

*un mot, si tu m'aimes.*" (Not a word if thou lovest me).

Bertrand found Messieurs Derville, Blaise, and Mangier in a private room; and he remarked, with a nervous shudder, that two gendarmes were stationed in the passage. Derville, though very pale, sustained Bertrand's glance of rage and astonishment without flinching. It was plain that he had steeled himself to carry through the diabolical device his revenge had planned, and the fluttering hope with which Marie had inspired Bertrand died within him. Derville repeated slowly and firmly what the clerk had previously stated; adding, that no one save Bertrand, Jeanne Favart, and the clerk whom he first suspected, had been in the room after he left it. The note now produced was the one that had been stolen, and was safe in his desk at half-past seven the previous evening. M. Mangier said: "The assertion of Bertrand, that I advanced him this note, or any other, is entirely false."

"What have you to say in reply to these grave suspicions?" said M. Blaise. "Your father was an honest man; and you, I hear, have hitherto borne an irreproachable character," he added, on finding that the accused did not speak. "Explain to us, then, how you came into possession of this note; if you do not, and satisfactorily—though, after what we have heard, that seems scarcely possible—we have no alternative but to give you into custody."

"I have nothing to say at present—nothing," muttered Bertrand, whose impatient furtive looks were every instant turned towards the door.

"Nothing to say!" exclaimed the banker; "why, this is a tacit admission of guilt. We had better call in the gendarmes at once."

"I think," said Dufour, "the young man's refusal to speak is owing to the entreaties of Mademoiselle de la Tour, whom we overheard implore him, for her sake, or as he loved her, not to say a word."

"What do you say?" exclaimed Derville, with quick interrogation, "for the sake of Mademoiselle de la Tour! Bah! you could not have heard aright."

"Pardon, monsieur," said the clerk who had accompanied Dufour: "I also distinctly heard her so express herself—but here is the lady herself."

The entrance of Marie, accompanied by Jeanne Favart, greatly surprised and started M. Derville; he glanced sharply in her face, but unable to encounter the indignant expression he met there, quickly averted his look, whilst a hot flush glowed perceptibly out of his pale features. At her request, seconded by M. Blaise, Derville repeated his previous story; but his voice had lost its firmness, his manner its cold impassibility.

"I wish Monsieur Derville would look me in the face," said Marie, when Derville had ceased speaking. "I am here as a suppliant to him for mercy."

"A suppliant for mercy!" murmured Derville, partially confronting her.

"Yes; if only for the sake of the orphan daughter of the Monsieur de la Tour who first helped you on in life, and for whom you not long since professed regard."

Derville seemed to recover his firmness at these

words: "No," he said; "not even for your sake, Marie, will I consent to the escape of such a daring criminal from justice."

"If that be your final resolve, monsieur," continued Marie, with kindling, impressive earnestness, "it becomes necessary that, at whatever sacrifice, the true criminal—whom assuredly Hector Bertrand is not—should be denounced."

Various exclamations of surprise and interest greeted these words, and the agitation of Derville, was again plainly visible.

"You have been surprised, messieurs," she went on, "at Hector's refusal to afford any explanation as to how he became possessed of the purloined note. You will presently comprehend the generous motive of that silence. Monsieur Derville has said, that he left the note safe in his desk at half-past seven last evening. Hector it is recognised, did not enter the house till nearly an hour afterwards; and now, Jeanne Favart will inform you *who* it was that called on her in the interim, and remained in the room where the desk was placed for upwards of a quarter of an hour, and part of that time alone."

As the young girl spoke, Derville's dilated gaze rested with fascinated intensity upon her excited countenance, and he hardly seemed to breathe.

"It was you, mademoiselle," said Jeanne, "who called on me, and remained as you describe."

A fierce exclamation partially escaped Derville, forcibly suppressed as Marie resumed: "Yes; and now, messieurs, hear me solemnly declare, that as truly as the note was stolen, I, not Hector, was the thief."

"'Tis false!" shrieked Derville, surprised out of all self-possession; "a lie! It was not then the note was taken—not till—not till——"

"Not till when, Monsieur Derville?" said the excited girl, stepping close to the shrinking, guilty man, and still holding him with her flashing, triumphant eyes, as she placed her hand upon his shoulder; "not till *when* was the note taken from the desk, monsieur?"

He did not, could not reply, and presently sank utterly subdued, nerveless, panic-stricken, into a chair, with his white face buried in his hands.

"This is indeed a painful affair," said M. Blaise, after an expectant silence of some minutes, "If it be, as this young person appeared to admit; and almost equally so. Monsieur Derville, if, as I more than suspect, the conclusion indicated by the expression that has escaped you should be the true one."

The banker's voice appeared to break the spell that enchaind the faculties of Derville. He rose up, encountered the stern looks of the men by one as fierce as theirs, and said hoarsely: "I withdraw the accusation! The young woman's story is a fabrication. I—I lent, gave the fellow the note myself."

A storm of execration—"Coquin! voleur! scélérat!" burst forth at this confession, received by Derville with a defiant scowl, as he stalked out of the apartment.

I do not know that any law proceedings were afterwards taken against him for defamation of character. Hector kept the note, as indeed he had a good right to do, and Monsieur and Madame Bertrand are still prosperous and respect-