

“Monsieur—Valmond!”

Her trembling hands were stretched out before her yearningly. The Curé moved. She turned towards the sound with a pitiful vagueness.

“Valmond, oh Valmond!” she cried again beseechingly.

The cloak dropped from her shoulders, and the loose robe enveloping her fell away from a bosom that throbbed with the stifling passion of a great despair.

Nothing but silence.

She moved to the wall like a little child feeling its way, ran her hand along it, and touched a crucifix. With a moan she pressed her lips to the nailed feet, and came on gropingly to the couch. She reached down towards it, but drew back as if in affright; for a dumb, desolating fear was upon her.

But with that direful courage which is the last gift to the hopeless, she stretched forth again, and her fingers touched Valmond's cold hands. They ran up his breast, to his neck, to his face, and fondled it, as only life can fondle death, out of that pitiful hunger which never can be satisfied in this world; and then moved with an infinite tenderness to his eyes, now blind like hers, and lingered there in the kinship of eternal loss.

A low, anguished cry broke from her:

“Valmond—my love! my love!” and she fell forward upon the breast of her lost Napoleon.