

Here, give me your valise and let us go."

Five minutes later we reached the inn of the Golden Eagle, and before the door stood a sort of cabriolet to which was harnessed a large dapple-grey horse.

"Put that under the seat, John," said my friend, giving my bag to the man who was in waiting, and I asked in surprise:

"Is this your trap, Gaston?"

"No, it belongs to the Golden Eagle," he answered gaily. "Jump in, we shall not go quite as fast as usual, but we'll get there all the same!"

When we were all seated, the man took up the reins, cracked the whip and the dapple-grey set off at a good pace, although, with the best will in the world, he could never be a match for the bay.

"You have not that fine horse of yours?" I asked, and he replied:

"No, I have sold him."

Sold him? I was filled with wonder, but I made no remark, for the moment seemed an unpropitious one for asking questions. I therefore turned the conversation, and we talked of general matters, hunting, politics, novels, theatres, in fact everything, grave or gay, which had been discussed in the newspapers since we had last been together, a year before.

After a drive of three quarters of an hour, the vehicle left the main road and turned into a narrower one which skirted a piece of woodland.

"Is not our driver making a mistake?" I whispered, "we never used to come this way."

"This is right," said Gaston, "I do not go home by the same road now."

In a few minutes we stopped before a small cottage on the border of the woods, and I recognized it as having often been a hunting rendez-vous. Gaston jumped out and when I had followed him, he took my valise from the man and told him to return at once as night would soon be falling.

I gazed round me, and could hardly distinguish, on a hill which looked dark against the sunset, this little village through which I had passed, a year before, on my way to Gaston's place.

In the cottage doorway an old house-keeper met us.

"Well, Madeline, is dinner ready?" said my friend.

"Yes, Sir, it is waiting for you," she replied.

"Good! Sit down, at once, for you must be famished," he said to me, and he helped me to a plate of smoking hot soup. While I attacked it vigorously, he leaned his arms upon the table, looked at me earnestly for a minute and then said:

"You do not understand all this."

I abridged my shoulders, and he added: "I will explain it in three words: 'I am ruined.'"

I let my spoon drop into my plate, as I gasped.

"Ruined? How?"

"In the only way that there is of being ruined," he answered calmly, "that is to say, that I have nothing, or almost nothing, to be exact. I have eighteen hundred francs income left—one hundred sous a day. So I am not a beggar, you see."

I looked at him searchingly. He smiled without bitterness, and I saw that he spoke the truth.

"Explain," I said, "what has happened?"

"It is rather an old story now—about a year old, and yet it is worth telling. Besides, to whom should I tell it, if not to you? Here it is.

You know that three years ago, when my uncle died, I inherited five hundred thousand francs. Not a colossal fortune, but enough to make a good show with, even in Paris. I had for two years been longing to get back to Paris, and I went. That was a bad day for me. Money melts very fast in that cursed crucible which is ever at white heat. I adored horses and took to racing, and eighteen months later, in making up my accounts, I discovered that I had lost two hundred thousand francs. I was reflecting on the sad state of affairs when a comrade noticing my melancholy air asked what the matter was, and I told him. 'Is that all?' he cried, laughing heartily, 'well, you are simple! You say you have three hundred thousand francs; very well, I will introduce you to a bank from which you can draw all the funds you require. The Queen of Spades will befriend you. Try her!' He cited numberless examples. Such a one, a former cloth-merchant had first sat down at the card table with hardly a hundred thousand francs in his possession, and now he was a millionaire. There were plenty more just as fortunate. In short, he persuaded me. I joined a club where the play was high. It was very exclusive, oh very. The members were men of the world, wealthy lawyers, and a few successful artists, their game was strictly honest, absolutely impeccable, for their doors were closed against intruders. They played from four till seven every afternoon, and from ten at night till dawn. This, my counsellor told me, was the place to fix up my affairs, and in less than six months they were fixed. Of my three hundred thousand francs I had lost a hundred thousand; my lands were mortgaged, and I owed a hundred and fifty thousand to the 'preteur' of the place. My brain was in a whirl, and I wondered how this was to end. It ended in a very unexpected manner. I awoke one morning and found myself a 'Greek.'"

As Gaston pronounced the last word I started up exclaiming:

"You are mad! What are you saying?"

"The plain truth," he answered, "but do not excite yourself. I can, without a blush, confess to having won at cards by means of fraud. Listen. One evening, I had extraordinary luck, I was invincible, I won repeatedly. There were only ten or twelve players, but it was an exciting game, and I won a hundred and fifty thousand francs. Just enough to repay what I owed. As I rose from the table I saw the lender standing near me, with his eyes fixed upon my pile of gold, notes and counters. On the spot I paid the debt, and drew a deep sigh of relief. About a week later I was dozing in an easy chair, behind a curtain. The club was empty, for it was four o'clock in the morning, and I was only waiting to take the train and run down here to the country for a little change. The sound of an angry discussion roused me. Two men were quarrelling in the next room, and I recognized the 'preteur's' voice, and that of a waiter. 'I will have my share,' said the latter furiously, 'you did just so the other day with Mr. Gaston's money. Who changed the packs, then? I did, but who grabbed the cash? You, you always do it! This is the end of it—if you don't give me my share, I'll split!' I felt a cold sweat starting out on my temples as I listened, and in two strides I was beside the scoundrels. Catching hold of the first I touched, I nearly wrung his neck in my frenzy. It was the waiter, and perceiving that it would be useless to beat about the bush, he confessed the whole truth. They had stacked a pack of cards, with which I had played and won the sum needed to repay the lender; in short I had stolen the money. I was ashamed you understand; as for getting the money from the 'preteur' himself—it would have been easier to tear out his soul! For an instant I seemed stunned. What was I to do? To blow out my brains? I thought of that, idiot that I was, but then a light broke over me and the mists cleared away. I rushed out, caught my train, came here and saw my lawyer. A month later all my land was sold, and I returned to Paris and refunded to the president of the club 150,000 francs, with a list of the men who had played against me on my lucky night. I explained the matter to them all and bade them good bye. They were honest fellows, and did not deserve to be cheated. And that, my friend, is why you find me in this humble abode, with an empty purse, but a light heart."

"My dear fellow," I said holding out my hand to him, "your story is a sad one, but its climax makes ample amends for that."

LADY'S CORNER.

From N. Y. Post.

Mrs. Guild, an American sculptress, has recently completed a bust of Mr. Gladstone, which is very highly com-