

lowance of purgatory by this time, and be now sleeping in profoundest rest!

You have bidden me write my history, my Father, before I die, and I accept the penance, but it is the bitterest you could have inflicted. You have seen how my tongue failed, and my lips refused to speak, when I strove to tell you by word of mouth the history of the last few weeks of my life. The last, do I say? Ay indeed the last, for I know well that I shall never leave this bed till I seek rest in one narrower and darker. Oh, that my soul might sleep there with my body! Oh, that eternal forgetfulness might be mine, instead of eternal memory and wakefulness! But if even now I never close my eyes without the scene of my crime and my agony being present with me—if I never sleep but to dream of it—how far worse will it be when the faintness leaves me which is now my only relief? Oh! it is terrible to think of existing for years, perhaps for centuries, with my brain and heart on fire with pain as they are now, and that without the body which at length gives me rest by refusing to suffer more. Yet if I die without his forgiveness—my Father, I dare not face the future. I will strive to collect my thoughts, and relate all that you would know.

I was born in Switzerland, in a little village on the shores of the lake of Geneva. My father was a doctor, and as he possessed a little property of his own, we were rather better off than our neighbours, and I was sent for my education to one of the best convents in the neighbourhood. Here I passed my time peacefully for several years, and on leaving it at fifteen I learnt that my parents had promised me in marriage to a young lawyer, the son of an old friend of my father's. I saw him for the first time the next day. He was tall and handsome, and at fifteen a girl's heart is easily won. We loved each other almost from the first moment of our meeting, and it was agreed that our betrothal should take place as soon as the few months had expired that were wanting to complete the year of mourning for his mother. According to the rules of etiquette, we should not have been allowed to be alone together till after that ceremony; but my parents were not strict, and I used to wander for hours with André by the shores of the lake, listening to the songs of the birds, and to the sounds of the sweetest voice, save one, I have ever heard. One afternoon towards the end of May, we were strolling there as usual. The heat was unusually great for the time of the year, and we had been sitting close to the water's edge, listening to its soft cool murmur, and watching its tiny waves rippling in the sun. Ah, how happy we were! We wandered slowly on, saying a word now and then, until we came to a large old tree, at the foot of which a man was lying apparently asleep. We had passed him, when something in his attitude attracted André's attention, and he turned back and touched his shoulder. No movement answered. I stood a few paces off, trembling I knew not why. André bent down for a moment and looked at his face; then he turned to me. "Marie," he said, "I fear he has had a sun-stroke; he has fainted. He ought to have medical advice at once. I can easily carry him to your father's. Go on and prepare them—it may save his life." A cold chill seemed to come over me and my happiness, but I obeyed in silence. Of course, living where we did, I have seen persons suffering from sun-stroke before. I knew what a dangerous thing it was; and with a heart full of compassion I hastened home, and before André could arrive with his burden, my mother and I had made our only spare room ready to receive the sufferer. My Father, surely I may hurry over what followed. That was not my crime, and I do not think that to dwell upon it need be a part of my penance. The young stranger was a Frenchman; and for many and many a week I helped my mother to nurse him. His illness was long and dangerous, but he had youth on his side, and a strong constitution. My father at length pronounced him convalescent. Alas! I helped as well as I could to amuse his slow recovery; and before he was well, before—I must do him the justice to say—he had heard of my engagement to André—he had asked me

in marriage from my father! Poor old father, he was dazzled, and so was my mother, by the stranger's proposals. Perhaps so was I, too, for I did not make the strong resistance that might have turned them from their purpose; but it is not the custom in Switzerland for a girl to dispute her father's will in the question of marriage. Enough. Before the day came that was to have witnessed my betrothal to André, I was married to Monsieur de M., heir presumptive to one of the noblest titles and finest estates in France. He explained his prospects to my father with the utmost frankness. He was heir to his cousin, the Duc de B., who with his wife was already passed middle life and was childless. I believe the idea of what my son would succeed to was even then the prominent one in my mind, as it certainly was in my father's, who exulted in the thought that a grandson of his should be born to such greatness. We were married; and lived—well not unhappily—for about a year, when my husband, who had never quite recovered the effects of the sun-stroke, was attacked by a fever, which in a few hours was fatal, and, oh, I shame to say it! his loss was hardly enough to cloud my supreme joy and pride in the birth of my baby-boy. My treasure! my own darling! I think you would forgive your wretched mother even now if you could know the immense tenderness and devotion that filled my heart to overflowing every time that I looked at you, or held you to my breast in those first days of your life. I was so proud too—so proud of my baby, and so proud of his prospects, for they were very brilliant. His cousin was now upwards of fifty, and had the reputation of having amassed great wealth during his long possession of the B. estates, and though he considered my husband's marriage a mésalliance, and never took any notice of me, yet as my boy grew up he sent for him to Paris, and undertaking the charge of his education, publicly proclaimed him his heir. I let him go, my darling, and never once murmured at all those long years during which I scarcely saw him. Was it not for his good that he should be separated from me? The Duchesse de B. had died, and it was natural that the Duc should wish for the society of his heir. I had moved meanwhile to this neighbourhood. These springs had been recommended for my health, and the journey hither from Switzerland was too long to be undertaken every year. At length the time came when my boy was twenty; and his cousin placed him in the French army. He wrote to me that he was coming to pay me a visit—coming to show himself to me for the first time in his uniform. I shall never forget the day when he arrived. I had expected him all the afternoon; and at last when night began to fall, I fancied he would not come till the next day, and was sitting wondering what could have delayed him, when the ring came at the anteroom bell which announced my boy's arrival. I flew to the door, and stopped, trembling, when I saw the tall strong form standing on the threshold. Could that be my boy whom I had rocked on my knees as it seemed but yesterday? A second decided it.

"My mother!" he said, and almost lifted me in his arms.

"My son!" And in a moment the time since we parted was all nothing. How noble he looked in his blue uniform, with his bright brown eyes and black curly hair. And yet when I came to watch him quietly, there was something in his look which troubled me. He was much handsomer than he had been when he left me, but his expression then had been all sparkling gladness and merriment, while now there was a look of grief about the lines of his mouth when in repose that made me feel a vague uneasiness lest he should have some sorrow which I did not know.

After supper, we were sitting over the fire, chatting dreamily of one thing and another, when my boy roused himself suddenly, and said, "Of course, you have heard the news, mother?"

"What news?" I asked. "You forget what an out-of-the-way place this is—the last that news comes to."

He paused an instant, and then said with an effort, "Only that the Duc de B. is going to be married."

Heavens! how the blood seemed to rush from my heart, leaving me pale and sick. The news I heard seemed ruin to my boy! Could it be true? Was it, indeed, for this that I had deprived myself of the very light of my eyes for so many years? I tried to speak calmly, but the words came slowly, and my voice was thick.

"To be married, and at his age—impossible!"

"Too true, however, my mother," said Henri, "He will be a young bridegroom of just seventy-two. Monday week is fixed for the marriage. I shall go up in time to drink my fair cousin's health at the wedding."

The bitterness of my disappointment could no longer be repressed.

"Oh, my boy, my boy! how cruel! how terrible for you! Why did I ever send you away to that hateful Paris, to be separated from me for so long, and ruined at last?"

"Ay, why, indeed, mother?" he answered lightly, and yet with a sort of earnestness in his voice. "It was a grand mistake, but it is too late to think of that now. Don't you want to know something about the bride? How happy she must be to-night, eh, mother?" and there was something like a sneer upon his face.

"What do I care about her?" I answered, gloomily, "well; who is she?"

"Mademoiselle Caroline de D., aged seventeen, six weeks ago. Bah!" he added, rising and walking up and down the room, "it's a bad business. These marriages do convenience are hateful things—a blot upon France. Well, my news is told now, and we won't talk of it any more. Why, I came down here on purpose to forget it and enjoy myself."

Then he stooped and kissed me, and no more was said; but it was a heavy, heavy heart that I carried to my bed that night.

My boy stayed with me till Sunday week, and then returned to Paris, unaccountably, as it seemed to me, to attend his cousin's wedding, and I was left alone to cherish all the bitter feeling excited by the news he had brought. The marriage duly took place. I read the account of it in the paper—the description of the bride's beauty, and the list of her splendid presents; and about a year and a half later, I read in the same paper the birth of her son,—the boy was to snatch the inheritance from mine. My Father, I believe the devil entered into my heart that day, and instead of driving him out, I welcomed him, and nourished my impotent anger against the authors of my grief, until it became a consuming fire. Ah, how rapidly and how fatally it has consumed all my happiness.

In the morbid state of my mind at that time, I used to read greedily all news of the de B. family that I could find in the papers—the rejoicings at the birth of the heir—the feasting at the family place; and then I heard no more of them for some time, except that the old Duc had had a paralytic stroke, and was now a cripple, although still in perfect possession of his mental faculties. At length, about three years after the birth of the baby—oh, my Father, little more than a month ago—I received a letter which threw me into an indescribable turmoil of mind. It was from the Duc de B.; a few short and cold lines, saying that his infant son, having shown signs of delicate health, had been recommended mountain air by the physicians, and he therefore trespassed upon my well-known kindness so far as to request that I would receive the little boy at C. and take charge of him for—an indefinite period. The letter concluded by saying that as the Duc felt confident that I should not refuse to do him this favour, he should not think it necessary to await my reply, but should send the child by the first opportunity, and as would be no doubt most agreeable to me, he would entrust the selection of an attendant to my care, and the child would be left at my house quite alone. The next day he arrived—a fine, rosy, healthy boy. Bah! they could not deceive me by the shallow pretence of ill-health. I felt at once that the father must want to be rid of the child, or he would never have sent it to me—to me who hated it. Heaven help me! I believed, fool that I was! that it was his love for my son, the heir he had educated and cared for for so many years, that had poisoned his affection for his own