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## THE STORY OF A PIN.

### XIX.—EXPLANATION.

As soon as he had gone, Jeanne, left alone to herself, fell back upon this unexpected appearance. She was fearful of committing a fault in receiving this young man alone in her chamber, for Anna had not yet returned. She comprehended that she had pronounced but a single word. In fact, if George was a stranger to her, what could be more easy than to let him see her design, and naturally to ask advice of him, and then show him out with proper politeness? But the dismissal—had it not said, on the contrary:—‘You are something more to me than a mere lover of paintings; you do not come to see some flowers, but to see me instead, and I knew it. I am expecting you, but I must not let it be seen. *‘Have you come already?’* She fell into melancholy and discouragement. Her sister, upon entering, found her much changed, and had great trouble to understand what had happened. That night Jeanne went to bed with a slight fever.

George, on his part, had been greatly moved by this reception. He abruptly took leave of Madame Blanchemain, who said to him:

‘They cannot complain that you make your visit too long.’

And he entered the shady forest paths, which were the chosen places for his reflections.

He arrested his steps before ‘la Vierge noire,’ a venerated image at a crossway in the forest, as if to make the Holy Mother a witness of the wisdom of his plans. And then his spirits began to be lightened.

‘If I am nothing to her,’ thought he, ‘she would have received me like any one else. She is timid in my presence; her paleness gave evidence of a deep impression. She was thinking of me, perhaps, and of that little pin which is already like a bond between us.’

Finally, never man found himself more happy at having been dismissed by a word of reproach. Moreover, he comprehended that he was now the offended one, and that he would have all the advantage in the silence which was about to follow this brief interview.

He then recalled to mind the attitude of the young girl, leaning upon the back of her chair, and the outlines of her flexible form, which useless bonds seemed never to have abused; he again beheld the bouquet of flowers which arose beside her; and, flattering himself with his remembrance, he returned to Paris, to resume with confidence his active and devoted life.

### XX.—A FRIEND.

What has passed at the house of Monsieur Wolff, since we left it to follow George in his adventures?

Madame Wolff was embarrassed at the part she played in the winter garden, and hurt at the audacity of which she had accused George.—The anxious air of her husband, the hurried departure of George, gave her a thousand fears.—Remorse tortured her, and affected her health. She remained in her chamber, stretched upon a sofa; but Mademoiselle Borghese kept her in sight, tearing some unseasonable confession.

After George’s return, when Mademoiselle Borghese thought that her friend had been sufficiently punished for her imprudence, she said to her:

‘Louise, you hide your trouble from me. It is some difficulty which has made you ill. Can you not, then, become accustomed to the pin strokes of Lady Wilson? What has happened to you?’

‘Dear Mademoiselle Borghese,’ said Madame Wolff, ‘it is not Lady Wilson who is the cause of my anger, it is—you cannot guess. But you have my whole confidence; you have given me so many marks of your good friendship, that it is quite necessary that you should listen to my complaint, and that you should give me counsel. To tell you all, and it is to you only, so kind and indulgent as you are, that I dare to confide this secret, do you remember that foolish wager?’

‘What, then?’ replied Mademoiselle Borghese, with an air of astonishment.

‘Ah, well, that stupid pin, with which they found a way of busying all the house. Yourself, even—did you not banter me like the others?’

‘Yes, and what is the great harm? I remember, now, that you lost, and that you faithfully paid Lady Wilson the few louis which formed the stakes. Do you repent of that?—Lady Wilson, notwithstanding her whims, is charitable, and that gold went to aid a poor family; I have proof of it.’

‘It is not that which I am sorry for; but, since you comprehend nothing, Borghese, it is necessary to tell you the whole. I won the bet, and here, behold that wicked pin, which I do not know what to do with, and which I could believe bewitched, from the tortures which I have endured since that detestable wager.’

‘And why, then, Louise, did you pay the stake which you really won? Why were you so generous?’

‘Because—it is to you only, Borghese, that I will confess that I have won—because you are kind, indulgent, because you know me, and because your Monsieur George whom you have taken for a saint, is a bold and presumptuous man, whom you must be on your guard against. I should blush to tell any one else what took place.’

‘Good heavens! what is it?’ said Mademoiselle Borghese, with an air of astonishment, ‘and what did he do, that poor young man?’

‘Ah, well, that innocent took advantage of my falling half asleep from his conversation, to— to kiss me in the winter garden.’

‘Ah! that was very pleasant!’ replied Mademoiselle Borghese; ‘do you not see, then, that to that school-boy who kisses the ladies, they all open their doors.’

‘You can laugh at it, Borghese, and then you will be like the others, though I believed you better and more charitable. Do you believe that, if I had thought of exposing myself to such insolence, I would have bargained with him for this fine relic? But that is not all. All that happened was quite harmless, was it not? Ah, well, it can all be misinterpreted and misrepresented. Have you noticed the abrupt and gloomy manner of Monsieur Wolff?’

‘And how will you explain to me that hasty departure of Monsieur George? Is it a drama of the gymnasium in which they have given me a part.—Am I, then, an unfaithful wife, because an impertinent fellow has allowed himself to touch me with his lips? And is my seducer punished for his success by his exile? It is all perfectly ridiculous. Dear Borghese, you can sympathize with me; you know the esteem and affection I have for Monsieur Wolff; you know my whole life. You must come with me, that we may tell this shameful story, how the innocent, wise George kissed, without ceremony, and by surprise, the wife of his protector.’

‘But then,’ said Mademoiselle Borghese, ‘one does not kiss a woman without any encouragement. I have found myself with him ten times alone, when he has come to play the piano with me, and, like everyone else, I have found him respectful and almost embarrassed in my presence. Do you not see you must have given him some cause for it?’

‘My dear, almost nothing. I was piqued about the wager. You know that I like to succeed in enterprises, and, I do not know why, I was tenacious about this pin, and then—’

‘And then?’ said Mademoiselle Borghese.

‘Then I picked an olive flower. I offered him this flower for his pin, whose value, by a child’s blindness which I cannot explain, increased in proportion to his resistance.’

‘And then?’

‘And then,’ continued Madame Wolff, ‘I put this flower in my belt, and afterwards I fell asleep—’

‘You fell asleep, Louise? And you think all very innocent? You see, however, to what that led.’

‘I know it only too well,’ said Madame Wolff, ‘but it is not moralizing which I ask of you, Borghese, but a means of getting out of this foolish scrape.’

‘The means, the means—I really can tell you how,’ replied Mademoiselle Borghese; ‘but it is on two conditions, and the first already appears intolerable to you.’

‘What is it, then?’

‘My dear Louise, it is to listen to a sermon with three heads.’

Madame Wolff stretched herself dejectedly upon her sofa.

Mademoiselle Borghese placed herself in an arm-chair before her with a magisterial look.

‘My dear daughter,’ said she, ‘you are good, you are wise, you love your husband, who is the most devoted and most generous of men; you have all your leisure time; you might invent some charming and useful occupation; you are in a most enviable position, for you have the rare privilege of being able to distribute your charities among those who are in distress. Ah, well, how do you employ your time? With child’s-bodiness, listening to foolish speeches, encouraging slanders, plotting venturesome enterprises, like that which you cannot get out of, provoking by your coquetries the attention of an honest and innocent young man, wholly busied with his duties. Have you learned the danger of all this?’

‘Ah, dear Borghese, you know it very well, since I have called you to my assistance.’

‘And now,’ said Mademoiselle Borghese, ‘the other condition; if I extricate you from this danger, will you forgive me for all the means which I have thought necessary to employ, I, whom you defied to protect George under my white wing? And will you promise me to be yet to this young man as a wise and prudent mother?’

‘You know very well that I will promise all you wish. Therefore, speak, perverse friend.’

‘Very well, know then that I was watching you, for it is not without danger that one sleeps under the flowering myrtles. To day I will restore the kiss which I took from you, and the flower that you have regretted so much.’

And she threw at Madame Wolff’s feet a withered olive flower.

‘It was I, your Borghese, who was that impertinent fellow of whom you have to complain. Poor George is quite innocent in the matter.—He was already away, so much he feared your enchantment’s; and, as to the pin, for which I have done duty, I beg you to believe that it is no sorceress.’

‘I am mad,’ said Madame Wolff, ‘and too happy at this denouement. But why have you let me suffer so long, and to have a thousand suppositions about George’s departure?’

‘To punish you, and to avenge him,’ said Madame Borghese, seriously.

The two friends embraced, and promised to keep the secret.

Madame Wolff was cured. That evening, in the salon, everybody was in good humor. Madame Wolff, hanging upon her husband’s arm, received George with a wholly motherly friendship. He was the lion of the evening, and they made him recount his travels. Monsieur Wolff congratulated him, and expressed the intention of interesting himself in his affairs. Quiet and prudence had entered this house, thanks to the foresight of a friend.

### XXI.—A LITTLE PROGRESS.

George resumed his labors with double courage: for, first, he felt all the devotion and effort which he owed to Monsieur Wolff; and, moreover, he had now some well determined plans for his future. All his reflections confirmed him in the excellent opinion that he had conceived of his proteges, and the dismissal which he had received, far from wounding him, increased all his hopes.

It was, then, with a new ardor that he attempted to again acquaint himself with the run of the ever prosperous and active affairs of the house of Wolff. Nights without sleep were not hard for him; for, while laboring, he would say to himself: ‘I know now to what profit are my vigils.’

Some days passed thus; and then one morning George received a letter bearing the stamp of St. Germain, and whose unsteady writing was unknown to him.

Nothing in George’s character would authorize the accusation of coxcombry, but, after all, it must be confessed that he was slightly expecting this letter. Here are the contents: ‘My dear Monsieur George:

‘It was quite fortunate that you left your address, for I really have need of writing to you, and I cannot speak of it to my neighbors above.’

‘What have you done, then, Monsieur George, you who have, by your modest air and good heart, inspired me with so much confidence?’

‘I induced you to go up to see my dear children, and I do not know what has happened.—We can draw nothing from Jeanne, whom you found alone, and who, since then, has been sad and really ill.’

‘I do not need to say to you that, when one obliges people, one is entitled to more regard and respect. I wish to believe that you are to blame for nothing.’

‘If your conscience is at ease, come and see me Sunday morning, for I will speak to you seriously and confidentially. We will be alone.’

‘Hoping that you are ever worthy of our friendship, I remain affectionately yours,

V. BLANCHEMAIN.’

On Sunday morning, George, happy at this recital, but pre-occupied with the health of Jeanne, was at the door of the white house.

‘You have come, then, you wicked boy,’ said Madame Blanchemain; ‘I have some things to say to you while we are alone. Tell me, frankly, Monsieur George, while we are by ourselves; tell me, as if you were speaking to your mother, or to the mother of Jeanne, what did you say to that poor child; what did you do that she should be in this melancholy state? You passed through the church to enter this house of angels, you made use of piety to gain their esteem; they are under obligations to you, I have said it already. Under great pretences of giving employment, and with a delicacy of which I believe you really capable, you have imposed upon me—me, who pretended to read countenances so well. Why have you abused the access which your business has given you to this poor house, to cast trouble into it? Answer me at once.—If you wish only to form one of those frivolous connections in which so many young persons lose their present and their future, why do you not address willing persons, such as you have in your Paris? If you come only on business, how does it happen that you do us more evil than

your generosity has done us good? You have, nevertheless, the appearance of a good and honest lad, but speak, speak then, that I may know if you are the friend that Providence has reserved for us, or an enemy who has penetrated under our roof in the name of Charity.—Aod do not think you can deceive me?’ added she, taking a pinch of snuff, and looking at him fixedly.

‘Be assured,’ said George, with a smile, as he had an opportunity to reply, ‘I have nothing to blame myself for, and I am still worthy of your friendship and of theirs. Jeanne’s countenance and her talent, and that which an honorable man, such as Monsieur Redouté is, told me, has from the first inspired me with equal esteem and respect from this young person. All that I have seen here has but confirmed my opinion. The place even where I met Jeanne in St. Germain was to you a guarantee of my conduct.—When you induced me to ascend to her chamber, the other day, she appeared offended at my prompt return, and upon the only word which she pronounced, I retired, excusing myself; and I promised not to come again, but with her permission. What could I do? And do not think that I have cherished the least resentment at this cold reception. I have learned to esteem Jeanne more for this very natural susceptibility, and for this prudent reserve. And I was happy to go, when others would have been eager to remain.—You see, dear Madame Blanchemain, that I am yet, perhaps, the one whom you were waiting for, to help and to love your children. You see that I am not unworthy of your confidence and your hospitality.’

And he offered his hand.

‘Ah, well, my child, you relieve my poor heart,’ said Madame Blanchemain, taking his hand, and holding it in her two great ones; ‘but tell me, now what do you want to do: For I begin to see clearly into Jeanne’s thoughts, thanks to your explanations. Have you thought of your future? You will meet in society some advantageous opportunities of establishment; and if you begin any relations here, based, as much as you will, upon esteem and respect, who knows but Jeanne may cherish from this passing acquaintance a serious attachment, and you expose her involuntarily to sad mistakes? Would it not be better to talk of all this among reasonable people, before advancing in a road in which it is difficult to recede?’

‘Dear Madame Blanchemain,’ said George, ‘you have spoken of Providence, and I believe in it also. I believe it is Providence which brought me in the presence of Jeanne, I believe that this acquaintance responds to the sweetest needs of my heart. I knew that my mother would not put an obstacle in the way of my plans, as I can prove to you. But it does not belong to me, for the present, to declare my intentions, and I hope that you will agree with this prudence. You will be my confidante, and you will help me in preparing happiness for Jeanne. I have really need of you to assure her, and to plot, between ourselves, if you will, to create a future for her.’

‘There, that is well spoken,’ said Madame Blanchemain. ‘Now we must go up to console those troubled ones, and take counsel of your reason and your heart not to offend them in wishing to serve them.’

Madame Blanchemain entered first.

‘My child,’ said she to Jeanne, who was again alone, ‘I have brought Monsieur George to you, who really wished to know about your paintings.’

George entered and offered his hand with a look that implored pardon. Jeanne extended her own frankly and readily.

‘I have need of your advice,’ said she to him. And she fell back, a little pale, in her great easy chair.

George then observed that everything in this little chamber was still as on the day when he had made so short a visit. The same sketch was upon the table; the same bouquet, so fresh and bright the other day, was now drooping, with faded flowers, down the sides of the large slender glass which contained the dying stalk; and Jeanne herself, with her features altered by suffering, was she not like a wasted flower? Yet she became herself presently, her great eyes recovering their life.

‘This week I could do nothing,’ said she; ‘I was not well, but I feel better. And then I have need of consulting you. How unfortunate! now these poor flowers cannot serve us any more.’

And she raised them with pity.

‘I will go and seek for others,’ said George, ‘for we must advance our business, and make up for lost time.’

‘Go quickly,’ said Madame Blanchemain, ‘and breakfast will be ready when you return.’

An hour after, the family—what a sweet poem to improvise—Anna and Jeanne, Madame Blanchemain and George, were united in the hall.—Confidence and tranquility were upon all faces.

George, such is the power of sacrifice, emptied to the dregs, without apparent repugnance, the cup which Madame Blanchemain had placed before him. This was the triumph of the wine of Mareil.

‘It can be drunk,’ said the good dame with satisfaction, ‘but it is still better with water.’

A gardener arrived and ranged in the dining-room a selection of most beautiful flowers.—The breakfast was very pleasant and very amicable.

When coffee was served, Jeanne, who had wished to take nothing for some days, did not refuse the fine cup full of liquid amber which Madame Blanchemain passed to her with most particular care, adding to it the top of a cup of cream.

‘She is our spoiled child,’ said she to George.—‘Now we will go with you to take a walk in our park. We have only to open the door.’

In fact, the family found themselves presently afterward under the verdant arches of the forest. George gave his arm to Madame Blanchemain; the two sisters walked beside them, some times apart. When they were near the Chateau du Val, they made a halt at the top of the hill, and a delightful spectacle met their sight. The solitude, the silence, all acted upon the imagination. George found himself seated near Jeanne, and they had nothing to say to each other. Had she not given him her hand, had she not said to him, raising towards him an earnest look, ‘I have need of your advice?’ It was really so.

According to the custom of visitors who come to walk in this part of the majestic forest, they went out by the royal gate. There is a sudden transition which strikes all visitors, and which cannot be found perhaps in any other place in the world.

Coming out of a dim light, one leaves the mysterious shelter of dark shadows, so like the side chapels of a cathedral with stained windows, to find himself facing a radiant immensity. One has before him the open sky, and from the raised circular platform which commands the landscape, one sees beneath his feet the living world, with its great river which waters it, its numerous villages which enliven it, its fertile fields which furnish bread and wine, its woods which give shadow in Summer, and fire in Winter, its graceful hills which adorn the amphitheatre.—Pursuing with their eyes this changing spectacle, they return to the parterre and to the old chateau.

It was necessary now to remember more serious matters. They gravely discussed; they grouped the flowers to make harmonies or contrasts, according to the principles of the master; they aided nature; they chatted together while working in this chamber, where all breathed of taste and art, in the midst of virtuous poverty.—Thus a crystal cup was encircled by a wreath of wheat ears, forming a graceful group. Some familiar books of the best and purest authors, gave evidence of the preferences of the inhabitants of the cottage; some sketch books recalled interesting views in the forest. A portrait of a woman, an excellent pastel, worthy of Latour, was hung in the best position the room afforded. It attracted George’s attention.

‘It is the portrait of my mother,’ said Jeanne, ‘how well the eyes are painted. They seem as if looking at you.’

There was nothing more said.

But how quickly the time passed. George arose; he must go.

Jeanne arose also and extended her hand to him.

‘Already!’ she said to him with a meaningful smile.

It was like an atonement for the cruel word of the other day. And they separated, but not without agreeing that they should see each other again on the following Sunday, for the inspection of the week’s work, and to prepare for the next.

Madame Blanchemain, while showing him out, said to him in a low tone—

‘I am satisfied with you. Have good heart; you have made to-day a little progress.’

### XXII.—THE EXILE.

‘Everything in nature, according to the law of God, must follow a movement of progress or decay. Nothing is permanent, nothing is unchangeable. The sun, pale at his rising, ascends to the zenith, and falls again, extinguishing his light in the waves. The sea stirs; then is agitated, then sends its foam rushing up the cliff; then, exhausted with its vain efforts, it becomes only a mirror reflecting the image of the balcony as it flutters above it. The plants, animated by the sap of spring, rise towards heaven their vigorous stalks, until summer withers them, and renders them the sport of the winds. Poor human beings! it is thus with your feelings; reason is not always a sufficient guide to hold them in wise limits.’

Thus it was that George’s visits became each Sunday more intimate. Thus it was that one