

managed to preserve his incognito; and it was not until passion had asserted full mastery over the hearts of both, that Madame de Montbazon discovered her secret lover in the person of the handsome and gifted Abbe. It was to both a dream, such as had never before visited their waking thoughts; it was a first and passionate love, for, however inconstant each might once have seemed, other attachments were but the semblance, while this was the reality of affection. Tainted as they were, by evil contact, the voluptuous priest, and the court beauty were, for the first time, sensible of disinterested love, and henceforth the character of both seemed to lose the selfishness which had once been their most striking trait. Yet their love was a crime, and however their guilt might be palliated to the eyes of the world by the licentiousness that prevailed around them, in the sight of Heaven, the sin was too dark and deadly to escape its reward. But the heart of the lover was of far different mould from that of his volatile mistress. There was a wealth of tenderness in his bosom of which she never dreamed. His capacity for loving exceeded hers in a tenfold degree, and all the powers of his noble nature, all the energies of his gifted mind, were concentrated upon this affection. Her dazzling beauty, her bewitching gentleness, her fond blandishments, had completely captivated his senses, and the treasures of his gifted intellect were flung like grains of incense on the shrine of her loveliness. But the fire that burned before the idol, was an unhallowed flame—the smoke of the incense ascended not up to Heaven, and the punishment which ever awaits the deeds of ill, did not spare the denizen of courtly splendour.

As one of the charms of their intercourse was the mystery in which it was involved, the Duchess de Montbazon had given her lover a private key which admitted him by a secret staircase to her dressing-room; and thus they were accustomed to meet without the cognizance of the lady's most confidential domestics. Months had passed without awakening

either from their delirium of passion, when, at length, business compelled De Rance to leave Paris, and summoning a degree of resolution of which he was scarcely capable, he repaired to their usual trysting-place to bid her farewell. The lady had just returned from a ball at the Tuilleries, where the lovers had met each other with the careless glance and frivolous words, which served to hide their secret from the eye of prying curiosity. Throwing off her velvet robe, heavy with its embroidery of seed pearls, and loosing her beautiful tresses from the cumbrous head-gear prescribed by the fashion of the times, Madame de Montbazon dismissed her attendants, and awaited the visit of her lover. Never had she looked more enchanting than on that evening. A wrapping-gown of dark flowered silk, displayed the beauty of a form usually encased in the stiff hoop; while her dark tresses fell upon her fair brow and bosom in all the unadorned loveliness of simple nature. Such was the creature who sprang with joy to greet the coming step of the young Abbe, and who lay, weeping upon his bosom, when the hour of parting came. Again and again he bade her farewell—again and again he pressed her to his beating heart, and, as he kissed her fair round cheek, he dared to breathe a sacrilegious prayer that Heaven would watch over the object of his guilty love.

Two short weeks only had elapsed, when the Abbe de Rance, impatient of his exile, unexpectedly returned to Paris. It was late in the evening when he reached his hotel, and, as he summoned his valet to assist at his toilet, he anticipated the joyful surprize which his sudden return would afford his beautiful mistress. Wrapping his manteau about him, and slouching his hat close over his eyes, he hurried to the abode of the Duchess of Montbazon, and reached the private portal just at the hour of twelve. Noiselessly making his way up the narrow stairs, he approached the secret door, and paused to listen ere he ventured to uncloset it. But all was still, and his heart beat high as he imagined his