

into my eyes, blinding me. But I'm not likely to forget what I saw. It was so awfully stagey . . . so like a picture of the sensational, blood-curdling, highly-coloured kind!"

"Go on!"

"It was like this. The upper storey of the Villa had been shaved off—simply. There was the interior of the dining-room before me, all colour and mirrors, and gilding, and twinkling wax candles in crystal girandoles. The French windows had been shattered, and there was a great hole in the ceiling. On the mantelshelf, just in front of me, between two Sèvres candlesticks, was a clock, the hands pointing to half-past two. There were Sèvres figures on each side of the clock—I have seen them here in the shop-windows,—'Pierrot qui rit' and 'Pierrot qui pleure.' The crying Pierrot had been smashed by the shell-splinter that shivered the mantel-mirror, but the laughing Pierrot was untouched. He seemed to be holding his sides and screaming at Valverden sprawling across the table with his skull shattered, and Madame de Bayard sitting stone-dead in her chair. She had the cigarette in her fingers, still alight. . . . It must have been painless. . . . There was only a small blue hole in her temple—just here! . . ."

The Minister was repeating:

"Valverden. . . . Are you clear that you mean Count Max Valverden! But of course you are! There is no other officer of that name in the Prussian Guard Infantry. How you came to be acquainted you shall tell me to-morrow." He laughed harshly, looking at the clock upon the mantel. "I should say to-day, at a somewhat later hour!" He added, as Breagh rose: "Have you told any thing of this matter to Mademoiselle de Bayard? Then, I advise you, do not enlighten her at all. Or if you must do so, tell her after you are married!"

He drove the sentence home with another that left the listener gasping.