

in inopportune circumstances. At about the same time, Clement Derville, her late husband's confidential clerk, a steady, persevering, clever person, took possession of the deceased ship broker's business premises on the quay, the precious savings of fifteen years of industrious frugality enabling him to install himself in the vacant commercial niche before the considerable connection attached to the well-known establishment was broken up and distributed amongst rival courts. Such vicissitudes, frequent in all trading communities, excite but a passing interest; and after the customary commonplace commiseration of the fallen fortunes of the still youthful widow, and gratulatory good-wishes for the prosperity of the *ex-deroi* clerk, the matter gradually faded from the minds of the sympathisers, save when the rapidly rising fortunes of Derville, in contrast with the daily lowlier ones of Madame de la Tour, suggested some tritely sentimental reflection upon the precariousness and instability of all mundane things. For a time, it was surmised by some of the fair widow's friends, if not by herself, that the considerable services Derville had rendered her were prompted by a warmer feeling than the ostensible one of respect for the relic of his old and liberal employer; and there is no doubt that the gentle, graceful manners, the mild staid face of Madame de la Tour, had made a deep impression upon Derville, although the hope or expectation founded thereon vanished with the passing time. Close, money-loving, business-absorbed as he might be, Clement Derville was a man of vehement impulse and extreme susceptibility of female charm—weaknesses over which he had again and again resolved to maintain vigilant control, as else fatal obstacles to his hopes of realizing a large competence, if not a handsome fortune. He succeeded in doing so; and as year after year glided away, leaving him richer and richer, Madame de la Tour, poorer and poorer, as well as less and less personally attractive, he grew to marvel that the bent form, the clouded eyes, the sorrow-sharpened features of the woman he occasionally met hastening along the streets, could be those by which he had been once so powerfully agitated and impressed.

He did not, however, form any new attachment, was still a bachelor at forty-five; and had for some years almost lost sight of, and forgotten; Madame de la Tour, when a communication from Jeanne Favart, an old servant who had lived with the De la Tours in the days of their prosperity, vividly recalled old and fading memories. She announced that Madame de la Tour had been for many weeks confined to her bed by illness, and was, moreover, in great pecuniary distress.

"*Diantre!*" exclaimed Derville, a quicker and stronger pulse than usual tingling his sallow cheek as he spoke. "That is a pity. Who, then, has been winding the business for her?"

"Her daughter Marie, a gentle, pious child, who seldom goes out except to church, and," added Jeanne, with a keen look in her master's countenance, "the very image of the Madame de la Tour we knew some twenty years ago."

"Ha!" M. Derville was evidently disturbed, but not so much so as to forget to ask with some asperity if "dinner was not ready?"

"In five minutes," said Jeanne, but still hold-

ing the half-opened door in her hand. "They are very, very badly off, monsieur, those unfortunate De la Tours," she persisted. "A *huissier* this morning seized their furniture and trade-stock for rent, and if the sun is not made up by sunset, they will be utterly ruined."

M. Clement Derville took several hasty turns about the room, and the audible play of his fingers amongst the Napoleons in his pockets inspired Jeanne with a hope that he was about to draw forth a sufficient number for the relief of the cruel necessities of her former mistress. She was mistaken. Perhaps the touch of his beloved gold stilled for a time the agitation that had momentarily stirred his heart.

"It is a pity," he murmured; and then briskly drawing out his watch, added sharply: "But pray let us have dinner. Do you know that it is full seven minutes past the time that it should be served?"

Jeanne disappeared, and M. Derville was very soon seated at table. But although the sad tidings he had just heard had not been able to effectually loosen his purse-strings, they had at least powerfully to destroy his appetite, albeit the *poulet* was done to a turn. Jeanne made no remark on this, as she removed the almost untasted meal, nor on the quite as unusual fact, that the wine *carafe* was already half emptied, and her master himself restless, dreamy, and preoccupied. Concluding, however, from these symptoms, that a fierce struggle between generosity and avarice was going on in M. Derville's breast, she quietly determined on bringing an auxiliary to the aid of generosity, that would, her woman's instinct taught her, at once decide the conflict.

No doubt the prosperous ship-broker was unusually agitated. The old woman's news had touched a chord which, though dulled and slackened by the heat and dust of seventeen years of busy, anxious life, still vibrated strongly, and awakened memories that had long slept in the chambers of his brain, especially one pale Madonna face, with its soft, tear-trembling eyes that—

"*Ciel!*" he suddenly exclaimed, as the door opened and gave to view the very form his fancy had conjured up. "*Ciel!* can it be—Pshaw!" he added, as he fell back into the chair from which he had leaped up; "you must suppose me crazed, Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle de la Tour, I am quite certain."

It was indeed Marie de la Tour whom Jeanne Favart had, with much difficulty, persuaded to make a personal appeal to M. Derville. She was a good deal agitated, and gladly accepted that gentleman's gestured invitation to be seated, and take a glass of wine. Her errand was briefly, yet touchingly told, but not apparently listened to by Derville, so abstracted and intense was the burning gaze with which he regarded the confused and blushing petitioner. Jeanne, however, knew whom he recognised in those flushed and interesting features, and had no doubt of the successful result of the application.

M. Clement Derville had heard and comprehended what was said, for he broke an embarrassing silence of some duration by saying, in a pleased and respectful tone: "Twelve Napoleons, you say, mademoiselle. It is nothing: here are twenty. No thanks, I beg of you. I hope to