

never wrote to each other. I heard sometimes from strangers, that she was somewhat faded, but that she was surrounded by a coterie of young men particularly poets and artists, to whom her open table was very agreeable. Then I learned that her husband was dead, and the poets who formed her court were middle-aged enthusiasts and mystics, protestant catholics, and that Augustina herself was much given to romancing, and some of her poetical effusions had graced the last Almanac of the Muses.

At the same time in which I received a new order from the Minister to visit the court, I also had a letter from Augustina, consulting me on a lawsuit in which she had become involved with some of the relatives of her late husband, and requesting my advice and presence in the affair. I was glad that my approaching visit to the city gave me an opportunity to comply with her request.

I was forty, Augustina the same. She could not be so dangerous to me as she was ten years before. This time I went the second day after my arrival in the city, without any heart-beating, to her house. I had sent before to know what time she would receive me, because I had been told she was seldom alone, being generally surrounded by fashionable poets, listening to or reading romantic jingle, talking religious mysticism, or at the card table with ancient ladies and gentlemen,—for play had become her passion. Her former friends, male and female, whom I had seen about her ten years before, had fallen off from her, for they were no longer sufficient for her. She was known throughout the city for her venomous tongue, was at enmity with every-body and if one wished to know the city news, Madame von Winter was the person to visit. This I had heard from two of the former friends of Augustina, whom ten years before I used to meet at her house. Hum—thought I,—but these good friends are also ten years older, and perhaps have themselves some disposition to slander, or as they call it in the city, scandal.

It was a summer evening, and as I entered Augustina's house, the servant told me her lady was with company in the garden. I went,—ah! the well known garden of my childhood! For the sake of affording the subject for a little joke with Augustina, I wore her gold ring, which she had, twenty years before, given me in exchange for the powder one. Now the garden and the ring, the Chinese temple before me, I could not remain entirely unmoved.

"Is your lady alone?" I said to the servant on the way.

"No, she has company, only a few persons."

I entered the temple. There sat, at two tables, two parties, engaged so deeply in playing cards, that they hardly saw me. I recognized Augustina.—Oh, all-powerful Time! how changed! No, there was no danger now. I reflected with delight on my Adela.

Augustina was so engrossed in play, that she only saluted me, and begged me to excuse her a moment until she could finish the game. When this was over, she arose, overpowered me with civil speeches and questions, ordered refreshments for me, and offered me cards. I declined this, as I did not understand the game.

"In heaven's name," said she, "then how do you kill time, if you do not play cards? it seems unaccountable in a man of your spirit."

She resumed her play; the game was faro. The banker had great luck; all the money of the players soon lay before him. Every passion here shone out in the burning cheeks, the piercing eyes, the compressed lips. The banker was radiant with pleasure.

"I have stripped you all quickly," said he. "We were speaking just now, of my very costly diamond," and he displayed a ring on his finger. "I will stake it in a lottery against all the rings in the company."

Eagerly and with longing eyes they all viewed the diamond. They accepted the proposal. Madame von Winter said:

"Rings trouble me at cards; I have none on." But she looked at me; "apropos, my friend you are very kind, and will lend yours for the moment."

Surprised at the request, I drew off Augustina's ring and reached it to her. "You see, my lady, it is yours; you may remember it."

She looked hastily at it, and saying, "So much the better," threw it into the pool with the rest, and fixed her eyes upon the diamond. But the rings were all lost. The banker won. Even the holy ring of our first love was gone, and on the very spot where in tears I had received it. Oh, all-powerful Time, how dost thou overturn everything!

We went to supper. The guests were in good humour; Augustina forced herself to appear gay which gave to her features a disagreeable contortion. The wine was applied to, to raise the tone of conversation; it became more gay, but not more wise. The news of the city was discussed; their acquaintances and the secret histories of them passed in review. The conversation did not lack wit so much as charity, and to my great grief Augustina was the most full in wicked