of feverish expectation. With us, the first appearance of a new actor or actress of celebrity, was then, and is even now, a matter of serious and overwhelming importance. A thousand rumors were in circulation respecting the new comer, and all of course the most contradictory and irreconcilable. The most correct account, however, appeared to be, that she was young and handsome, that her name was Maria Gonzaga, and that she was the illegitimate offspring of a pretty Manola—a woman of the lower ranks—and of a licentious Spanish grandee, who, however, had never treated her with much parental affection.

The eventful night fixed for her appearance at length arrived. The curtain rose and discovered the beautiful Nina, richly dressed in the Spanish costume, and glittering with precious jewels. Her figure was slight—almost girlish, but charmingly proportioned, her hands and arms were models of perfection, while her beautiful and elastic little feet and ankles were enough to turn the brain of an anchorite. The warm rich tint of her cheeks, betrayed her Spanish origin, and her features though exquisitely beautiful, wore at times an air of wildness and *hautcur*. But the great charm of this lovely girl was her eyes. Dark as night, lustrous as the diamond, they seemed fitted to express all the workings of a lofty and passionate soul.

Her reception was warm and flattering, but when she had performed one of the fascinating, but somewhat voluptuous dances of her native Spain, the enthusiasm of the audience knew no bounds, and her success was complete and triumphant.

The first impressions of the fair *debutante* on the public were afterwards fully maintained, and she became the rage. In vain the critics—a surly race—found a thousand faults with her style, and protested that she violated all the established rules of her art; her admirers were steadfast and declared that the lovely Spaniard possessed a charm beyond the reach of criticism. In that licentious age it was not to be supposed that a beautiful girl, in her position, could escape the pursuit of libertines. But to the surprise of all, it was soon discovered that the young actress was of inflexible chastity. In vain did a crowd of the gay and glittering court butterflies flutter around this fair exotic; in vain did many an old and wealthy debauchee make her the most tempting and dazzling

offers. The advances of the first were repelled with haughty indifference, and of the latter, with gay but bitter mockery. Even the most veteran *habitués* of the *coulisses* confessed with a shrug of pity, that the virtue of Nina was without spot or reproach. But matters were not to remain long in this situation. "The hour was come and the man." The handsome, the noble Colonel de Valmont at this period returned from the army, with just a sufficient wound as to render him interesting, and to allow him to wear his arm in a graceful scarf. Young, rich, of high birth, witty, accomplished, but heartless and profligate, he had long assumed a prominent rank as a man of gallantry and pleasure. The favourite companion of the regent, the idol of the ladies, the terror of husbands, the envy of his vicious companions, De Valmont had fought more duels and broken more hearts than any other man in Paris. To see and admire the young dancer and to attempt her conquest was with him a natural consequence. But why detail the arts of an accomplished seducer? It is enough to say they were successful, and Nina became his mistress. These matters are easily arranged at the opera. But the connection was an unhappy and stormy one. Yielding up every thought and energy of her passionate nature to the new and overwhelming feeling which engrossed her whole being, this young creature could not long be content with the imperfect and scanty love of such a heart as De Valmont's. Besides, it must be confessed that she was dreadfully jealous. At the theatre she watched him like a lynx. A smile, or the slightest attention or courtesy to another woman, would drive the blood from her cheek and make her dark eyes flash like lightning. Matters could not long continue thus. It was the old story, devoted affection on one side, indifference, coldness, disgust on the other.—They parted. But not content with abandoning the victim of his sensuality, De Valmont still farther outraged her feelings by immediately commencing a *liaison* with a pretty *filie d'opera*, named Rosalie. This was an injury never to be forgiven, and aroused every dark and baleful passion in the breast of the young Spaniard. Her former love was changed to deadly hate, and vengeance became the sole impulse of her thoughts,—her dream,—her existence. From that moment De Valmont was a doomed man!

Among the crowd of lovers who had knelt at the shrine of her beauty, was one who had been most persevering in his pursuit, and