

clustered—as many sitting as can find room round the green cloth covered board; while behind the sitters there are people standing two or three rows deep, the hindermost watching the table over the shoulders of their neighbours. A placard upon the wall informs visitors that only constant players are permitted to remain seated at that sacred table. Perhaps a third of the players and a third of the lookers-on are women. And if there are lips more tightly contracted than other lips, and eyes with a harder, greedier light in them than other eyes, those lips and those eyes belong to the women. The ungloved feminine hands have a claw-like aspect as they scrape the glittering pieces of silver over the green cloth; the feminine throats look weird and scraggy as they crane themselves over masculine shoulders; the feminine eyes have something demoniac in their steely glare as they keep watch upon the rapid progress of the game.

Half-a-dozen moderate fortunes seem to be lost and won while the traveller looks on from the background, unnoticed and unseen; for if those plate-glass doors swung suddenly open to admit the seven angels of the Apocalypse, carrying the seven golden vials filled with the wrath of God, it is doubtful whether the splendour of their awful glory, or the trumpet-notes that heralded their coming, would have power to arouse the players from their profound abstraction.

Half-a-dozen comfortable little patrimonies seem to have changed hands while the traveller has been looking on; and yet he has only watched the table for about ten minutes; and this splendid *salon* is but an outer chamber, where one may stake as shabby a sum as two francs, if one is shabby enough to wish to do so, and where playing for half-an-hour or so on a pleasant summer morning one could scarcely lose more than fifty or sixty pounds. Another pair of plate-glass doors open into an inner chamber, where the silence is still more profound, and where around a large table sit one row of players; while only here and there a little group of outsiders stand behind their chairs. There is more gilding on the walls and ceiling of this chamber; the frescoes are more delicate; the crystal chandeliers are adorned with rich clusters of sparkling drops, that twinkle like diamonds in the sun. This is the temple of gold; and in this splendid chamber one may hazard no smaller stake than half a napoleon. There are women here; but not so many women as in the outer saloon; and the women here are younger and prettier and more carefully dressed than those who stake only silver.

The prettiest and the youngest woman in this golden chamber on one particular August afternoon, nine years after the death of Tom Halliday, was a girl who stood behind the chair of a military-looking Englishman, an old man whose handsome face was a little disfigured by those traces which late hours and dissipated habits are supposed to leave behind them.

The girl held a card in one hand and a pin in the other, and was occupied in some mysterious process, by which she kept note of the Englishman's play. She was very young, with a delicate face, in whose softer lines there was a refined likeness to the features of the man whose play she watched. But while his eyes were hard and cold and gray, hers were of that dense black in which there seems such an unfathomable and mysterious depth. As she was the handsomest, so she was also the worst-dressed woman in the room. Her flimsy silk mantle had faded from black to rusty brown; the straw-hat which shaded her face was sunburnt; the ribbons had lost their brightness; but there was an air of attempted fashion in the puffings and trimming of her alpaca skirt; and there was evidence of a struggle with poverty in the tight-fitting lavender gloves, whose streaky lines bore witness to the imperfection of the cleaner's art. Elegant Parisians and the select of Brussels glanced at the military Englishman and his handsome daughter with some slight touch of supercilious surprise—one has no right to find shabbily-dressed young women in the golden temple—and it is scarcely necessary to state that it was from her own countrywomen the young person in alpaca

received the most chilling glances. But those Parthian arrows shot from feminine eyes had little power to wound their object just now. The girl looked up from her perforated card very seldom; and when she raised her eyes, it was always to look in one direction—towards the great glass doors opening from the outer saloon. Loungers came and went; the doors swung open and closed again as noiselessly as it is possible for well-regulated doors to open and shut; footsteps sounded on the polished floors; and sometimes, when the young person in alpaca lifted her eyes, a passing shadow of disappointment darkened her face. A modern Laurence Sterne, or a new Sentimental Journey, might have derived some interest from the study of the girl's countenance; but the reflective and observant traveller is not to be encountered very often in this age of excursionists; and Maria and her goat may roam the highways and byways for a long time before she will find any dreamy loiterer with a mind attuned to sympathy.

The shabbily-dressed girl was looking for some one. She watched her father's play carefully—she marked her card with unflinching precision; but she performed these duties with a mechanical air; and it was only when she lifted her eyes to the great shining plate-glass doors which opened into this dangerous Paradise, that any ray of feeling animated her countenance. She was looking for some one, and the person watched for was so long coming. Ah, how difficult for the arithmetician to number the crushing disappointments, the bitter agonies that one woman can endure in a single half-hour! This girl was so young—so young; and already she had learnt to suffer.

The man played with the concentrated attention and the impassible countenance of an experienced gamester, rarely lifting his eyes from the green cloth, never looking back at the girl who stood behind him. He was winning to-day, and he accepted his good fortune as quietly as he had often accepted evil fortune at the same table. He seemed to be playing on some system of his own; and neighbouring players looked at him with envious eyes, as they saw the pile of gold grow larger under his thin nervous hands. Ignorant gamesters, who stood aloof after having lost two or three napoleons, contemplated the lucky Englishman and wondered about him, while some touch of pity leavened the envy excited by his wonderful fortune. He looked like a decayed gentleman—a man who had been a military dandy in the days that were gone, and who had all the old pretensions still, without the power to support them—a Brummel languishing at Caen; a Nash wasting slowly at Bath.

At last the girl's face brightened suddenly as she glanced upwards; and it would have been very easy for the observant traveller—if any such person had existed—to construe aright that bright change in her countenance. The someone she had been watching for had arrived.

The doors swung open to admit a man of about five-and-twenty, whose darkly-handsome face and careless costume had something of that air which was once wont to be associated with the person and the poetry of George Gordon Lord Byron. The new-comer was just one of those men whom very young women are apt to admire, and whom worldly-minded people are prone to distrust. There was a perfume of Bohemianism, a flavour of the Quartier Latin, about the loosely-tied cravat, the wide trousers, and black-velvet morning-coat, with which the young man outraged the opinions of respectable visitors at Forêt-dechène. There was a semi-poetic vagabondism in the half-indifferent, half-contemptuous expression of his face, with its fierce moustache, and strongly-marked eyebrows overshadowing sleepy gray eyes—eyes that were half hidden by their long dark lashes; as still pools of blue water lie sometimes hidden amongst the rushes that flourish round them.

He was handsome, and he knew that he was handsome; but he affected to despise the beauty of his proud dark face, as he affected to despise all the brightest and most beautiful things upon earth; and yet there was a vagabondish kind of foppery in his costume that contrasted sharply

with the gentlemanly dandyism of the shabby gamester sitting at the table. There was a distance of nearly half a century between the style of the Regency dandy and the Quartier-Latin lion.

The girl watched the new-comer with sad earnest eyes as he walked slowly towards the table, and a faint blush kindled in her cheeks as he came nearer to the spot where she stood. He went by her presently, carrying an atmosphere of stale tobacco with him as he went; and he gave her a friendly nod as he passed, and a "Good-morning, Diana;" but that was all. The faint blush faded and left her very pale: but she resumed her weary task with the card and the pin; and if she had endured any disappointment within those few moments, it seemed to be a kind of disappointment that she was accustomed to suffer.

The young man walked round the table till he came to the only vacant chair, in which he seated himself, and after watching the game for a few minutes, began to play. From the moment in which he dropped into that vacant seat to the moment in which he rose to leave the table, three hours afterwards, he never lifted his eyes from the green cloth, or seemed to be conscious of any thing that was going on around or about him. The girl watched him furtively for some little time after he had taken his place at the table; but the stony mask of the professed gambler is a profitless object for a woman's earnest scrutiny.

She sighed presently, and laid her hand heavily on the chair behind which she was standing. The action aroused the man who sat in it, and he turned and looked at her for the first time.

"You are tired, Diana?"

"Yes, papa, I am very tired."

"Give me your card, then, and go away," the gamester answered peevishly; "girls are always tired."

She gave him the mysteriously-perforated card, and left her post behind his chair; and then, after roaming about the great saloon with a weary listless air, and wandering from one open window to another to look into the sunny quadrangle, where well-dressed people were sitting at little tables eating ices or drinking lemonade, she went away altogether, and roamed into another chamber where some children were dancing to the sound of a feeble violin. She sat upon a velvet-covered bench, and watched the children's lesson for some minutes, and then rose and wandered to another open window that overlooked the same quadrangle, where the well-dressed people were enjoying themselves in the hot August sunshine.

"How extravagantly every body dresses!" she thought, "and what a shabby poverty-stricken creature one feels amongst them! And yet if I ask papa to give me a couple of napoleons out of the money he won to-day, he will only look at me from head to foot, and tell me that I have a gown and a cloak and a bonnet, and ask me what more I can want, in the name of all that is unreasonable? And I see girls here whose fathers are so fond of them and so proud of them—ugly girls, decked out in silks and muslins and ribbons that have cost a small fortune, clumsy awkward girls, who look at me as if I were some new kind of wild animal."

The saloons at Forêt-dechène were rich in monster sheets of looking-glass; and in wandering discontentedly about the room, Diana Paget saw herself reflected many times in all her shabbiness. It was only very lately she had discovered that she had some pretension to good looks; for her father, who could not or would not educate her decently or clothe her creditably, took a very high tone of morality in his paternal teaching, and in the fear that she might one day grow vain of her beauty, had taken care to impress upon her at an early age that she was the very incarnation of all that is lean and sallow and awkward.

CHAPTER II.—THE EASY DESCENT.

Amongst the many imprudences of which Horatio Paget—once a captain in a crack cavalry regiment, always a captain in his inter-