

with a sharp ring. A smile played for an instant around the maiden's lips, and the dark lashes were half raised from her cheeks ; but, as if suddenly remembering herself, she merely pushed back the sleeve of her deep crimson bodice, and dipped her pen afresh.

Seeing that she would not look up, the officer approached a step, and, taking hold of the quill drew it through her fingers, leaving her nails covered with ink.

"Oh, Captain !" she cried, stretching out her hand towards him. Her head was thrown back, and a pair of deep grey eyes were fixed upon him with what was intended to be a look of great indignation.

He plucked a leaf from the vine which covered the doorway, and carefully wiped her little fingers. She made no resistance, but as soon as it was done, took up her pen and resumed her occupation.

"Finish that some other time, Francisca," pleaded the young man.

She shook her head. "Our books are to be made up to-morrow, and I must have this ready," she said, without pausing in her work.

"You are the heroine of the pen."

"I am a merchant's daughter."

He laughed.

"Do. laugh. You know we have no great love for the military."

"We ! Who are the we ?"

"Well then, Constantine"—and the pen went on adding up the column from figure to figure—"by we, I mean the whole firm."

"Thou too, Francisca ?"

"Ah, me !"—and she let the pen fall and threw herself upon his breast, raising a little cloud of powder around her head. Then she passed her hand caressingly over his bright black hair, and gazing with undisguised admiration in his handsome face, she said, "How vain you are !"

From the distant town came a faint sound of military music. The eyes of the young soldier brightened.

"That is my regiment," he said, and held the maiden tighter in his arms.

She bent herself away from him, still smiling. "But it is all in vain," she said.

"Then what is to come of it ?"

She raised herself up to him on tip-toe and whispered, "A wedding !"

"But the firm, Francisca ?"

"I am my father's daughter." And she looked at him with her bright intelligent eyes.

At this moment a harsh voice, which sounded quite near, was heard proceeding from the upper story of the house. The starlings flew affrighted through the garden ; involuntarily the officer drew the young maiden closer to him.

"What is the matter ?" she said. "It is only the two old gentlemen who have finished their first game, and now they are standing at the window while papa arranges the weather for the coming week."

He looked through the open door over the sunlit garden. "Thou art mine !" he said. "Nothing shall part us."

She shook her head slowly several times ; then disengaging herself from his embrace, she pushed him towards the door. "Go away, now," she said ; "you shall not have long to wait."

He took the sweet little face in both his hands and kissed it ; then went slowly out of the door, and turned aside along by a privet-hedge, which separated the garden from the steep river bank. While his eyes watched the ever-flowing water, he came to an open space where a marble statue of Flora stood, surrounded by trimly-clipped box-borders. Fragments of porcelain and strings of glass beads glistened from among the green foliage ; a strong aroma filled the air, mingled with the perfume of the Provence roses, which grew here by the wall at the end of the foot-path. In the corner, between the wall and the privet-hedge, was an arbour overgrown with luxuriant honey-suckle. The young officer unbuckled his sword and seated himself upon the little bench ; then he began to draw one letter after another with the point of his cane upon the ground, always, however, carefully obliterating them to the last stroke, as though fearful they might betray his secret. This went on for some time, till his eyes fell on the shadow of a branch of honey-suckle, at the end of which he could clearly distinguish the delicate tubes of the blossoms. As he gazed he observed something slowly crawling up the stem. He looked on for a time, then rose, and sought among the clumps of honey-suckle above him, that he might find the cluster and rescue it from the impending