

my trial. Give me my answer—yes or no—now, here, at once.”

Thus adjured, Madame St. Deger raised her head, looked full at him with wide open eyes, something profound, exalted, in a way desperate, in her expression. She shivered slightly, and holding out both her hands—

“I surrender,” she said.

The young man took her extended hands in his, bent down and kissed them reverently; then looked back at her gravely, resolutely, though he was white to the lips.

“But not under compulsion, not out of pity?” he said. “Now, even now, with the consummation of all my hopes and desires within my grasp, I would rather you sent me away, than—than—that.”

*La belle Gabrielle* shook her head gently, smiling.

“No,” she answered. “Not under compulsion, not out of pity, *mon ami*, but because I find nature is too powerful for me. Because I find I too love, and find—since you will have me bare my heart and tell you everything—it is you, precisely and solely yourself, whom I love.”

And from the inner room—into which Anastasia Beau-champ had passed, unperceived by her two guests during this, for them, very momentous colloquy—came strains of heroic music, good for the soul.