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THE OLD WRITING-MASTER'S HEIRESS.

A STORY OF FRENCH LIFE.

"Draw your hair-strikes lightly, Henri; lean heavily on the down strokes, and round off your capitals bravely. There: very good. Armand, you are not attentive to-day. I can tell you, little boy, your poor mamma, who works so hard to pay for your instruction, cannot afford to have you idling. Now, Jacques, finish your copy, and sign your name with a bold flourish at the end." So did old Maitre Caillot address his writing class, composed of three ruddy faced boys, whose coarse habiliments and rough hands showed that they belonged to the lower rank of life. The pupils were seated at a rickety-looking desk, in the scantily furnished upper room of a house situated in one of the meanest and most obscure suburbs of Paris. The master was a thin man, bent from age, but whose vivid glance and sharp careworn features seemed to tell that the vigor of his mind was unimpaired. While standing behind the boys, and instructing them in the art of penmanship, he would sometimes pause and sigh, and look round at a very young girl who was busy at the earthen stove preparing bread soup for their dinner. She was a fair-haired delicate-looking creature, about fifteen, and small for that age; her little hands were scarcely able to lift the earthen pot, in which she put two thin slices of bread, an onion, a few sweet herbs, a bit of dripping, some pepper and salt, and then filled it with water. With an effort she placed it over the tiny fire in the stove, and watched and skimmed it as it gradually boiled. She then drew forward a small table, covered it with a coarse clean cloth, and neatly arranged on it two bowls, plates, knives and forks, together with a jug of water, and half a brown loaf. Having finished these arrangements, she took some needlework, and seated herself near the stove. At length the hour of one sounded from a neighboring church, and the pupils of Maitre Caillot rose from their seats, and with a politeness which children in this country would do well to imitate, bowed respectfully to their teacher, and then to Mademoiselle Louise, before they withdrew. The old man sighed at the last little gray blouse disappeared. "Three francs a week," he said, "are all I can earn by teaching; and yet thou seest, Louise, I take as much pains to improve these little plebeians as when I directed the hand of the king's son."

M. Caillot's lot had indeed been one of strange vicissitude. The office of writing-master to the royal princesses had been for a number of years hereditary in his family. His ancestor had instructed Louis XIV.; and his son, in due course, taught the dauphin; and so on in regular succession, until the disastrous events of the Revolution brought the good Louis XVI. to the scaffold, and consigned his innocent little son to a lingering death. Then M. Caillot lost his office, and very nearly his life. He had saved scarcely anything from the wreck of his professions, and now lived in great poverty with his granddaughter.

She was his only remaining relative, with the exception of an aged female cousin—Madame Therese—who lived at the other side of Paris, and whose circumstances were as indigent as his own. Louise was an amiable, affectionate girl; she attended her grandfather, did the household business, and yet found time to earn a few sous by needlework, so as to add to the small pittance which M. Caillot gained by teaching writing to a few of their neighbors' children. He was certainly very poor, and yet there was a circumstance that appeared to Louise very mysterious. Her grandfather, when in a communicative mood, often spoke of a treasure he possessed, and which she should inherit; and on one occasion he showed her a green tin box, carefully locked, not available to him, as he could never bring himself to part with it, but which would one day enrich her. This box he always kept cautiously secreted at the head of his bed; and Louise could not help sometimes wondering why grandpapa would not use his treasure, and prevent them suffering so much from poverty; yet fearing to annoy him, she never spoke on the subject, but quietly put her trust in God, humbly hoping that in His good time their circumstances might alter.

A change indeed came, but it was one that filled the tender heart of Louise with sorrow.—One day, about six months from the time when our narrative opens, M. Caillot complained of being very ill; a sort of numbness seized his limbs, and he had scarcely strength to reach his bed. Louise immediately warmed water to bathe his feet, and begged the mistress of the house to fetch a doctor. While waiting his arrival, the old man said in a feeble voice, "Louise."

"Well, dear grandpapa?"

"Death is approaching, my child. I feel I have not long to live, and but for leaving thee, I should feel quite happy. I leave thee, my child, in the midst of a dangerous world, yet I feel assured the goodness of God will never forsake thee as long as thou continuest to keep His com-

mandments. I have very little to give thee;—the sale of the furniture will do little more than pay the rent, and my other possessions, with one exception, are of trifling value. Give me the tin box at the head of the bed." Louise did so, and the old man put a small key of curious workmanship into her hand. "Try, Louise," he said, "to earn your livelihood by honest industry; but if your resources fail, then open this box, dispose of its contents, and they will bring you a sum of money. They are"—But here his voice failed, his breathing became labored, and pressing once more the hand of his beloved child, he expired just as the physician and the landlady entered the room. The former, seeing that all was over, immediately withdrew, and the latter busied herself in performing the last sad offices for the dead. As to poor Louise, she was stupefied with grief, and it was not until after the funeral was over, and she found herself alone, that she was able to rouse herself and consider her situation.

The door opened, and her landlady, Madame Duval, entered. "Well, Mademoiselle Louise," she said, "I am come to ask what you intend to do? Has your grandfather left any money?"

"No, madame, nothing but one five franc piece and a few sous. But perhaps you will have the kindness to put me in the way of disposing of the furniture, which will, I hope, pay your rent and the other expenses?"

"It will hardly do that," said the landlady, casting a scornful glance around. "And then pray how are you to live?"

"I can work neatly, madame, and I hope you will kindly allow me to remain with you, while I try to procure employment."

"Oh, if that's all you have to depend on," cried the landlady, "I promise you I cannot afford to keep you here. Why, child, in these hard times a young creature like you could not earn enough to keep you from starving, and then how am I to be paid for your lodging?"

"You need not fear, madame," said Louise, a little proudly, "that I shall be a burden to you. Though dear grandpapa did not leave me money, he told me to leave me a 'treasure' in this tin box; but I am not to open it until I am really in want."

"Oh, that alters the case," said the woman. "Of course, my dear Mademoiselle Louise, I shall be most happy to have you here; indeed, I was only jesting when I spoke of sending you away. But won't you open the box now? I am sure you must be anxious to see what it contains."

"No, madame," said Louise firmly; "I must obey grandpapa's wishes, and not open it unless I fail to earn a livelihood by work."

"As you please, my dear child, as you please," replied Madame Duval. But she thought to herself, "She is an oddity, like her old grandfather; I must humor her for the present and keep her here, so that I shall secure my share of the treasure."

In pursuance of this plan, the landlady lavished fond words and caresses on Louise; she invited her to eat with herself, and took care to provide some little delicacy for dinner. She disposed of the furniture to the best advantage, and after having satisfied all claims, presented Louise with three francs, saying, "See, my dear, how well it is for you to have an attached friend to manage your little affairs; if less carefully disposed of, your furniture would not have brought half the sum."

Louise was a gentle, well principled girl; but she was young, and the pernicious flattery and indulgence of her false friend soon produced an evil effect on her mind. She indeed felt speedily into idle habits. She procured some work from a neighboring shop, but the remuneration was very small, and she often thought, as she held her needle with a listless hand, "How tiresome it is to work so long for a few sous; I really think I might open grandpapa's box and enjoy what he has left me."

It happened one day that Louise saw a very pretty bonnet in a milliner's window; it seemed as if it would exactly fit her, and she inquired the price. "Fifteen francs," the milliner said. "Very cheap, indeed too cheap; but it would become mademoiselle so much that she would let her have it at first cost."

Louise looked and hesitated. Her conscience whispered "You have not got the money, and even if you had, fifteen francs could be better spent than in gratifying vanity." "But the bonnet is so pretty," she thought again; "and I can open grandpapa's box to-night, and then I shall be so rich that fifteen francs will seem a trifle." And conscience was silenced though not satisfied, and Louise returned to the house of Madame Duval. They sat down to dinner, but the young girl felt so agitated that she could not eat.

"Madame," she said at last, "I think I will open the box to-night. You know I have tried to work, and could earn but little, and 'tis right that I should repay you for your kindness." At these words the landlady embraced her—

"Oh, my dear child," she said, "you know I love you so much that I would gladly have you here without any payment. But come, where is the key? Let us look at your treasure."

Louise produced the key, unlocked the box and raised the cover. Madame Duval thrust in her eager hand and drew forth—what?—a bundle of manuscripts carefully tied up. They were evidently written by juvenile hands, and looked, indeed, like schoolboys' copy books.—The landlady and Louise looked carefully through them, hoping they might contain bank notes, or some paper of value; but when nothing of the kind appeared, the rage of Madame Duval knew no bounds. She accused M. Caillot and his granddaughter of being impostors, and even threatened the poor girl with being sent to prison.

Louise was quite stunned by her misfortune, and could scarcely find words to implore the compassion of her cruel landlady. At length, having exhausted her anger in various abusive epithets, Madame Duval stripped the poor child of everything she possessed, leaving her nothing but a few ragged garments to cover her, and then turned her out of doors to seek a shelter where she could.

Night was fast approaching, and Louise found herself in a dreadful situation; sent at such an hour to wander, penniless and half naked, thro' the streets of Paris. When Madame Duval was closing the door, Louise ventured to ask her for the fatal tin box.

"No," replied she, "that may be worth a few sous, so I shall keep it, but if you wish for the trumpery papers in it you may have them, as a precious souvenir of your thievish old grandfather." So saying, the cruel woman threw her the carefully tied up manuscripts, and then shut the door.

The heart of Louise was humbled; she felt no inclination to return railing for railing. "I have deserved this misfortune," she thought; it comes as the just punishment of my idle selfishness. May God protect me, and enable me to act better in future." After a short but fervent prayer, her mind felt calmed, and she bethought herself of the aged cousin of her grandfather, Madame Therese. "I will go to her," she said, "and ask her to let me share her lodging, and perhaps, by working hard, I may contribute to her support as well as my own." Holding her grandfather's papers carefully in her hand, she set out. The humble lodging of Madame Therese was situated in an obscure suburb, and Louise had some difficulty in finding it out. At length a good natured shoemaker living in the same street, directed her to the door, and the young girl knocked gently.

"Come in," said a feeble voice. Louise entered.

The room was small, but very clean; a bed, covered with a white quilt, occupied one corner, and a cupboard another; at the side was a small earthen stove in which a few sticks were burning, and two or three chairs and a table completed the furniture of the apartment. Madame Therese was seated on a low stool near the stove; her dress, though humble, was very clean, and her gray hair, drawn tightly under a muslin cap, gave a venerable air to her wrinkled features. She had been for many years so crippled by rheumatism as to be unable to walk; but her hands being free from the disease, she was constantly employed in knitting, and thus gained a scanty subsistence. Yet often in the cold dark of winter, the poor widow would have perished but for the timely assistance of a few charitable neighbors, who, out of their own small supply, used to bring her small presents of soup, bread and firing. It was now four years since she had seen Louise, her own infirmities and those of M. Caillot having prevented their meeting; indeed, so secluded was her life that she did not even know of her cousin's death, and was therefore much surprised both at seeing Louise and hearing all she had to tell.

Encouraged by the maternal kindness with which she was received, the young girl made a frank confession of her errors, and concluded by saying, "Now, dear madame, if you will allow me to share your room, I will try, with the blessing of God, to be some comfort and assistance to you. I am young and strong, and indeed I will try to work hard."

"You are welcome, my dear child," replied Madame Therese; "while God spares me we will never part; indeed I feel assured that He has sent you to me, and that all our misfortunes, if borne with cheerful resignation, will prove for our real good."

She then set herself busily to prepare some bread soup, and when it was ready, pressed Louise affectionately to partake of it. Afterwards she made her share her clean hard bed, and the young girl, happy to have found so truly good friend, slumbered peacefully till morning.

When Louise awoke she set herself to consider her present situation, and resolved to leave nothing undone that might contribute to her cousin's comfort. Accordingly, having dressed her-

self, she assisted Madame Therese in putting on her clothes, and then arranged the room neatly while the old lady prepared breakfast.

"How handy and useful you are, my child." "Oh, aunt—will you allow me to call you aunt!—I was always accustomed to attend dear grandpapa, and shall be glad to do the same for you."

Their light meal over, Louise asked her aunt, as she now called her, to lock up in the cupboard her grandfather's manuscripts, for although she could see no intrinsic value in them, yet, as a memento of him, she prized them.

The old lady looked at them. "I am a poor scholar," she said, "but certainly these papers appear to me like a schoolboy's scribbling. I cannot think why my poor cousin called them a treasure. However, for his sake we will put them up carefully, and I certainly feel indebted to them for bringing you to me."

Madame Therese then lent Louise a cloak with which to cover her shabby garments, and directed her to a large haberdasher's shop, where she might succeed in gaining employment.

It was situated in one of the busiest streets of Paris, and a number of gaily dressed people were purchasing at the counter when Louise entered. Ready made shirts, blouses, and children's clothes were among the articles sold, and these Louise hoped to be employed in making. She advanced timidly towards the mistress of the establishment, and said, "If you please, madame, do you a work-woman?"

"Not at present," was the reply, and poor Louise was turning away when the woman added, "If you can work well, and on low terms, I may find something for you to do. Have you any one to recommend you?"

"Only my cousin, with whom I live."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Madame Therese Caillot. She lives in a room, No. 27 Rue —; but she cannot come out of doors, for she is disabled by rheumatism."

The shopkeeper laughed. "A fine recommendation truly. You don't suppose, child, that in this establishment we trust our work to persons who can give no better references than you offer?"

The tears stood in the young girl's eyes.—"Good morning, madame," she said humbly, and left the shop.

She recollected passing another warehouse of less splendid appearance in the next street, and thither she turned her steps. There had been a heavy fall of rain and the pavement was muddy. As Louise walked slowly on, she struck her foot against something that jingled; she stooped and took up what looked like a lump of mud, but felt very heavy. Louise wiped it, and then perceived it was a purse. With some difficulty she opened the clasp and found it contained twenty gold pieces. What a treasure! Her first feeling was joy; her second, "this money is not mine. I must seek for the owner and return it."

She then resolved to take it to Madame Therese and be guided by her advice as to the best means of restoring it. Securing it carefully in the folds of her dress, she entered the second shop and applied for work. She met with a similar refusal, and with a heavy heart was quitting the shop, when a few words spoken at the counter arrested her attention. An elderly gentleman was purchasing some gloves, and when the parcel was handed to him he said, "I fear, madame, I must be in your debt for these until to-morrow, for I have just been so careless as to lose my purse."

"Ah, monsieur, what a pity. As to the gloves, don't mention them, I pray; it will do to pay for them at any time. But how did monsieur lose his purse?"

"I can scarcely tell. I remember taking out my pocket-handkerchief in the street next to this, and probably drew my purse out with it;—but I cannot be certain. It was rather a serious loss—twenty Napoleons."

Louise advanced eagerly—"Monsieur," she said, "I believe I have found your purse;" and she handed him the one she had found.

"You are a very honest little girl," said he; "this is indeed my purse, which I never expected to see again. And now what shall I give you for finding it?"

"Thank you, monsieur; I do not expect anything."

"That's no reason why you should not be rewarded. You look poor; tell me where you live."

Louise replied that she lived with her cousin, an old woman, and was now seeking for work to support them both.

"Madame," said the gentleman, turning to the mistress of the shop, "will you, on my recommendation, supply this girl with work. I heard you refuse her just now, as you said she could give you no reference. I think we may both be assured of her honest principles."

"Certainly, monsieur, I shall have much pleasure in trying her; and if she works well, I shall

be able to supply her with pretty constant employment."

"Now," said the gentleman, turning to Louise, "here are four Napoleons for you, they are only the just reward of your honesty. I leave Paris to-morrow with my family, and shall probably be absent for some months, otherwise I would ask my wife to call at your lodging; but on our return I hope she will be able to see you. Here is a card with my name and address."

Louise gratefully thanked the kind gentleman, who hastened from the shop, and she then took the materials for a shirt, promising to bring it back finished the next day. What joyful news she had on her return for Madame Therese, and how cheerfully did they partake together of their evening meal, to which was added a salad and a bit of cheese to make a little feast.

Louise continued to work hard and steadily. Winter set in this year with unusual severity, and poor Madame Therese became quite disabled. Rheumatism attacked hands as well as her feet, and rendered her quite unable to work. She suffered dreadful pain at night, which Louise sought tenderly to relieve by rubbing and chafing her limbs. The four Napoleons were gradually expended in providing medicines and nourishing food for the invalid. Taught by adversity, Louise learned to forget herself, and was never more happy than when ministering to the wants of her aunt. Before the end of February their money was all spent, and the earnings of Louise, always small, were further diminished by the expense of candle-light, and the necessity of giving up much time to attending the invalid. To add to their trials, the young girl's own health began to fail. Loss of rest, constant sitting at her needle, and want of sufficient food, produced their usual effect. She became pale and thin, her breathing was quick and her appetite failing.

Madame Therese became much alarmed about her. One day she remarked her frequently putting her hand on her side, and sighing as if in pain.

"My child," said the old woman, "the good gentleman whose purse you found is a physician. I am sure if he knew of your illness, he would do something for you. Will you, then, call at his house to-day, for indeed I feel uneasy about you?"

Louise felt reluctant to go. She feared it would look like begging from one who had already done much for her; but her aunt fearing that her health was seriously affected, managed to satisfy her scruples, and induced her to go.

Nothing but disappointment awaited them.—Louise found the house shut up, and the old man who was left in charge of it told her the family were not expected home for two months. She returned sorrowfully to her lodging, and continued with Madame Therese to struggle against poverty and illness.

When Dr. Leverrier, the loser of the purse, at length returned to Paris, he called to mind the poor little girl, and one day, accompanied by his wife, sought out the humble lodgings of Madame Therese. Ascending the dark, narrow staircase, they knocked at the door, and the voice of Madame Therese said "Come in." They entered. The room, though perfectly clean looked almost bare; every little article of furniture had by degrees been parted with to meet the necessities of the poor inmates. Louise, whose weakness had considerably increased, was seated on a bundle of straw, which formed their only bed, and her wasted fingers were feebly endeavoring to finish some work which ought to have been returned the day before. So changed was her appearance, that Dr. Leverrier could scarcely recognize her; but she knew him, and blushed deeply as she rose and said:

"Aunt, this is the kind gentleman who gave me the money."

"I am sorry," said Madame Leverrier, "to see you look so poorly; but we are come now to do what we can to relieve you, and I hope, please God, you will soon be well." She then entered into conversation with the old woman, while her husband inquired into Louise's state of health. He found she had no fixed disease, nothing which might not be removed by good food, fresh air, and freedom from toil. These he took care should be secured to her, by giving her aunt a sum of money sufficient for their present necessities, and promising to continue it until both the invalids should be restored.

They then took their leave, followed by the grateful blessings of Louise and her aunt. That evening Madame Leverrier sent them a comfortable bed and blankets, together with a warm gown and shawl for each. How comfortably they slept that night! and how fervently did they bless the goodness of God in sending them such friends!

Dr. Leverrier continued frequently to visit them; he used to send Louise out to walk, and sometimes sat with her aunt during her absence. One day he asked the old lady to tell him all the