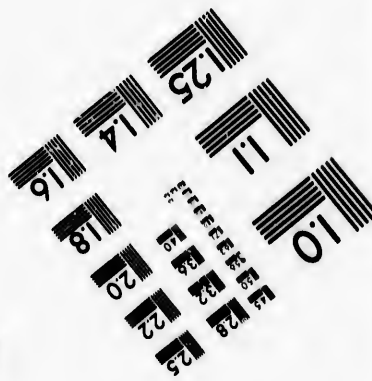
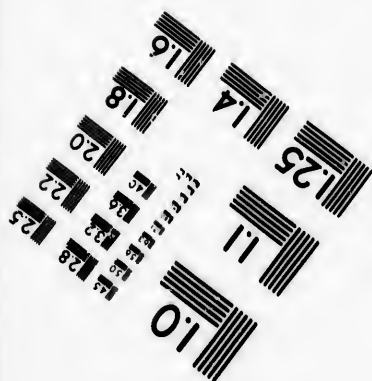
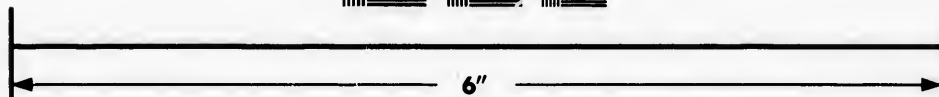
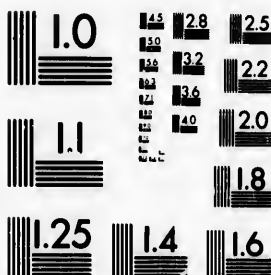


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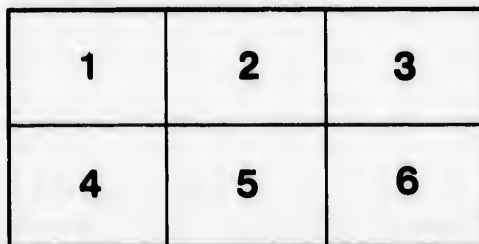
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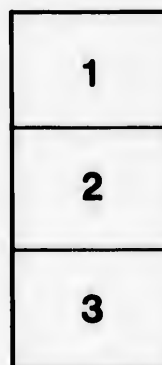
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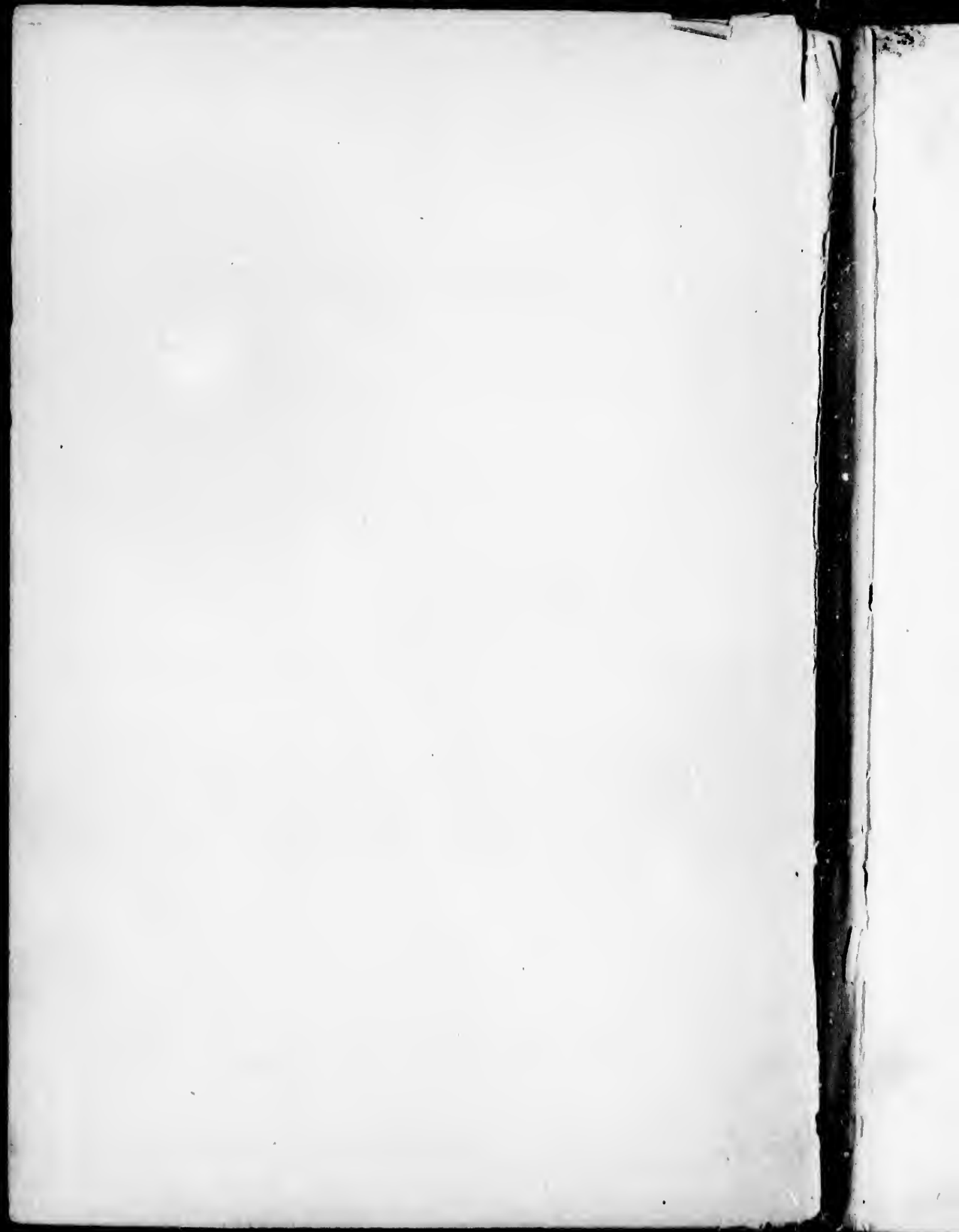
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THE  
HAUNTED FOUNTAIN

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID

AUTHOR OF "PATTY," "AT THE RED GLOVE," ETC.

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TORONTO:  
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# THE HAUNTED FOUNTAIN

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## PROLOGUE.

HE sun had had his own way all day long; not so much as a cloud had ventured to dispute his possession of the deep blue sky. The cracks on the parched ground seemed to widen under the scorching blaze; the chestnut-trees in the park of the Château drooped their great leaves as if the August day had been too much for them; the slates on the cottage just within the park looked many-coloured in the sunshine. In the small field behind the cottage the fragile stems of white buckwheat blossoms gleamed like threads of blood. It seemed surprising that the bunches of

green filberts, nestling in the hedge round the little homestead, had not browned under so much heat.

A large chestnut-tree threw broad masses of shadow over the hot clay front of the cottage. A boy with a sunburnt face stood leaning against the chestnut trunk, as if he found the leaf-shelter welcome. The lad was thirteen, and well grown; but he was thin and plain. The earnestness of his face, and a certain resolute look, made it remarkable, and one forgot his sallow complexion and irregular features. A child sat on a little stool beside him, in every way a perfect contrast to her companion. She was only nine years old, and she looked like a little fairy; tiny, delicate features, eyes of golden hazel, looking up through shadowy, auburn lashes, with seemingly a tear ready to fall from them; a skin like a pale rose-leaf; hair, as much of it as her close-fitting linen cap allowed to be seen, bright auburn. She kept her eyes fixed on the boy's face, and two hot, bright tears fell on her lilac pinafore.

His eyes had not left her. "Why do you cry, Liline?" he said, tenderly.

"If you were a girl you would cry too."

There was archness in the sweet voice. Liline had sharp eyes, and she knew that Gustave had hard work to keep his tears back. She went on, however, sadly:

"It is so much better for you, you know; you are going back to Paris, and in the holidays you will come to the Château and be happy; but I shall never see you again, never"—she shook her head.

"I shall not come back," the boy said, firmly. "I shall not care to come when you are not here; but it is nonsense to say you will not see me again; you are my wife, Liline, and I am your husband. When I can make a home for you, I shall find out where you are, and I shall marry you."

He was not looking at Liline now, his eyes were fixed on the great fan-like leaves overhead;

for all his manful determination there were real tears in his dark, sunken eyes.

Liline moved her stool closer to him, and then she nestled her lovely little face against the sunburnt hand that hung down beside him.

"Dear Gustave," she murmured, "dear Gustave"—she rubbed softly against him.

He pinched her cheek; but after that he stood silent. He had nothing to begin life with but a determined will, a strong power of self-control, and a warm love for all that seemed to him good and true; but Gustave Chauvin was an orphan, and he owed his education and his entire support to his mother's cousin, the Marquis de Vougay. The Marquis was dead, but he had invested a sum of money to be applied to the education and placing in life of his cousin's son, Gustave Chauvin.

Many people said that when they were young, the Marquis and his cousin, Marie de Vougay, had been deeply attached, but that as the house of De Vougay had lost much of its former wealth, the

young Marquis had been compelled to make a wealthy marriage; and that his cousin, Mademoiselle Marie, had remained single ten years for his sake; then, being of age to do what she pleased, she married Gustave Chauvin, a young cavalry officer, who died when his son was an infant, and before he had time to make a suitable provision for him. Marie Chauvin soon followed her husband, and the Marquis de Vougay took the charge of her child upon himself.

Gustave had been brought up with his second cousin, Lucien. Since her husband's death, the Marquise de Vougay had tried to follow out his wishes by treating the orphan as if he really were her second son. Gustave was so steady and truthful, so honourable, and so persevering, that she really found more comfort in him than she did in her own handsome Lucien. Without any decided vices, Lucien was a scapegrace; his love of amusement led him into frolicsome escapades, that more than once had nearly caused his expulsion

from college; and he was never trusted, as Gustave was, alone in the old Château in Brittany, under the joint care of the steward Étienne, the curé Monsieur Édouin, and the garde champêtre Basil Grignan, Liline's maternal grandfather.

It was not from any neglect that Madame de Vougay had sent the young fellow to the Château these last two summer holidays. She had been warned by Lucien's tutor that although there was affection between the cousins, there was no sympathy, and that Lucien's example was very bad for Gustave. So in the holidays the Marquise had paid visits to her friends, and had sent Lucien and his tutor on their travels. She had never visited the old Breton Château since her husband's death; but she knew that Gustave loved it, and in sending him there she considered that she had cared for him in all ways; Monsieur le Curé would be his companion, Étienne would provide for all his bodily comforts, and old Basil would help him to make war on the rabbits, and in any

outdoor sport he had a wish for. She did not know that little Liline Vivier was the attraction that made Gustave's life so happy at Vougay.

Liline was only a child, but the boy was fascinated by her. He used to stand watching her exquisite little face, now sparkling with sunny smiles, or else pensive with tearful eyes, though the sight of Gustave usually brightened her into content. Then her talk was so quaint and pretty, and all her little ways were as dainty as her face was. When he went back to Paris, Gustave used to dream about the bewitching little creature. Sometimes he fancied he could feel her tiny hand in his, or see her flying like a little fairy as they played hide-and-seek beneath the chequered light and shade of the chestnuts in the woods at Vougay. He never spoke of Liline to any one, but the quiet boy said to himself: "Yes, I have only to work and to do right, and when the time comes I shall marry Liline, and I shall see her always."

She was his aim in life, and, young as he

was, she was the mainspring of his diligence and of his success in his classes. To him Liline was perfect; he longed to take her away from the old grandfather, who often scolded her, and to help her in the care required by her invalid mother.

Her grandfather had lately died. A new garde had been appointed, and in a few days Liline and her mother were going to an aunt near Rouen. They would stay there, Monsieur le Curé said, till Liline's father, Baptiste Vivier, had served his time in the army, then, perhaps, they would go elsewhere; but Baptiste would not get his discharge for eight years or so.

"Can you write, Liline?" Gustave said, presently. "You said you were going to learn, you know."

Liline shook her head.

"The road was so bad all the winter, I could not go to school. My aunt will teach me herself, she says."

"Has your aunt any employment?"

Liline hung her head.

"Yes," she pouted, "she is an embroideress, and she says she shall teach me also to embroider ; but I shall not like it, it will be so dull. How can I run and jump as I do now? I must sit still and sew—sew—sew."

She gave him a lovely smile, as she mimicked the close attention and the rapid, deft stitches she had watched in her aunt's work.

For a minute it seemed hard to Gustave that this playful, pretty creature should have to do anything she disliked, and then his natural independence helped his judgment.

"But, Liline," he said, "if your aunt is going to do so much for you, it will be well to do something for her ; and look here, you must learn to write very soon, then you can send me a letter now and then."

She laughed at this ; but the sadness came into her face again, and Gustave saw how much she grieved at leaving Vougay.

"After all," he said, in a cheerful tone, "this has not always been your home, dear child. Your mother says, till you were four years old you lived in Normandy."

Liline looked at him fixedly.

"I'll tell you something, Gustave."

"Is it a secret?" He bent down and put his ear to her lips.

She shook her head and gently pushed him away.

"No—I always forget grandfather's dead—it was only a secret from grandfather. This is my secret—I want to see Monsieur Lucien, and now, of course, there is no chance. Why are you frowning, Gustave?"

"Am I?"

He was ashamed of the sudden annoyance that took possession of him.

"Yes. Why should I not want to see Monsieur Lucien? He will be lord and master here when he is older. He will be called Monsieur le Marquis.

Mother says he is beautiful and rich; he will never have to work. Ah, how happy he will be!"

"Rich people are not always the happiest."

She looked at him doubtingly.

"You are wise very often, grandfather said you were wise; but you are sometimes wrong, Gustave. Grandfather told me that was the use of another life after this. He said rich people will not be the happiest there, as they are here. I know Lucien will be happy when he is master of Vougay. Yes, and he will have a beautiful lady for his wife, and she will have nothing to do but to put on new gowns and look at herself in the glass all day long. Ah, mon Dieu, think of that!" Her little face was pathetic.

Gustave burst out laughing.

"And you think that would be enough to make any one happy, eh, Liline?"

She drew up her little figure and said, gravely:

"Of course, it would make me very happy.

But I could not have told grandfather, you know ; he always scolded me for being vain."

Gustave stooped down and kissed her forehead. "You are a dear little goose," he said, "but I am not sure that you would like the Marquis. He does not care for children. Now I am going off to Monsieur le Curé ; he is teaching me to play chess. Good-bye till to-morrow, dear little one." He nodded, and was soon out of sight among the trees.

"Why should not Monsieur le Marquis like me?" Liline looked very thoughtful. "Every one likes me, so of course he will ; we shall see"—she gave a deep sigh—"no, I forgot, I shall never see Lucien because I am going away from Château Vougay."

## CHAPTER I.

### IN PARIS.



LARGE, dull room at the back of a great house in Paris. The walls are dark, but the mirrors on two sides lighten them. The furniture and the hangings are good and tasteful, but these have plainly come together by accident, relegations from several better rooms in the vast house. Their haphazard quality makes one at first sight mistake this chamber in the Hôtel de Vougay for a room in a lodging-house.

The three persons in the room were as incongruous as the furniture was. A dark-haired woman stood at a window, and two other persons, a middle-aged man and a girl, were beside a table littered with cuttings of silk and muslin, some of

which had fallen upon the polished wood floor. Any one who had seen Liline Vivier as a child would have recognised her lovely little face in the girl who stood talking to a bronzed, rough-looking man, with close-cropped hair and an almost red moustache, in which a few white hairs asserted themselves. Baptiste Vivier looked older than he was. He had received a severe wound in the thigh, and having got his discharge from the army, had come to Paris to claim Liline from her kind mistress, Madame de Vougay. Liline was just seventeen. Her mother did not long survive the removal to Rouen, and the girl had lived with her aunt till two years ago, when her old friend, Monsieur Édouin, the curé, had found her a post in the Hôtel de Vougay.

The Marquise fancied herself a poet, and she was in want of a secretary to set down her ideas as they flitted through her brain. The curé assured the lady that a girl of Liline's age, who could be treated as a child, and placed under the care of

Madame de Vougay's maid, Nathalie, would be in all ways more suitable as a secretary than a full-grown woman, who might attract the notice of the young master of Vougay. The Marquise took her old friend's advice but she smiled at his warning. She told him that her son, Lucien, was going to London with the new French Ambassador, and that he would certainly be away for two years.

Monsieur Édouin smiled back at her. He did not say that there were scandalous tales current about the young Marquis.

"Take care that Liline is kept upstairs," he said, "and completely out of sight. She is only a child of fifteen, but she is attractive."

He did not fear that the girl might renew her childish acquaintance with Gustave Chauvin. He was now a civil engineer, and was busy railroad-making in Spain.

Perhaps, if Monsieur Édouin had seen Liline to-day, he would have wondered how he

could have sent such a rare bit of flesh and blood to Paris.

Liline was fair, and she had little colour on her cheeks ; but the warm blood flushed up when her father told her he was proud to own such a daughter, her yellow-brown eyes had a grateful glow, as she looked sweetly up in his bronzed face.

“How soon can you be ready, my child?” Baptiste Vivier said.

The poor man had been so long parted from his home—except for rare visits few and far between—that he hungered to find himself once more beside a hearth of his own, with his beautiful child for companion. He looked at Liline in simple wonder. Truly she was like his dearly loved Caroline ; but then she was much more beautiful than Caroline had ever been. Liline’s self-possession, and her pretty, dainty ways, made him feel unworthy to be her father.

Liline turned towards the woman near the window. “How soon can I be ready, Nathalie?”

His daughter's familiar tone greatly impressed Baptiste Vivier. Mademoiselle Nathalie, who had received him yesterday on his arrival, had seemed to him a superior being. He had spoken to her as if she were a lady. He looked at his child with increased reverence.

"If I help you," Nathalie answered, in a purring voice, "you can be ready in less than an hour."

"Thank you," Liline said.

Baptiste noticed that although Mademoiselle Nathalie spoke softly, she did not smile; her sallow, shrunken face was like a mask, which would have been ugly but for her bright black eyes and a profusion of well-kept hair. Nathalie was plainly dressed, but her black gown showed a well-made figure, and there was a good deal of expression in her eyes in spite of her seeming self-restraint.

She went out, and Liline followed her into the next room, which looked into the front court-

yard. A box stood half packed near the window, and some chairs beside the box were heaped with a variety of articles. Liline began to fold some of these, while Nathalie knelt down before the box and deftly arranged in smaller space all that the girl had already placed there.

It was a chilly spring morning, and the window was closed ; but Liline was excited, and the room felt warm to her. She went to the window, opened it, and then she stood musing over the strange change which had come into her life since yesterday afternoon. She had grown so tired of her monotonous occupation, and of her dull shut-up life with Nathalie, that yesterday, when Madame de Vougay told her she had to choose between her present life and a cottage home with her father, Liline had not hesitated. She said at once she was ready and willing to leave the Hôtel de Vougay. Since then she had talked with her father, and his affection and his admiring deference had delighted her. Nathalie's constant

jealousy made her sometimes spiteful to Liline, and the girl felt delighted with the prospect of freedom.

Nathalie steadily went on packing; but a sound in the court-yard below drew Liline's eyes down to the flight of steps in front of the entrance.

A gentleman was getting off his horse. He flung his reins to the groom, and then he came slowly up the steps. Liline saw that he looked very handsome. He was pale, and he seemed languid; his eyes and fair hair and regular features reminded the girl of some face she had seen.

"Ah," she said, as a memory flashed on her, and she leaned out of window.

In an instant she felt Nathalie's arm round her waist, she was pulled back and the window was shut.

Nathalie's eyes looked very angry.

"Foolish, imprudent child," she said, "it is

indeed time you left the house; actually you have exposed yourself to attract the observation of a stranger."

Liline freed herself; then she curled her red full lips.

"I hate you," she said, coldly; "he would have looked up if you had kept quiet, and he would have seen me."

"And if he had, you vain puss, the gentleman would have gone away again as wise as he came."

Liline held up her round finger in rebuke, and shook her head.

"You are telling a story, Nathalie. You know who that was as well as I do. It was the Marquis himself. Chut! I know it. He is so like his mother, and so like the portrait that hangs in Madame's room. How spiteful you are, Nathalie, when you know how I have always longed to see him! I have a great mind to stay here."

Liline stood still, swelling with anger, but

Nathalie did not answer her. She finished packing with surprising quickness, then she rang and ordered a fly to take the Viviers and their baggage to the railway station. She also sent for Baptiste, and while she did all this she never once lost sight of Liline. She stayed beside her, and followed her down the back staircase, and saw Baptiste hand the girl into the fly. Then, as the father and daughter were driven out of the court-yard, Nathalie smiled.

"That was a narrow escape," she said. "If Monsieur Lucien had seen her he would have followed her to Vougay."

## CHAPTER II.

### A NEW LIFE.

**I**T is autumn again, and the chestnut leaves have begun to turn colour; some of them lie dead at the foot of the huge, gray trunk, that shows its stout, twisted limbs far more plainly than it did ten years ago, on that hot August day, when Gustave and Liline talked under its shadow.

There is a change, too, in the cottage. To the clay wall that faced the original dwelling, an extra room has been added on each of the two floors. This addition, built of logs, has larger windows than any belonging to the old house, which, indeed, had been content with only one small window in front, and with the light that came in through the arched top of the entrance

door, the upper half of which always stood open in day-time. It is true a larger window at the back shed light into the long, low room, clay-floored, with a rack for provisions fixed to the ceiling beam, and box-beds in the wall on either side the hearth. Ten years ago this long kitchen had been all-sufficient as living and sleeping room for the old garde, his invalid daughter, and her little Liline. The woman who cooked for them and tidied up the place had lived some way off in a cottage near the church.

Since then a new garde had occupied the old house, and had died there just before Baptiste Vivier got his discharge from the army.

Madame de Vougay felt it hard that Liline should be so willing to leave her, but she was too kind to send the girl back to the clay-floored cottage, fresh from the luxuries to which two years in Paris had accustomed her. It was by the Marquise's orders that these additional rooms had been constructed, and while they were pre-

paring, the father and daughter received permission to occupy some of the out-of-the-way rooms in the Château.

The afternoon sun was so level that the chestnut-tree no longer screened his light. It came in at the wide window, and fell full on Liline's bright auburn hair as she sat bending over her needlework. It seemed to be easy work enough ; she was sewing a lace frill into the collar of a neat-looking black silk gown that lay across her knees, and yet she gave a deep sigh as she ended her task. She put her thimble away in her work-basket and looked out of window. The light made her crown of auburn hair glorious. It became a red-gold as the last gleams fell on it, and, by contrast, her fair skin looked paler than usual.

She had fulfilled her early promise. At nineteen she was as lovely a girl as could easily be found, although just now the beauty of her golden brown eyes was spoiled by their discontent ; her lips, too, looked as if they wanted to

quarrel. She put her hand in her pocket and pulled out a note. First she held it to her nose and said "Ah!" with satisfaction as she smelled the perfumed paper, then she looked for a minute at the coronets on the envelope and at the heading of the note, and then she read the delicate writing slowly through—the third reading since it had reached her. It was very short.

"DEAR CHILD" (it said), "you have, no doubt, heard that I was coming to Vougay. I have taken every one by surprise—and here I am. Your successor, Mademoiselle la Bouillerie, was too ill to accompany me, and it may be some weeks before she is well enough to come. Tell your father he must spare you to me while I am at Vougay; at least you must come to me while I am alone. I expect you to-morrow at ten o'clock. Étienne will send for your clothes.

"Your Friend,

"ANNE DE VOUGAY."

Liline kissed the letter and her discontent fled.

"Father will spare me—he must, the letter will show him how sweet she is; ah, why did I ever leave her?"

She replaced the note in the envelope and put it carefully on the little mantelshelf; then she looked at herself in the mirror above it. Liline smiled at what she saw, and a pretty pink flush came into her cheek; she felt that she was much prettier now than when she left the Marquise two years ago, and they had not met since that time. The blush was not all pleasure; Liline was a little ashamed, too. She looked at her hands—they were sunburnt, and she was not sure that the Marquise would like to see her with so much colour in her cheeks. In the confined life she had led in Paris, Liline had become pale. She had lived in two rooms, and, except on Sundays and on festivals, had taken her exercise in the garden of the Hôtel de Vougay;

even when she did go out with an old, staid bonne, the girl had become utterly weary of her seclusion in the midst of life, and when her father asked her to come to him, she had felt overjoyed, almost wild with delight at the prospect of freedom.

Liline went back to the window, and standing by it, she looked out—her eyes shaded by her well-shaped hand—in search of her father's tall figure among the trees.

"How late he is," she said, fretfully; "oh, if he would only come!"

She thought of him impatiently, angrily even. He stood between her, she thought, and all the refinements and luxuries which, in their absence, she had learned to long after. As she looked forward—with a desire that every moment became more passionate—to find herself once more installed in her former post, those long days of wearisome imprisonment were forgotten; all those heart-sick longings for the freedom she had

enjoyed with her aunt, and before that in her childhood, were blotted out. She now only remembered how soon she had tired of her father's company, and of his oft-repeated camp stories; she forgot how nice he had seemed at first, when his devotion to her was something new and unusual. He was kind to her, but he was too careful. On Sundays, as they came out of church, if one of the young farmers looked at her, Baptiste always hurried on; and he never offered to take her to any *pardon* or *fête*. It is true that Vougay was an isolated place, too small to have a *fête* of its own, and very far distant from the next hamlet.

Her father was slightly lame, and he did not possess a horse, or perhaps he might have given her this pleasure. She considered he was selfish, and that he wished to keep her at home. In the two long winters she had passed with him, Liline had found life even duller than it used to be in the Hôtel de Vougay. She was spared those

long hours of writing from the Marquise's dictation, but she had no decided occupation, nor had she the occasional chance of reading in secret one of the novels devoured by Nathalie.

Wonderful things happened in those stories to girls who had unusual beauty; and as the long dull days went on, Liline became more and more addicted to the contemplation of her own increasing loveliness, for the fresh country air and abundant exercise had developed it in a surprising manner, and she frequently told herself she was very pretty, and that she looked far more like a lady than like the daughter of a garde champêtre. She had noticed, as she stood before the glass, that when she felt discontented, a line came in the soft flesh between her delicate eyebrows; she remembered this now, and she left off frowning as she stood at the window.

To the left the chestnut-trees made a sort of grove, and coming across the rough ground below

them she saw her father, his straw hat and his shoulders in deep shadow, while the many buttons of his gaiters and brown velveteen breeches caught the gleaming sunbeams. His frank, genial face glowed with pleasure at the sight of Liline watching for his return. Baptiste was not a Breton, although he had taken a Breton wife, and he wore his hair cut almost as short as when he was a soldier. He held himself upright, and one scarcely noticed his lameness as he walked, looking now and then over his shoulder to make sure that Didi, a small brown mongrel, was at his heels.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

**L**ILINE went forward to the door ; in her heart she knew that she had not expected her father so soon, and she smiled as she held her forehead for his kiss.

He patted her on the shoulder. "Well, my darling, what has been happening? Has all gone well?"

"Yes, father."

Liline had planned the best way of getting his consent to Madame Vougay's request. Her novels had taught her always to avoid argument with a hungry man, and she had added a slice of ham to her father's supper, so that he might be extra content.

It seemed to her that he looked excited when

he presently joined her in the kitchen, and took his place at the long wooden table, at one end of which was a homespun cloth ; on this stood the steaming soup-bowls and the rest of the supper. But Baptiste was silent till she gave him his pipe. Then he placed himself on a bench beside the hearth, and began to smoke vigorously, while Liline cleared away the remains of the supper. It was almost the only household work she did as a matter of course.

Marie Jeanne did far more work in the house than old Barbe had ever done for the poor invalid mother years ago, but Marie Jeanne went away before supper. It is true that she was not yet forty, and that Barbe, her grandmother, had always been old ; but Liline's mother had been very gentle and easily pleased, and had put up with much discomfort and negligence. Certainly, Liline never complained ; but she had a dainty little way of looking fixedly at things that were dirty or dusty, which impressed Marie Jeanne, and

the poor ugly woman was so bewitched with her young mistress's beauty, that it seemed to her she could never try hard enough to please Liline.

To-night Liline felt degraded as she washed and wiped the bowls and plates.

"It is not fit work for me," she thought, "it spoils my hands; Marie Jeanne ought not to go home so soon."

"Liline, have you heard any news?" Baptiste was holding his pipe between his finger and thumb. He had been watching his daughter's sad, serious face.

She looked quickly at him, and she felt sure that he had heard of the châtelaine's arrival.

"Yes, I was waiting to tell you. I have a note from Madame herself."

Her eyes sparkled. Baptiste had not seen her look so gay for months, and he felt rejoiced.

"That is good; that is kind of Madame la Marquise—very kind. She did not arrive till three o'clock. She slept last night at Morlaix."

Well, my child, you must go up to-morrow or next day, and pay your respects." He went on smoking.

Liline's cheeks flushed, she could hardly hide her contempt; the notion that her father could teach her how to behave to her benefactress was so very absurd! What could such an old, rough soldier know about behaviour to a lady?

"She has sent for me, father, to go at once. Listen, I will read the note."

The smile left his bronzed face while he listened, and Liline might have seen his heavy gray moustache quiver, as if the lips beneath were in pain. He stretched his large hand out to take the letter. But Liline drew back. "I will read it again. You might grease it, and it is so sweet and nice, so just like her, dear lady."

Baptiste was frowning now, and the girl felt a little nervous. She came forward again, and held the letter open before him, so that he might read it himself.

When he had finished, he looked steadily at Liline, and he read her face as carefully as he had read the dainty writing of the Marquise. His chest heaved, and a strange, fixed look came into his face, a look that his comrades used to notice in the face of Baptiste Vivier before he went into action.

"Do you wish to do this, child?" He said it tenderly; but Liline felt sure that he did not want to let her go.

"Yes, father," she said, firmly, "I wish it more than I can say."

Baptiste sighed, then he frowned again; finally he put his pipe between his lips, and puffed out a volume of smoke. "When I came back," he began to speak, with his pipe in his mouth, so that the words sounded indistinct, "I noticed you were glad to leave the lady, and——"

He rose up, laid his pipe on the high mantel-shelf, and clasped his hands behind his back.

Liline pouted, and she raised her eyes from the dainty note in her hand.

"I inquired about your life, my child," Baptiste went on, "and you told me it was too dull to be borne. I ask myself, then, why does my girl wish to go back to this dull life?"

Liline looked away. The pain in his honest brown eyes hurt her; she could not bear to see it; she saw the reason he was giving to himself; he had discovered that he was not able to make her happy. She could not contradict him; it was the truth.

There was freedom in her cottage life, and it was good for her health and her appetite; but she was heartily tired of her plain, monotonous meals, and she wanted variety. When she complained to Monsieur le Curé, he had asked her to visit a poor, blind woman, who lived in a cottage in the park; he said also, she could teach this poor creature's child to read. But Liline had answered him that her father required all her time at home. The

curé saw that she came to church, and did all that could be expected of her; but, for all that, her answer troubled him, he feared that Baptiste must be selfish not to allow his daughter a little of her time to give to others.

"Father," she said, after a pause, "would it not be ungrateful if I were to refuse to oblige Madame? See how good she was about the house, and how much she did to make us comfortable, and she is all alone at the Château."

Baptiste looked hard at her. "Well, Liline," he said, "I don't want to be selfish, but as you have to live in a cottage, it is better to be content with it. I fancy the cottage is a safer place for you than the Château."

"Safer! father, when I am to be alone with Madame herself. What harm could I get from her?"

Her eyes were full of angry light, and her red lips looked rebellious.

Baptiste did not know how to answer the

spoiled child, but he felt in a dim way that no good could come of this visit to the Château; and then, while he stood dumbly staring at her, feeling that it would be selfish not to yield, as he could find no good reason to put in words, he remembered what the curé had said to him, when he met him two days before in the park. Monsieur Édouin had told him that Madame de Vougay was expected at the Château. Then he added: "Baptiste, my friend, do not let your daughter be idle. She will be happier and safer, too, if she has regular daily employment."

And Baptiste had answered: "She sews, monsieur, and—and—" for as he tried to think, he found it hard to recall what Liline did in the way of daily work—"she reads when she can get hold of a book."

The curé shook his head. "Reading and sewing are not the best employments for so attractive a girl," he said; "it would be better if she helped in the house-work or the cooking, or she might try

to be of use to some of her poor neighbours, eh, my good friend ? ”

“ She is free to do that, or anything else that pleases her ; she is a good child, Monsieur le Curé, and I want her to please herself.”

“ So I see,” the priest had said, drily. “ Take care, my friend ; you are perhaps teaching Liline to be selfish. A selfish woman is worse than a selfish man, remember.”

In the light of these words, Baptiste now saw that the girl was self-willed. He was disposed to indulge her ; but it seemed to him that she ought to show some consideration for his wishes, and then he remembered that this was almost the first time he had thwarted her.

“ Well ! ” she spoke impatiently, “ say, father, that you will let me go.”

Baptiste sighed. A feeling of anger rose against the beautiful creature who stood fronting him, her golden eyes full of demand rather than of supplication. In that moment he realised that that

which had come to him before as a dim fear was the truth ; Liline did not return the love he felt for her, she was indifferent to him ; he saw that the smile with which she had greeted him a while ago, and for which the poor fellow had felt so grateful, had been only gladness that she could tell him her news. He felt tempted to say : "Go to the Château, and stay there." He longed to reproach her with her coldness to him ; but this was not the way in which Monsieur Édouin meant him to control his wayward child.

"I am going to tell you," he said, slowly.

Liliné looked attentive. She recognised a new tone in her father's voice, a tone of authority, and it impressed her ; but she wondered what it meant.

"I do not like you to go to the Château, my child ; but I see you wish it, and Liliné, so far I have always tried to let you be happy in your own way ; but understand me, you must not sleep in the Château. I shall come every evening and

fetch you home. I do not choose that you should sleep at Château de Vougay."

She pressed her hands together, and bit her pretty lips with vexation.

"Father," she said, passionately.

Baptiste turned away. Her tone gave him courage, for he saw that Monsieur Édouin had spoken truly.

"It must be as I say, child," he said, firmly, "or else you had best stay at home." Then, as if he dreaded further opposition, Baptiste crossed the kitchen and went out.

Liline looked triumphant.

"At last," she said. "Monsieur le Marquis is sure to come to Vougay, and this time he *shall* see me, and he shall speak to me, too."

She looked very pretty as she nodded her fair head, pretty and determined, too.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SECRETARY.

**T**HE clock was striking ten as Liline Vivier passed through the great open gates of Château Vougay. Yesterday, only an hour before the appointed time, news had come that the Marquise would arrive at three o'clock; it was then found that the hinges of the great gates were so stiff from disuse, that the gates were opened with difficulty, and Maturin, the gatekeeper, had not yet found it possible to get help to close them.

As Liline crossed the grass-grown outer court, a large dog came slowly forward; he was old and almost blind, but as he drew near the girl, his sullen aspect changed, his tail moved slowly, and when he came close, he fawned

upon Liline and put his huge paws against her waist.

"Oh, Nero, go away—down, dirty dog," she cried; and indeed the dog's paws had left dark traces on the buff ground of her fresh cambric gown; then, as he opened his huge mouth in a welcoming bark, she called out in terror: "Poor Nero, good dog, is he glad to see me then?"

"Come away, Nero," a stern voice said, and Liline rejoiced to see the steward standing in the entrance of the stone screen that parted the outer court from that of the Château.

She nodded and smiled at old Étienne, who was soft-hearted with regard to beauty. He took off his straw hat and made her a ceremonious bow.

"You are punctual, my child; come in, our lady expects you."

He turned and crossed the inner court with her. The ground here was not quite so rough, and the round paddock in the centre, where the

after-crop had stood, half a yard or so high, had been mown this morning, and the cut grass already looked gray against the tawny stubble. In front was the old gray Château, some of its stones stained here and there a warmer hue with golden lichens, while over the rest was the frosted look of age. The grand entrance, of later date than the house, had a pediment above the pillared portico. There were many windows all along the building, and the pile was crowned with a high slate roof, with dormer windows; showing at the corners were round tourelles with black peaked roofs. The buildings right and left of the courts were much lower than the central portion, and at the right-hand corner, adjoining the screen, was the pointed roof and round apse of the chapel.

Liline looked about her with a glad feeling of recognition. This was much more like home to her than the house in the wood had been since her return to it. She followed Étienne, the

steward, up the broad flight of steps into a large hall, where the flooring squares of black and white marble looked greenish with the damp of disuse ; and a huge lamp hanging from the high ceiling was so festooned with cobwebs, that one might have fancied it was shrouded in gray gauze. There were two doors on the left and three on the right. The staircase ended above in blankness, it went up from the middle of the hall to a large door on the landing ; but there was no gallery visible on either side of it, only blank gray walls. Two doors below flanked the staircase on either side and led to the offices.

The girl shivered a little as she entered the grim old house.

"Come this way, if you please," the steward said, and he opened one of the doors below the staircase. This led into a long passage lighted only from another room ; at each end there was a spiral staircase.

Étienne pointed to the right,

"Go up there," he said, "you will meet Mademoiselle Nathalie at the top. Good morning."

"Thank you," said Liline; she felt suddenly timid; even when she was living here for those few days she had always been afraid to explore the upper floor of the Château. She knew there was nothing worth seeing upstairs, for all the furniture had been either taken away or was packed up, and Étienne had told her the place was full of bats and owls; so she had contented herself with roaming about the lower rooms, and gazing at the portraits of dead De Vougays.

When she reached the end of a gallery at the top of this back staircase, Liline's courage came back, for facing her was tall, dark Nathalie, with a fawning smile on her thin lips, and a keen, almost spiteful look in her black eyes. Liline had lost all fear of Nathalie long ago, when she discovered that Madame de Vougay preferred her to her maid.

"Ciel!" Nathalie raised her eyebrows in wonder,

"to think how you have grown, mademoiselle ; you do credit to country air."

The girl's beauty and her self-possessed manner had for a moment so imposed on Nathalie, that she said "mademoiselle" in spite of herself. She made haste, however, to rectify her mistake.

"Follow me, Liline," she said, carelessly, "I will show you Madame's room ; your sleeping-room will do later."

Liline followed in silence along the gallery ; she felt herself very superior to Nathalie, and it was not necessary to tell her that she should not sleep at the Château.

The woman stopped, opened an outer door, and then she knocked at the inner one. "Come in" was said, and Nathalie opened the inner door.

The walls of the room within looked very desolate. The paper hung so loosely, that in the corners it made festoons and ragged flags with its tatters. But the floor was covered with fine old tapestries, and some ancient white and gold sofas

and arm-chairs, covered with painted satin, had been taken hastily out of their wrappings, and with two or three spindle-legged tables gave a quaint and refined character to the Marquise's room. The bedstead was shrouded by curtains; but Madame's own especial table and her desk had travelled with her from Paris. She sat bent over her writing, and her back was towards the door.

Nathalie did not speak. She let Liline wait her mistress's leisure, and she left the room.

The Marquise looked round as the door closed, and then she rose and came forward, with a smile on her fair, high-nosed face.

"Dear child, is it you?" She bent down and kissed Liline's forehead, and then while she looked at her, the smile beamed out of her blue eyes, and curved her thin lips into an admiring gaze. "So, my child, you are as blooming as a Provence rose. I am glad to see you again. Sit down and tell me about your father."

The Marquise was very tall, and she looked

very dignified as she placed herself in an easy-chair, and pointed to a stool near it.

It seemed to Liline, as she seated herself at the lady's feet, that Madame de Vougay had aged very much since she left her. Her forehead was still free from creases; but the network of fine lines at the corner of each eye had become criss-crossed like a spider's web.

"My father is quite well, Madame, thank you." She tried to feel quite at ease; but the repose of the lady's manners, and her quiet, refined way of speaking, awed the girl. She thought, if she could only behave like that—well, she would try, and then she should be a lady.

"It is good of him to spare you. Now I look at you, Liline, I wonder he could part with you so easily. It does one good to see anything so pretty as you are, my child. I have never really replaced you, little one."

She patted the girl's rich hair as affectionately as if she were still the child she called her.

Liline blushed ; she hated the task her father had put on her. She felt so sure that what she had to say would annoy Madame de Vougay.

"If you please, Madame, I am very sorry ; but my father says he cannot spare me altogether ; he wishes to fetch me home every evening."

She pouted, and tears of vexation rushed to her eyes, she could not look up.

"That will do very well, Liline. I like to be alone with my books in the evening, I shall not want you then. Tell your father I am content with his arrangement. Now let us get to work, my child. You can write at that table in the window, I will dictate as I sit here."

Liline was terribly disconcerted. In many ways she was prosaic ; but for all that she had some imagination, and since she received Madame de Vougay's note, it had been playing her sad tricks. It had even persuaded her that the Marquise considered her a friend, and had asked her to the Château for the sake of her companionship. And

now this fancy was rudely dispelled. She saw Madame de Vougay lean back and close her eyes, a pose she so well remembered in those old days, and the feeling of *ennui* came back. She sighed as she placed herself at the table in the window, for she also remembered the weary hours she had passed, pen in hand, waiting for the effusions of the lady's muse. But she thought she had been a child at that time ; things must be different now——

“One's best ideas are sure to come when one has no power of registering them.” Madame de Vougay kept her eyes closed while she spoke. “On the journey from Paris many beautiful lines flashed through my brain. I cannot recall one of them now. Let us hope that something else will come in place of them.”

At the end of an hour, when Liline's feet tingled with keeping still, and she felt altogether restless and impatient, Madame de Vougay had dictated a composition which a careful reader

of Lamartine would have said did credit to her memory rather than to her invention.

"Read it all over, child; is it not lovely? Does it not thrill you?" she said.

"It is beautiful, Madame." Liline could not understand the verses, but she felt sure they must be very fine.

"I am going to walk on the terrace now, my child."

Liline rose, wiped her pens and shut up the blotting-book on which she had been writing. She longed to stretch her arms and to gape; but now at last she was going to enjoy herself. She should of course walk with the Marquise, and it was possible in their talk that she might learn when the Marquis was coming to the Château. After his return from England, when Liline had caught that brief glimpse of him, he had gone to St. Petersburg, but Liline had not heard any news of him for a long time.

"While I am out, you can make two copies

of those verses." Madame de Vougay had a very soft, pleasant way of speaking; she nodded at Liline and went to the door that opened into her dressing-room. "When you have finished you will find Nathalie in here, and then she will give you something to eat. Stay——" She turned and came half-way back. "At present I am alone, Liline, but in a few days I may have a visitor or two, and therefore you had better keep to my apartments; Nathalie will let you have a little room close by for yourself. You understand that I do not wish you to be seen in the Château by any one, my child; you come here for me only."

She went out without waiting for Liline's answer, and it was as well. The girl was very angry, she was more than angry, for she suddenly understood her position; the Marquise wanted to use her like a machine. "Unkind old woman," she said to herself; "does she suppose that any one so young and so beautiful as I am can like to be cooped up only to write down ridiculous verses?"

Liline knew that the command that she should keep to one part of the Château galled her far more than the monotonous occupation did. She had persuaded herself that at last her dream would come true—she should speak to Monsieur Lucien. She rarely thought about her old friend Gustave Chauvin; at the beginning of her life in Paris she had once boasted of her childish acquaintance with Monsieur Chauvin, and Nathalie had told her in a slighting way that Monsieur Gustave was only a poor relation, and that but for the Marquise's kindness he would be a beggar.

After this snub Liline did not mention his name; and when she came back to Vougay, although she asked many questions about Monsieur le Marquis, she had not once inquired for his cousin. She had never suffered from poverty; but those two years in the Hôtel de Vougay had strengthened her determination to be, as she said, "a lady," and a lady in Liline's

opinion must be rich and able to dress to perfection.

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, as she sat down to her writing again, "I see now why the Marquise has me here—this is my prison. Monsieur Lucien will have no chance of finding me out even if he should go to the house in the wood."

There was a knock at the outer door.

"At least I may see what happens," she said, sulkily to herself; then she called out: "Come in."

Étienne, the steward, opened the door and came forward with so low a bow that he did not at first perceive his mistress's absence.

Liline saw that he carried a telegram on the little tray in his hand.

"Madame has just gone to her dressing-room," she said, "I will take the telegram to her."

The steward gave it, but he waited for any orders that it might occasion.

Liline knocked at Madame de Vougay's door,

and being told to come in, she found the Marquise sitting while Nathalie pinned a large Leghorn hat securely to her mistress's fair hair.

"Étienne has brought a telegram, Madame," Liline said, "he waits for orders."

She looked hard at Madame de Vougay while she read the telegram, but there was no change on her pleasant face.

"There is no answer," she said. "You can tell Étienne to come to me on the terrace."

Liline went out and Nathalie closed the door behind her. When Étienne had gone, the girl did not, however, go back at once to her writing. She moved again to the door of the Marquise's room, and, although she did not appear to be listening, she heard Madame de Vougay say:

"Oh no—not the Marquis—it is Monsicur Gustave; but he will only stay a day or two."

## CHAPTER V

### AN ARRIVAL

**M**ADAME DE VOUGAY was greatly impressed by Liline's beauty; the girl's self-possession, too, seemed wonderful, considering that she lived quite out of the world, alone with her father, who was, of course, only a rough soldier. She was altogether so attractive that she must certainly be kept out of the way of Lucien, should he visit the Château.

"The best way will be to find a suitable husband for the girl," the lady thought, as she walked up and down the broad terrace, between rows of myrtles, and orange-trees in huge green and white tubs.

There were really no garden flowers at the Château. A thicket of roses and honeysuckle clustered round a green, gray fountain, and long

trailing periwinkles hid traces of walks ; here and there a tall spike of foxglove pierced its way out of this flowery jungle, which marked the spot where the garden had been. It lay at the south end of the terrace, and as she reached it the châtelaine's eyes rested longingly on the old gray fountain and its surroundings ; but for Lucien's debts she felt that the restoration of the garden might have been possible.

Gustave's telegram said that he was coming on Lucien's business. The poor mother's heart ached ; she feared her son had got into some fresh trouble, and yet, on his return from Russia, he had seemed to be completely sobered. In regard to Gustave, it was a little awkward that he should come to Vougay just as she had sent for Liline. Well, well ; he need not see the girl. She must take care of that. But when she reached the other end of the terrace, Madame de Vougay smiled at her own precautions. Gustave was not like her son, Lucien, she thought. Gustave had a cold, well-regulated

nature ; he was bent on advancing himself in his profession ; there was no fear that he would entangle himself with a pretty village girl. But then Liline Vivier was not like an ordinary village girl. Madame de Vougay disliked any sort of worry ; and now she shook herself free from this one by reflecting on Gustave's high moral tone.

"Lucien calls him a saint," she said, lightly ; "there can be no danger for Liline in such a man as Gustave Chauvin, she can gain only good from him if they should meet."

A sudden idea flushed the Marquise's pale face. What a subject for her poetic powers would be this idyl of a well-born youth and a village maiden exchanging their first love sighs ! They were both too virtuous and well-brought-up to do more than sigh over their love. Gustave was far too honourable to think of wronging Liline, and certainly he would never dream of marrying her ; it would be just a brief episode in two young lives.

"Setting aside his own wish to rise in the

world," she thought, complacently, "he would never outrage his family by a *mésalliance*. No, he may be trusted if he should meet with this lovely child. Ah, yes; it would make a charming little episode in both their lives. I will leave chance to settle it, and I will not speak of Liline to Gustave."

Liline found the afternoon dictation less irksome. In the long pauses she had time to wonder what Gustave Chauvin would think of her.

Baptiste came at six o'clock to fetch his daughter, and as they walked home together, he was much surprised by her silence. He had expected to find her full of gaiety—excited even by the pleasure of meeting with Madame de Vougay; but he did not question the girl; he was so happy to have his darling once more beside him, that he was content to walk on with her in silence, wondering, as he often did in his humble way, how it had happened that so rough a fellow as he, was father to such a dainty bit of loveliness,

"Are you to go again to-morrow, sweetheart?" he said at last, when they were clear of the Château, and were making their way across an unfrequented part of the park.

Liline was thinking about Gustave Chauvin. She roused when her father spoke; she did not mean to let him guess how disappointed she was with her benefactress.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I was thinking. Yes, I am to go to-morrow, and every day, I fancy."

She wondered whether her father knew that Monsieur Chauvin was expected, and she decided to give him her own version. If he heard the story from any one else, he might take it into his head to keep her away from the Château during the young man's visit. Liline knew that she had power over her father; but she did not love him well enough to trust him; her sole trust lay in herself.

"Did you hear that Monsieur Chauvin is coming?" she said. "Perhaps you did not know

him, father." She looked up at Baptiste with so innocent an expression, that it would have been impossible to doubt her simplicity.

"No, child."

"When mother and I lived here, he used to come to see us ; he was a big, ugly boy."

She laughed merrily.

Baptiste looked hard at her ; but she did not flinch ; and, indeed, when she thought of those old days, she was greatly amused ; it seemed absurd that so big a lad had been able to find pleasure in talking to such a baby as she had been.

"Did you like this Monsieur Gustave ?" Baptiste's voice was ill-assured. He had felt a sudden jealousy, and he was half ashamed of his question.

"You see, he was my only playfellow." Liline laughed. "I used to tease him, for he was slow and stupid, and he was shy. Oh, depend upon it, father, he is quite another sort of man from Monsieur le Marquis."

Baptiste was troubled by her flippant manner.

"What do you know about Monsieur le Marquis?" he said, sharply.

"I—I never spoke to him; but I know he is handsome, and everybody likes him; and he is the master of Vougay. It will be a grand day for all of us, will it not, when he marries, and brings a young mistress to the Château?"

"Diable!" Baptiste raised his rugged eyebrows. "Are you not content with your old mistress, my jewel? Why do you wish to see her set aside?"

Liline shook her head.

"She will not stay here, father. When I asked why Madame's bedroom was not repaired, and made more suitable, Nathalie said, 'That is Monsieur Lucien's affair. Madame has a house of her own near the Lake of Geneva.'"

The old soldier bent his head.

"Poor lady," he said, "people of her class must find France sadly changed; but on her own land, among her own people here in Brittany they are not Republicans, they still believe in the lilies of France. Ah, why does she not trust her people?"

Liline was thinking of the poetic lamentation which had been dictated to her in the course of the afternoon.

"I do not know," she said; "but I am sure Madame is troubled——"

She broke off—her father's eyes were bent on the ground—but Liline heard footsteps, and she saw a man's figure moving among the chestnuts beyond them. She felt sure that it was a stranger, for no one but a stranger was likely to take this wild way to the Château. More than once as they walked her father had cut her an opening through the luxuriant briar arms that now and then formed a barrier, and threatened destruction to her gown. The stranger might possibly be Monsieur Chauvin himself; if so, he might have gone round to the cottage to see his old play-fellow before he presented himself at the Château.

Her interest in Gustave had been faint. She had only thought of him as a conquest better worth making, than the stolid-faced, huge-collared, wooden-shod young farmers, who loitered

outside the church, and gazed at her so longingly, yet so sheepishly, every Sunday when she passed in and out of the porch. If this was Monsieur Chauvin and he had gone out of his way to look for her, things were altogether different from what she had supposed them. Her heart beat quickly as she remembered that her boy-lover had always called her his little wife.

Baptiste looked up—his ear had also caught the sound of footsteps—even before Liline heard them. The man advancing towards them in the mingled light and shade of the chestnut boughs, was still on the pasture side of the park.

"It is a stranger," Baptiste stopped. "You had better stay here, Liline, I will go forward and see who he is."

She pouted and felt rebellious, but she obeyed. Her natural coolness helped her against her angry self-will. If Gustave Chauvin had gone to the house in the wood, he had gone to see her, and, therefore, he must be able to guess who she was, while she stood waiting for her father to

come back. She knew how becoming her little straw hat was, and she moved some steps aside so that the fast fading light might fall on her and make her more conspicuous.

She saw her father pull off his hat as the stranger spoke to him, and she knew that she had guessed rightly. But why did they not at once come to her as she stood waiting? Her pretty rose-leaf colour deepened—she hoped her father had not disgusted Monsieur Chauvin by any unnecessary show of humility. Monsieur Gustave was a gentleman by birth; but he was not master of Vougay or of her father either, and in these Republican days, the girl thought a great show of deference was old-fashioned and ignorant.

What was this? The stranger was nodding familiarly to her father, and now he was going straight for the Château by a path to which Baptiste pointed as they parted. It was too bad, too altogether tyrannical to be borne. Liline's small hands clenched involuntarily, and tears of mortified vanity filled her eyes.

"Father will make me hate him," she said, angrily; "he has let Monsieur Gustave go on without so much as asking him to come and speak to me—one would think I was still a baby."

When Baptiste came back she kept silence. She saw that he looked at her anxiously, but she was not going to take him into her confidence; if he thought she was vexed he might take it into his head that she cared for Monsieur Gustave.

Liline affected to despise the Marquise's maid, and she tried to treat Nathalie as an inferior, but she had insensibly adopted many of the woman's opinions, and one of them had taken firm possession of the girl that men, especially middle-aged men, were blunderers and thick-witted, and that such men were in every way, except mere personal strength, inferior to women.

"That was Monsieur Chauvin," her father said. "I showed him the direct path to the Château. He has been to St. Pol, and has walked on here from Bodilis."


"That is a long walk, is it not?" She spoke

carelessly, but she was a little shaken in her self-confidence. If Monsieur Gustave was coming from Bodilis and not, as she had expected, from Morlaix, he might be on that side of the park without having thought about the house in the wood.

Her father did not answer; he was troubled by Monsieur Chauvin's arrival. He had hoped to keep Liline out of the way of gentlemen till she was safely married to a man in her own station. If she got notice and admiration from gentlemen, her head would be turned; it was his duty, Baptiste argued, to shield her from that temptation. He had always heard that poor cousins belonging to great houses, like Monsieur Gustave, were undesirable acquaintances. They had nothing of their own, and they would take all they could get. Baptiste had met with more than one of these hangers-on in the army, "full of poor pride" as he called it. He said no more about Monsieur Chauvin, and Liline's willingness to talk of other things satisfied her father that she had no curiosity respecting the young fellow.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OLD PLAYFELLOWS.

ILINE smiled, while she poured out her father's coffee, and ate her own breakfast. She went to the door with him and kissed his cheek before he started on his daily tramp through the woods and meadows of Vougay. She watched him out of sight, and then she drew a deep breath of relief. Marie Jeanne was in the kitchen rubbing the brass hinges and fittings of a large wardrobe there ; and Liline departed to her own little room to think out the day before her.

With all her cleverness, she was puzzled by her father's silence. It might have been reticence, she thought ; then again, Monsieur Gustave might not have said anything—in that case her father had nothing to tell her. It was the fear of this that

had kept her from asking if Monsieur Chauvin had spoken about her. It would have been so mortifying to hear from her father that her child lover had forgotten her.

She set off earlier to-day for the Château. She took beforehand a long look in her little mirror. She went by the short way her father had brought her home last night.

"It is newer and altogether pleasanter," she said, and then she laughed softly, as if some other agreeable thought had suggested itself.

There was a curious contradiction in Liline's nature. Whatever she wished for she tried to obtain. She would never yield a fraction of the coveted object; but she usually took an indirect and subtle way towards its attainment. She even tried to hide from herself the real tendency of her actions and words. To-day she would not say simply to herself: "Monsieur Gustave will seek me where he saw me last night," and yet she laughed as she thought how pleasant the sight

of him would be between the still leafy chestnut boughs.

At that moment, however, Gustave Chauvin was standing beside his benefactress's writing-table. He called Madame de Vougay aunt, although there was no real kinship between them.

The Marquise's fair, usually placid face was puckered with trouble; but the creases smoothed a little while she listened to her young adviser, who stood with bent head on the opposite side of the table.

He was tall and broad-shouldered; but he had no spare flesh about him. One could see his legs and arms were thin; his hands, too, were slender and nervous, and there were hollows in his cheeks; but these seemed to match so well with his dark, deeply-sunk eyes, that they only made a natural feature in his thoughtful face. His hair was beautiful, deep brown in colour; it crossed his broad forehead in sculpturesque waves full of light and shade. Gustave Chauvin was, perhaps, not handsome; but

he was far less plain than he had been as a boy. The irresolute look had left his face; it was, indeed, full of power, and yet the expression on it just now was so sweet that Madame de Vougay found rest for her anxiety while she looked at him.

"You deprecate my plan, then," she said.

"Pardon me, I only try to show you its drawbacks; but I am not sure that you ought to listen to such a hermit as I am, dear Madame; I know nothing of society or of the world in that sense, and no doubt my ideas about marriage are rural and romantic."

"I am afraid so," she sighed, "but, Gustave, I fancy Lucien may make a good husband even though he does take a wife to—to——"

"To pay his debts," Gustave laughed. "I hope so. I believe good women are so good that when they love they will excuse all sorts of errors in the man they love. My fear is that it may be difficult to get Lucien to consent; and even if he does this, will he take the trouble to win a wife?"

Madame de Vougay sat up rather stiffly.

"I fancy he need not take much trouble about that, Gustave."

The young man bowed. It was only about the second time in his life that the Marquise had made him feel he was not her son, and it increased the dislike he had for some time felt for his cousin Lucien's conduct. There was little sympathy between the young men; but Lucien always behaved to his cousin with kindness in which Gustave's sensitiveness fancied there was a good deal of pity. In their boyhood they had been schoolfellows, and Gustave had often helped to shield Lucien from the consequences of his follies; but since his cousin's return from Russia, Gustave had avoided him as much as possible. He knew that, in spite of all the sacrifices made by his mother, Lucien was deeply in debt, and yet his extravagances seemed worse than ever.

At last a crisis had come, and Lucien's man of business had told him he must find some way

of paying his debts, and Lucien had gone to his cousin, who was in Paris, and had asked him to break the bad news to the Marquise.

"Yes," she said, when she found that Gustave did not answer. "My old friend, Madame de Lanmeur, will be charmed with the idea ; indeed, we talked of it when the children were young. Lucien is six-and-twenty, and Adelaïde is seventeen ; her fortune is even now very large—it will be enormous—she will be a sweet rosebud of a daughter, and I shall devote myself to her happiness."

Gustave turned away to one of the windows ; these were set so high up that from the middle of the room the park could not be seen. He knew that his face was not in sympathy with this marriage project ; and he could hardly keep from sighing at the idea of this innocent child of seventeen sacrificed to the selfish profligate he felt sure his cousin was. Just now, in his extreme indignation at the sorrow and vexation

which Lucien had brought into his mother's life, Gustave thought very hardly of him.

"You are anxious to explore your old haunts, I see," Madame de Vougay said; "I too shall be engaged presently, so I bid you *au revoir*."

Last night, on arriving, Gustave had passed near the house in the wood, and he had seen that it was inhabited; but when he met the garde, and asked the nearest way to the Château, Baptiste had not made himself known to Monsieur Chauvin, and Gustave had not guessed that the female figure half hidden by the trees was Liline.

When he reached the Château and told his aunt of Lucien's difficulties, Madame de Vougay's distress had completely absorbed Gustave, and he had lain awake planning how best she could be spared vexation. No one who saw the calm, self-controlled face with which he met her in the morning, could have guessed the deep and active sympathy he felt. He had not had time to remember Liline Vivier.

It was a great relief to find himself out in the fresh pure air, with the thick, soft grass underfoot and the fading leaves overhead. Where he now was, the park had become a forest, with leaves above and brambles and underwood crossing his path.

"The wood has surely grown very much thicker in ten years," he thought. Étienne, the steward, in answer to his inquiries about his old playfellow, had told him of Liline Vivier's return, and added that she now lived at the house in the wood with her father; but the news did not suggest to Gustave that he had seen the father and daughter overnight.

He laughed to himself as he recalled his former liking for Liline.

He went on among the trees, thinking of Lucien's marriage. He could not picture Lucien as a husband, and on the whole he pitied him. Even at six-and-twenty, Gustave thought it was very hard for a man to give up his liberty—as he

had told his aunt, his ideas of marriage were romantic. If he took a wife he should feel bound to live for her and to try to make her happy ; and he could not believe that a woman could be half so good a friend as a man could. Gustave knew a few men who dearly loved him, and whose lives he had helped to steer by his sensible example ; but hitherto he had not found the ideal friend he longed for. His most intimate acquaintance so far was a woman, Madame de Vougay, his so-called aunt ; but he dared not let her see all his ideas, they would only have puzzled or troubled her.

By the time he was forty, Gustave thought, he might be able to marry, and then—— Well, he should find some one much younger than he was, and with whom he should be perfectly content. Certainly he should not take a wife for any other reason than because he liked her.

Here his thoughts were interrupted ; he caught his foot in a tangle of bramble, and if he had

not adroitly flung himself back, he must have fallen.

While he stood freeing himself, he saw a pale glimmer among the tree trunks some way before him. He looked attentively, and he made out that it must be the skirt of a woman's gown that now showed, like a pale glory, beyond the gray tree trunks.

It suddenly flashed upon him that it was perhaps Liline; the woman, whoever she was, stood still. Gustave plunged forward, and he saw her. Only her gown was in light; the shadow of a round straw hat fell deeply over her eyes and the upper part of her face; but it did not reach the bright lips, parted in expectation. But neither light nor shade could add to the grace of Liline's attitude as she stood under a tree, her pretty head bent a little forward as she listened to the coming footsteps.

Gustave's pale face flushed as he reached her. Had he thought easily of renewing his old acquaint-

ance with the forest-keeper's daughter ; but now the sight of so much beauty fluttered him, he was stirred out of his usual calm, almost unwilling to speak.

He pulled off his hat and Liline bowed. She had seen him coming for several minutes, and she was not as much disturbed as he was, though it was a new and altogether delightful experience to find herself face to face and alone with a gentleman. She felt a thrill of excitement.

"You are Liline Vivier, are you not?" Gustave said. "Ah, you have forgotten your old playfellow—I am Gustave Chauvin ; now do you remember me?"

It jarred him to see this refined-looking creature droop her eyes with a commonplace simper. He did not know how disconcerting his own eyes were—how very plainly they told her his admiration.

"Yes, I remember you, monsieur." The lovely pink of her cheeks deepened, and she spoke softly and shyly.

"It must not be monsieur and mademoiselle

between us, Liline," then he hesitated. How could he dictate to this beautiful creature, who for aught he knew had admirers in plenty, and who very likely cared nothing about seeing him again? "I mean," he went on, "that I hope we are going to be friends, and that you will allow me the privileges of a very old acquaintance."

She looked up; her eyes were so full of arch amusement that he laughed. Liline joined him in his laughter, and they stood laughing merrily over their childish memories for a minute or two. Then she stole a look at him which gave him courage—there was such evident satisfaction in her golden-brown eyes.

"Which way are you going?" he said presently. "I will walk with you if I may."

She laughed again; then she looked grave.

"I am going to the Château. At present I am Madame's secretary; but," she glanced archly at him, "I have orders to keep out of the way of visitors."

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled; but

he placed himself beside her, and began to walk in the direction of the Château.

"I am not a visitor, Liline, I am only here on business."

She shook her head.

"Well," he went on, "I will leave you before we come in sight of the Château, will that satisfy you? Do you go there every day?"

She nodded and smiled at him. She enjoyed his admiration so much that she did not care to disturb it by words, and they walked some way in silence — his eyes fixed on her lovely face; but her eyes drooped again. She was evidently pleased, he thought, to have him beside her, and she was looking more beautiful in this moment of triumph than she had ever looked before.

There was a good deal of natural pleasure in Liline's feelings. It was so nice, she thought, that Monsieur Chauvin had not forgotten those old days, and she felt really glad and happy to see him again.

"Had you not forgotten me?" she said at last.

The smile she gave him delighted Gustave. He had never seen so lovely a creature, and he felt the power of her fascination, a power which every moment he was teaching her to realise.

Just then she gave him another glance, half arch, half coy ; it utterly bewildered him.

"How could I forget you?" he said.

"Did you guess who I was just now?" she said. "You could not have recognised me. Why, it is ten years since I saw you."

"Ah! I wonder how it was I knew you," he smiled at her with delight. "You are not the same, you know ; the pretty child has changed into a charming girl, and yet even now I see the sweet child Liline looking out at your eyes at me."

His cheeks glowed, and Liline blushed at his warm praise.

"I was a very naughty child, I am afraid : I feel ashamed of those days."

She looked up, her eyes full of sweet humility, as if she wished to ask his forgiveness for the childish wrongs she had done him.

Gustave felt like a boy again—he seemed transformed—but, as he looked round, he saw they had reached the edge of the wood, and he stopped.

“I will leave you here. I am going to see Monsieur Édouin,” he said. “I suppose there is no change at the Presbytery.”

Liline’s smile faded.

“Yes,” she said, “you will find one great change. There is a new housekeeper—dear old Marguérite is dead—the new one is called Françoise, and she is *dévoté*. Ah, mon Dieu!” she clasped her hands and turned up her eyes, “she is stiff as a stick—she likes to lecture me. She is not to be compared to dear old, kind Marguérite. Do you remember the bonbons she used to give us?”

“Yes.”

He could not contradict Liline when she looked up at him in that way; but it seemed to Gustave that the old housekeeper was not to be regretted; she had been in his opinion, with all her kindness, a chattering and slovenly old woman. He put out his hand and held Liline’s while he

spoke. "I shall not say Good-bye. I shall meet you on your way home, sweet friend. What time do you leave?"

She looked grave, almost sad, he thought.

"My father is coming to fetch me," she said. "That was my father you met last night. You had no eyes for me then, though I was 'close by," she said, teasingly.


"Forgive me. Was that your father? Well, I must try to improve my acquaintance with him. But you were not with him. Ah, naughty girl, you know, if you had been there, I must have seen you. *Au revoir.*"

They parted, and Liline began to cross the open part of the park towards the Château. Instead of going on to the village, Gustave hid himself behind a tree, so that he could watch her unobserved.

His aunt's troubles, and Lucien's proposed marriage were forgotten. Gustave had entered into that rose-coloured country, which many people traverse; but which some among them have learned to call Mirage.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A PROPOSAL.

USTAVE stood waiting under the chest-nut-tree where he had first met Liline. The young fellow had changed, in this short week, as much as the boughs overhead had changed; but while they had lost brightness—for the fierce autumn wind had stripped away the withered leaves, and had left only a few green ones, that drooped timidly, as if ashamed of their loneliness—Gustave Chauvin seemed to have more of spring joy in him than of autumn pensiveness. He looked full of health, and life, and happiness.

In his outlook on life, during those solitary years when he had only himself to commune with, Gustave had decided that most of a man's day-dreams must prove fallacious, must be regarded as

the mere pastime of youth, and that their fulfilment could not be looked for. And so he had yielded up the hope, fondly cherished in boyhood, of coming back to Vougay, and claiming Liline for his wife. More than once the Marquise had asked him to take rest and change in the old place ; but at that time he had refused the kindly-meant offer. He did not know what had become of Liline, but he had determined not to risk the chance of seeing her again till he could fulfil his promise.

This hope, too, had long ago taken its place among his day-dreams. Gustave's ideal of life had risen ; his horizon had mounted with his success, and he felt that some years must pass before he could establish himself in such a home as he now wished for. And Liline was perhaps already married ; certainly, if she had grown up according to her childish promise of beauty, she would marry long before he could lay claim to her.

He had been hurried down to Vougay on

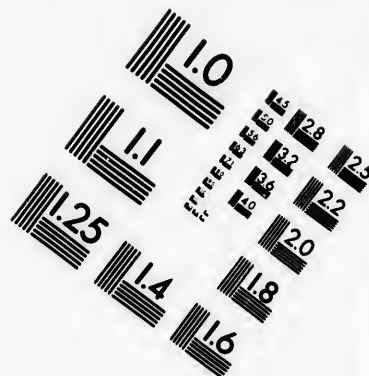
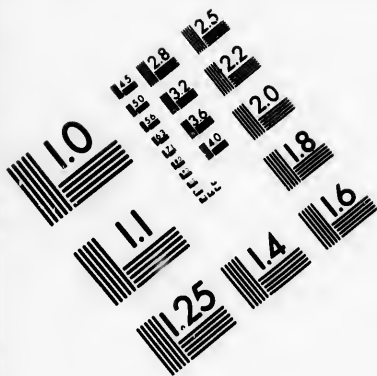
Lucien's business, and without any purpose of seeking Liline Vivier; it must even be confessed that, on the morning after his arrival when he questioned Étienne as to what had become of her, he learned, with almost a shock, that she was living in the house in the wood with her father.

Gustave knew nothing about the changes that had happened, and it seemed to him sad that so beautiful and refined a creature as the Liline he had fondly dreamed about should have been left to grow up in this sort of savage solitude. She could only be a mere peasant, he thought.

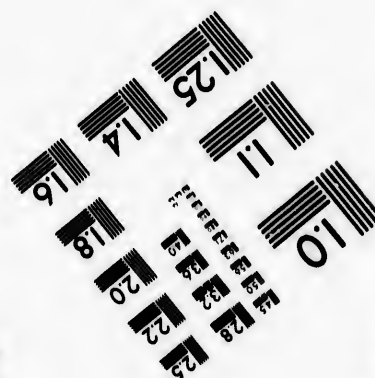
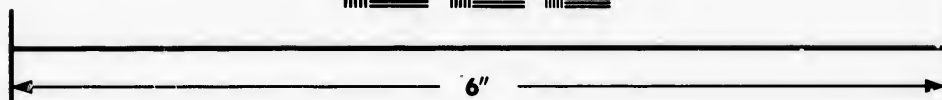
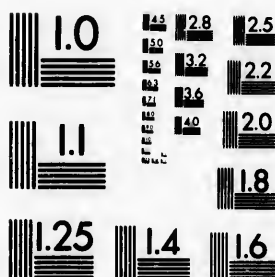
Étienne, however, asked Monsieur Chauvin if he had not seen the girl while she lived in Paris with the Marquise. And at this news Gustave had received a fresh shock. Liline, he thought, would have grown up more safely in the woods than in such a city as Paris.

But the sight of her had effaced all doubts and fears. Gustave Chauvin, who usually considered





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all sides of a subject before he allowed himself to form an opinion thereon, had yielded himself up unresistingly to the sweet magic of Liline's beauty. He told himself, the first day, that he was delighted to find his old playfellow just as he had expected to find her; and since then he had given up any reflection on his feelings—he had simply lived in them.

He now met Liline every morning on her way to the Château; and more than once in the evening she had stopped writing and had left the Château rather earlier so as to get a few minutes with him before her father joined her.

Gustave shrank from meeting Baptiste; he had gone to see the garde, and he had not met with an encouraging welcome. This, however, did not surprise the young fellow, and he respected Baptiste for his coldness towards him; it showed him that the girl had a careful guardian.

Gustave was, as he had told Madame de Vougay, eccentric and romantic in his idea of marriage; he

wished to have a wife who would love him for himself, and his old determination to win Liline had become stronger than ever. But, day by day as they met, Gustave found it more difficult to approach the subject of love. Liline was so gay, so playful in her talk, that he shrank from speaking earnestly lest he should weary the bright butterfly-like maiden. He must be patient, he thought, and the opportunity would come; but he resolved not to leave Château Vougay without winning her consent to become his wife.

It seemed to him that it would be unwise to let Baptiste suspect his intentions, the forest-keeper would be sure in some way or other to warn his daughter, and Gustave was anxious not to provoke a quarrel between Liline and her father. It was not wonderful, he thought, that the sweet girl shrank a little from Baptiste; he was so rough, and so blunt—a good, honest fellow, doubtless, but not a suitable companion for such a precious creature as Liline. Gustave determined not to

speak of his love, either to the Marquise or to Baptiste, until Liline had promised to be his wife.

But all this prudence and patience had to-day been upset; in their place was only a burning impatience that tortured him as he stood waiting under the tree for Liline. She was much later than usual; it was growing dark, and every moment he expected to hear Baptiste's heavy, crunching tread over the fallen leaves and twigs.

The post only reached Vougay at midday, and it had brought news that Lucien might be expected any day at the Château. The Marquis wrote that he accepted his mother's proposal, and was willing to accompany her to Château Plouanic. It was this news that had so excited Gustave. He resolved to betroth himself to Liline before Lucien's arrival. Lucien would respect his cousin's promised wife, but Gustave felt that Liline would not be safe from his cousin if Lucien

regarded her only as Baptiste Vivier's daughter. Even Lucien's own approaching marriage would not prevent his free admiration of Liline's singular beauty. As Gustave pondered all this, it seemed to him a special Providence that had brought Baptiste back to claim his daughter from the Marquise while Lucien was absent from Paris.

At last he saw her light dress in the dim distance. He went a little way to meet her but he did not venture far beyond the shelter of the trees. For Liline's sake it was better that his meetings with her should remain a secret.

"You are late, sweetheart," he said, tenderly, as she came up to him.

The new tone in his voice struck Liline; she gave him an inquiring look.

"Your aunt had to write letters," she said, "and she could not dictate so early as usual. Ah, I am so weary of it, my fingers ache."

She let him take her ungloved hand and press it in his. Suddenly he kissed it—the touch

of his burning lips startled her. She drew her hand away.

"You may not do that," she said, "it is not permitted." She drew up her slight figure till she looked as dignified as the Marquise herself.

Gustave bent over her.

"Pardon me, but you will permit it," he whispered, "everything is permitted to a husband; and you will be my wife, will you not, dearest child? Liline, you know how I love you—love is no word to express the feelings I have for you."

She looked at him in wondering silence; then under his glowing eyes she blushed and hung her head.

But Gustave did not want words; it was enough for him that she suffered him to take her hand and kiss it as passionately as he pleased, while he poured out the story of his love and of his hopes, cherished since he had parted from her in boyhood. He paused at last, and Liline gently drew her hand away

She looked up at him and shook her head, and he saw tears in her eyes.

"You go too fast," she said, sadly. "Ah, you will never get the Marquise to consent, or my father either, and you cannot marry me without their good-will."

"I have only two years to wait." He spoke in a strong, hopeful voice; Liline sighed heavily.

His proposal had seemed at first to offer a joyful escape from the life she hated, and she had been ready to consent. Now a cloud fell over her fair face.

"Two years is a long time," she said, thoughtfully.

He tried to regain possession of her hand, but she drew back. Her mood had changed.

"My darling, I will be frank with you;" the fondness in his voice touched her. "I will be entirely frank with you. If I married you now we should have to live in two rooms, and I could not afford you the comforts or the pleasures

that every loving husband likes his wife to enjoy. But in two years, or it may be sooner, I shall obtain a post which will double my income, and which will open out to me sources of profit which at present I do not possess. I am sure your father would give you to me. Will you wait for me, Liline? Will you say 'Gustave, I will be your wife'?"

Her face had cleared a good deal while she listened, and when she looked at him again she was dry-eyed—still there was some trouble left in her face.

"Say yes, my darling," he said, and in spite of her unwillingness he caught her hand.

"Hark!" She raised her free hand, and Gustave heard Baptiste's footsteps.

"Your father. Well, let him come," he said, boldly, with a glad look in his eyes.

His fearlessness impressed her. She thought he was almost handsome; still she had to be prudent for them both.

"Dear Gustave," she put up her lips so

caressingly that he could hardly keep from kissing her, "go, now, for my sake; I will make all right with my father. Till to-morrow——"

"Good-bye, dearest," he said.

She kissed her fingers to him as he disappeared among the trees.

Then Liline went on to meet her father. Even in the dim light under the trees she could see how suspicious he looked. She slipped her hand under his arm and smiled in his face, but Baptiste did not smile in answer.

"Did not I hear voices?" he said, gruffly.

Liline stooped to free her skirt from a briar arm.

"I expect you did; I heard voices somewhere in the wood."

She darted a swift glance at him as she rose, and she thought he looked troubled. He did not speak again till they reached the house in the wood, then he stood still before he opened the door.

"There is news to-day at the Château. Have you heard it, child?"

Liline was startled, it seemed so strange that Gustave should not have told her.

"I have heard no news, father."


Baptiste shrugged his shoulders.

"Your mistress does not then put much confidence in you, child. Monsieur le Marquis is coming to Vougay; he may come any day."

Liline frowned at the word "mistress," but at the news itself, she flushed deeply, her spirits rose, she thrilled with joy. At last—at last, the great desire of her heart was to be accomplished; she was going to see the Marquis again, and he would see her. Liline's head seemed to spin and her heart to stand still, in this ecstasy of anticipation. Ten minutes ago she had felt fond of Gustave Chauvin, and if he could have taken her at once from this hateful solitude, she would gladly have married him. Now, almost her first thought was one of self-gratulation that she had not promised herself to her old playfellow.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DISMISSED.

N some ways Liline was like her father. She had inherited, for instance, Baptiste's quiet power of observation, but she was less suspicious than he was, at the same time she had quicker perception.

Baptiste doubted Monsieur Chauvin, and distrusted him; Liline believed fully in her lover's honesty of purpose, while she doubted his power to succeed in life. To be a gentleman and yet to live in two rooms, was a revelation that overpowered her with surprise. She longed to be a lady, it would give her keen pleasure to be able to treat Nathalie as her inferior; but in all ways Liline was a practical young woman.

"There would be no use in calling myself a

lady," she thought, "unless I really was one ; and if I had to dress poorly and always go on foot, no one could find much difference between me and Nathalie."

She went further than this. That night, while she brushed out her rich auburn hair till it hung like a gleaming cloak round her white shoulders even in the poor light cast by the little lamp on her table, Liline mused over Gustave's proposal. At first she had been stupefied by surprise. It was wonderful that a man of his class should be willing to step down to her level, and then she remembered that things were altered in France.

She liked him, oh yes, she liked him very much—her cheeks glowed warmly at the remembrance of his looks and his kisses—and she looked at her pretty hand with pride, for no one but Monsieur Chauvin had ever kissed it. But then when she belonged to him and could see him every day, should she care for him so much? She had listened to him attentively, but he had not said she should be rich ; he had promised her comforts and some

amusements; but Liline, in her visions of ladyhood, had seen jewels and beautiful dresses and a carriage. She wanted to be uplifted—lifted high above her present condition, to become visibly—undoubtedly, to all eyes “a lady.” It would be a poor satisfaction only to feel that she had married a gentleman if she herself had to live as quietly as any mere workwoman did.

Into these musings came the recollection of her father's news about the young Marquis's coming. How pleased he had seemed; it was plain that he thought more highly of Monsieur Lucien, than he did of Monsieur Chauvin.

The girl dreamed all night of the young lord.

She loitered over her breakfast, and kept her father chatting in the doorway.

At last he said:

“Good-bye, little one, I must go; you are making me play truant.” He, too, was in a cheerful mood. “We shall have our young lord round during his stay,” he said, “so tell Marie Jeanne she had best be extra neat in her ways.”

Liline's eyes sparkled. She had already decided she would not meet Gustave this morning in the wood. She determined now to go to the Château by the beaten track she had followed on the first morning, and to enter by the great gates; she had ever since gone by the path through the wood, and in by a small gate in the low gray wall that divided the Château and its courts from the Park. Nathalie had given her the key of a door at the foot of the winding staircase, so that she might come and go, without giving trouble to any one. This seeming trust on the part of Nathalie, had lulled the girl's doubts of her to sleep—in fact, she had scarcely seen the woman since the first day.

Once or twice Nathalie had come in to the Marquise for instructions; but as Liline always wrote at the table near the window, she had not turned her head. If she thought of Nathalie at all, it was with a feeling of relief that she did not see her, for she could not forget how spitefully the woman had watched her in Paris.

Nathalie's jealousy had made Liline regard the Hôtel de Vougay as a sort of prison, of which this dark-faced woman was jailor.

To-day, as the girl crossed the court, her thoughts were full of the young lord. If she had fascinated Gustave, she asked herself, why should she not also fascinate Lucien, and then who could say what might happen? There was the Baron of Pourcel—Marie Jeanne had told her about his wife. Her father was a rich man in Paris, but no one knew from whence he came. Marie Jeanne said that this father had been a great money-lender, and that the new baroness was not a lady at all before she married the Baron of Pourcel.

"I, at least, look like a lady," Liline thought, proudly; "any one can see the difference between me and a village girl. Well, we shall see." Her spirits seemed to dance with anticipation.

The old mastiff did not rise up and come to meet her—he lay in the sunshine and growled as she passed by. Étienne was not visible, and

she crossed the great hall and passed into the passage behind it without meeting a soul.

Nathalie stood waiting for her at the end of the passage. There was a strange look in the woman's face. Liline shivered without knowing why; she felt as if she had received a shock as she met Nathalie's eyes looking at her through their long, half-closed lids.

"I want a word with you, child," the woman said, familiarly; and, in Liline's present mood, her manner seemed insolent.

"Well, what do you want?" The girl looked back at her scornfully.

Nathalie laughed maliciously.

"You seem inclined to cast off old friends, Liline, because you have got a new one. You are foolish in every way; because the trees grow thickly, do you fancy no one sees through them, and do you also think that what a young man promises he is sure to perform? I say to you—take care."

She moved away and retreated into her mistress's room before the astonished girl could answer.

Liline was greatly disturbed. It was not the warning that affected her, so much as the shock of finding that her movements were spied on. She wondered whether Madame de Vougay had set Nathalie to watch her. The suspicion made her tap at the door louder than it usually was.

She found her patroness leaning back in an easy-chair. She was dressed in a loose cream-coloured silk gown, which suited well with her faded complexion and her blue eyes. Madame de Vougay usually nodded and smiled at Liline when she came in; this morning she held out her hand, and as the girl bent respectfully over the delicate ivory-hued fingers, she patted Liline's sunny hair.

"How fresh and bright you look, dear child; you have brought in sunshine with you this chilly morning."

She looked so friendly, so full of kindness, that Liline felt ashamed of her suspicions; she was sure it was Nathalie's own malice that had tracked her and watched her meetings with Gustave Chauvin.

The girl smiled as she sat down to her writing; she saw how unwise it was to feel annoyed by Nathalie's behaviour. Let her do her worst; she could not harm her; if she became Gustave's wife, the woman would have to call her "Madame." Ah, that would change everything. Instead of that touch of Madame la Marquise's fingers, or one of those rare kisses she had received, each time she met Madame de Vougay she should be received as an equal, a cousin, and kissed on both cheeks. The cheeks burned with pride, and these thoughts helped her through an hour of waiting, during which she had to write down a line or two at rare intervals; but when the second hour began, Liline became weary and discontented. Her marriage with Gustave looked once more as gray and as uninviting as it had appeared

to her last night, and her under-lip drooped fretfully. Why should she pledge herself to him, and thus yield up any chance of better prospects? There was no need of haste if he wanted her to wait two years. If she could only be seen, she was sure she could marry well. Suppose she did marry Gustave, and then found out that she could have had a rich, and, perhaps, a grand husband.

"Monsieur Chauvin looks grand," she said, "but that does not make him so; it is the thing itself that I care for."

At midday, instead of going out to walk on the terrace, Madame de Vougay came up to her secretary.

"After this morning, dear child, I shall not require you. We must say 'Good-bye.'" She patted Liline's shoulder kindly. "You have been very useful to me, Liline, and you must take this as a token of my appreciation." She placed a little purse on the writing-table. "I had thought of giving you a dress or two; but it seems to me

you can have so little occasion for dress here, that money is more useful."

Liline felt choked, the humiliation was intolerable; it seemed to her that she was being sent away in disgrace, because Nathalie had told tales of her.

"Madame," she raised her head, and forced herself to speak quietly, although her anger strove to get free, "pardon me, but I cannot take money from you. I have been so glad to help you for love, dear lady. Will you not do me the honour of accepting my poor services?"

Madame de Vougay looked grave. She could not find fault with the girl's manner; but it disappointed her to find Liline so wanting in tact. She instinctively blamed herself for having spoiled the girl, so that she had forgotten her real position.

"I think you are unwise," she said, coldly; "if you do not need the money now, you can put it away, or it may be useful to your father."

Liline's anger had got loose; it flashed into her eyes.

"Thank you, Madame," she said, "if I have really been useful, you will not wish to give me pain—a ribbon that you have worn, or a book that you have read will be treasured by me; but I cannot take money for such a slight service as I have rendered."

Madame de Vougay was surprised, and she was also ruffled by this resistance; at the same time, Liline's last speech had touched her. She looked round her. There lay on a table in the corner of the room a beautifully-bound volume of "Hours" with a gold clasp.

She crossed the room, looked lovingly at the book, and then came back and put it into Liline's hand.

"I give you a very dear companion of mine," she said; "it is more suitable to you than one of my trinkets would be, and it will serve to remind you sometimes of me. Good-bye, Liline."

She held out her hand, but she did not offer to kiss the girl.

"Thank you, Madame, a hundred times."

Liline was still passionately angry, for she thought the Marquise would have given her the little brooch she wore at her throat. She lingered a moment, and then said :

"Are you sending me away, Madame, for any fault?"

Madame de Vougay raised her eyebrows.

"You should try not to be fanciful, Liline," she said, gravely. "I told you I wanted your help while I was alone. I am expecting a visitor, and, therefore, I shall be occupied. Good morning, child."

She walked away, feeling vexed with herself for having given so much explanation. She began to see that Nathalie was right. She had thought the woman jealous when she warned her mistress that Liline was spoiled and vain; Madame de Vougay felt that it was her own


fault; she ought to have remembered that the terrible Republican spirit which had infected the whole nation, made it more than ever incumbent on nobles to maintain class distinctions in their immediate surroundings. Liline was beautiful, and she had a singular power of fascination, and she had, too, little dainty ways, which made her far more companionable than a servant could be; every one of these qualities, however, made her dangerous when she presumed on them.

"Heavens!" Madame de Vougay went into her dressing-room, and closed the door behind her. "Suppose I had let her come here during Lucien's visit!"

She uttered a thankful ejaculation for such an escape; and she determined to send the rejected purse of money to Baptiste Vivier, to be applied by him to his daughter's benefit.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MARQUIS.

 HE days were shortening, and although the dinner-hour was early at Château Vougay, the long, bare dining-room had to be lighted before the meal began.

Dinner was over now. The Marquise had gone to her room, and soft candle-light from the chandelier fell on the white table-cloth, on the rich glow of the decanters, and the jewel-like fruit; it also fell on the faces of Gustave Chauvin and his host. The servants had left the room; there had been no sound for some minutes, except the click of a spoon in Gustave's coffee; he was looking very grave, but his cousin was laughing heartily.

Lucien de Vougay was singularly like his mother; but he was like the middle-aged

Marquise de Vougay, not the beautiful woman she had been at twenty-six years old. He was very pale and worn; and his blond hair, his long, drooping moustache, and colourless blue eyes had also a worn and faded aspect; there seemed to be no life in them. Something in his mobile lips contradicted this, and suggested a lively spirit within the exhausted appearance; his small, expressive hands, and his well-set head, were full of life.

"My dear fellow," he had taken his cigar from his lips while he laughed, "you look as shocked as though you were an Englishman. What in the name of wonder can my approaching marriage have to do with my pleasures?"

Gustave did not seem disconcerted by his cousin's laughter. He was not smoking; he sipped his coffee before he answered.

"Then you have really made up your mind to marry Mademoiselle de Lanmeur?"

Lucien shrugged his shoulders. "What would

you have me do? My mother tells me there is no other way. She shows me on one side my debts, and on the other the photograph of a pretty little person—with a fortune large enough to float me for some years to come. Yes, I have consented to marry Adelaïde de Lanmeur. I have no doubt I shall make an exemplary husband, and that my wife will adore me," he stroked his fair moustache. "I do not find women difficult, you know," he said, languidly.

Gustave was silent. He took a finger biscuit from a blue Sèvres compotier, and soaked it in his coffee. At that moment he wished his cousin Lucien were back in Paris; he felt a sudden dislike to the fair, handsome young fellow, and a strange warning sensation fell on him.

"You are not lively, my friend!" Lucien said, presently; "be reasonable, cousin, and tell me of any chance of amusement in this benighted Breton hole. There must surely be a pretty girl of some sort in the village."

"I have not been to the village——"

"Ah, my veracious one, I have you fast ; as sure as the sun sets this evening, you went to mass on Sunday, and you must have had full leisure during the discourse of worthy Monsieur Édouin to find out any good looks among our village maidens. Come, come. I insist on your experiences."

"And I say I have none to give you," said Gustave, doggedly. "Even if I had——" he paused. "I say again what right has a man on the point of marriage to wish even to begin an intrigue with a village girl? According to my notions such a pursuit is always unworthy of a gentleman ; but in your position it is an insult to the lady you think of marrying. Come, Lucien, come and finish your cigar on the terrace. You will find the air pleasant, I promise you."

Lucien was greatly amused by his cousin's rebuke. His facile temper was not easily ruffled, although he had a way of revenging himself by bitter, stinging words. This castigation, however,

he reserved for those whose good opinion he did not value.

Gustave Chauvin had gauged his cousin's character truly, when he resolved not to be thoroughly intimate with Lucien. He had acted, unconsciously, on the principle of the old proverb : "Familiarity breeds contempt," and he had never received any obligation from the young Marquis ; he had given to Lucien much valuable time, and had helped him both at college and since his return from England. He therefore possessed the natural empire, which a calm, self-possessed man, who has learned worldly wisdom by having made his own way to an honourable position, holds over a careless, light-hearted spendthrift ; for, in spite of his sweet, easy temper, Lucien was often in scrapes, which made him still cling to his cousin's advice.

"I will come, philosopher," he said, gaily. "I suppose you will lecture me even when my hair turns gray. Well, well ; one of these days you will over-shoot the mark in your wonderful discretion,

Gustave ; you forget that you are not the only man here with eyes in his head. Now let us talk of those confounded creditors for a quarter of an hour—no more, be it understood, not a moment. *Canaille !* they do not deserve the honour of being discussed by their betters, my sweet mother would say. But you know as well as I do, Gustave, that in the next generation of Frenchmen, class distinctions will hold a very small place. As it happens, Mademoiselle Adelarde is a lady ; but money, in due proportion, be it understood, levels class distinctions for me."

Gustave smiled ; but he thought there was truth in his cousin's words. At the same time he told himself it was better to marry an innocent village girl like Liline, than an over-educated, over-dressed Parisian, the daughter of a rich man who had, perhaps, worked his way up from sordid obscurity as a money-lender.

"Well," he said, "you have to be thankful. It would have grieved my aunt sadly if you

had not married in your own rank. Now about business."

The changing tints on the trees had softened into a deep olive, above which a yellow sky, pale, except where dark gray lines crossed it, changed first into pale green, and then above to luminous gray. There was not a sound, except the harsh cry of the night-hawk in the woods, and this came only now and then. Here and there a vista opened in the dense olive masses of the wood, and showed soft gradations of colour between the grass and the trees, and the dim, far-off prospect veiled beneath the pale sky. The beauty of the scene moved Gustave. It seemed a sort of profanation to be talking of debts, of money flung away on worthless pleasures, and the extortions of greedy money-lenders, in such sweet and peaceful surroundings; but he listened and advised his cousin as best he could, while his thoughts kept straying to the house in the wood. Was Liline watching that exquisite sky, he wondered?

Lucien said at last, "Time is up."

"Good night," he called out to his cousin as he left the terrace; "there is no use in my playing host to you, you are more at home here than I am."

He went into the house, and crossing the large, gloomy hall, he began to go up the broad staircase.

It has been said that there was no outside gallery to the staircase; the door at the top of the stairs opened into a long corridor which branched out right and left, and was dimly lighted by candles placed in blackened sconces; at the mouth of the right-hand passage, Nathalie stood waiting with a lamp.

Lucien guessed that she had brought him a message.

"Does my mother want to see me, Nathalie?"

"Pardon me, Monseigneur, but Madame la Marquise says that she is tired, and she has gone to bed. Madame sent me to ask if Monseigneur

has all he wants, and if there is anything that can be done for him."

Lucien had been only a boy when Nathalie came into his mother's service, and the grave-faced woman worshipped him.

Lucien looked hard at her set face. As a boy he had often wondered whether this demure, silent woman, who flitted in and out of his mother's room like a ghost, was all that she seemed to be.

"You can come with me and light my candles," he said. "I do not want Roger to-night, if he has put everything ready; go on first and light the candles, my good Nathalie."

The candle-light was hardly needed, for as the door opened, a brisk flame of wood fire shone on the hearth, and glittered on the heavy silver candlesticks and the gold-topped toilet bottles on the dressing-table. The dark, carved bedstead and the wardrobes and massive chairs, were entirely out of harmony with the rest of the

furniture, which had been hastily procured from Morlaix in honour of the young master's visit to his estates.

Nathalie lit the four candles on the table.

"Is that sufficient, Monseigneur?"

"By no means," he laughed. "I see four on the chimney-shelf, and two on the table by the bed-side; light them all if you please. Do not be stingy, Nathalie. I declined a public reception; therefore Vougay can well afford a few candles to welcome me with."

Nathalie lit the candles and then she made him a deep curtsy.

"You are truly welcome, my lord. I have the honour to wish you good night and pleasant dreams."

She began to move backwards out of the room.

"Stop a minute," Lucien said, "you should give me something agreeable to dream about. Tell me, Nathalie, you have not lived all these years

in Paris with your eyes shut—you ought to be a judge of beauty, eh?"

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders.

"Pardon me, my lord," she said, demurely, "a face that seems pretty to me, might not suit your lordship's taste."

She gave him a keen look out of her dark, half-closed eyes.

Lucien was sleepy and tired after his long journey, but the effect of Nathalie's look was magical.

He smiled, and stroked his fair moustache rapidly—he always did this when he was interested—and Nathalie understood the meaning of the action.

"You can then show me something to admire," he said; "you mean to say there is a pretty face in Vougay. Tell me about it, and I shall see what I think of your taste."

Nathalie looked stolid, and she shook her head.

"I fear, my lord, there is not one; there are scarcely any girls in the village worth looking at."

Lucien followed her as she again backed towards the door.

"Listen. You know as well as I do, Nathalie, that there is a pretty face and figure hereabouts, which would give me pleasure."

She started. Lucien laughed.

"Pardon me, my lord, it is not I who have told your lordship this, it must have been some one else."

Lucien laughed again heartily; then he flung himself into one of the tall, dark chairs.

"Come here, Nathalie; tell me the name of this pearl of Vougay—make haste, I am dying of sleep. Where shall I find her, eh? Tell me; and then you can leave me to my dreams."

"But, my lord, what have I said? Pardon me, I do not think Madame la Marquise would approve of such an indiscretion on my part."

The girl is already vain, and your lordship's admiration would no doubt turn her head."

"Peace; do not be silly, Nathalie. Who says I shall admire her? She may not please my taste. I look at faces as if they were pictures, then I pass on and forget all about them, unless—but this girl need not know who I am, so tell me, my good woman, quickly."

Nathalie still hesitated, she stood looking at the dark carpeted floor.

"Pardon me, my lord," she said at last, "I dare not do it. If you go to-morrow to the cottage of the new garde champêtre, Baptiste Vivier, you will find out from him all you want to know, and you need not ask questions either. My lord, I humbly ask your permission to retire."

## CHAPTER X.

### ▲ WISH FULFILLED.

**B**APTISTE VIVIER had said Good-bye to Liline ; his gun was on his shoulder and he was in the act of leaving the house in the wood.

"Baptiste Vivier, hold ! Baptiste," came from among the trees at the back of the house.

Baptiste listened a moment. "It is the young lord," he said to Liline, and he went quickly round the corner of the dwelling.

Liline stood in the doorway. She was vexed to be taken at unawares, for her gown had lost its trim freshness, and she did not know whether her hair was well arranged. She had not even glanced at her mirror since breakfast ; and now, if she was to try and get even a peep at herself, she might miss

Monsieur Lucien. Was it possible, she asked herself, that she was at last going to see him again? The girl's cheeks burned, and her fingers grew cold, as she stood waiting. She glanced down at her feet. Thank Heaven, she had on her neat walking shoes: she had always put them on to go to the Château, and without thinking that she did not need them, she had put them on this morning also. She had intended to change her gown later in the day, for she had fancied that Monsieur le Marquis would not come so early. But after all her father might be mistaken in the voice.

Liline looked very lovely, as she stood in the morning sunshine, partly shadowed by the huge chestnut-trees. Her skin was so daintily fair, her soft, rounded chin, and firm, cream-tinted throat had a freshness only to be equalled by the fine, blue-veined temples, and the little pink ears, just now so flushed with excitement, that the delicate skin behind them looked almost white against her rich auburn hair. If she had gone to her mirror,

Liline would, perhaps, have brushed aside some of the glorious confusion in which this hair had massed itself above her low forehead. The hair itself was not especially fine, and was therefore rebellious, and as the sunshine fell on it, a bright golden ripple showed among the auburn waves.

A sudden sound parted her full red lips, and the pretty teeth showed within. Voice and footsteps were close by. The Marquis was coming, then. Her heart beat strongly, and she felt vexed at her own want of composure.

She had dropped her eyes as she met Monsieur Lucien's fixed gaze, and she could not look up while she listened.

"Good morning, mademoiselle," he said, politely, "your father tells me our woods are not new to you."

Liline looked up. She was disappointed to find that Monsieur Lucien was not admiring her as she expected; he had already turned to her father.

"Yes, monsieur," she said.

But Lucien took no further notice of her.

"You two live here alone, I suppose," he said to Baptiste; "it is lonely for your daughter when you are away."

"Pardon, Monsieur le Marquis, she is not alone, a woman from the village comes every day to do the house-work."

"Ah, that is well. I wonder if you could spare the woman to take a message for me to Monsieur Édouin."

"Certainly, my lord."

Baptiste's rugged face beamed with delight. His new master had praised all his arrangements; he had approved of a new plantation, which the steward had condemned, and the garde had felt strengthened in his good opinion of his master when he saw that, although Monsieur Lucien's first look at Liline had been full of admiration, yet he had refrained from staring at the girl, or paying her any compliment on her beauty.

Baptiste went to the door and called for Marie Jeanne.

The coarse-faced Breton woman came clattering through the house in her wooden shoes. She was trembling all over with fear at the unexpected honour of being brought face to face with Monsieur le Marquis.

Lucien looked at her with disgust, and turned away, and in truth, her harsh features, and sad expression, and the dull stare in her black eyes, repelled him.

"Tell her," he spoke to Baptiste, "to go to the Presbytery, and to say that I hope Monsieur le Curé will do me the honour of dining to-day at the Château. Thank you, my man," when Baptiste had repeated his message. "Now I will go with you. *Au revoir*, mademoiselle."

He raised his hat to Liline, and then led the way into the park.

"Is that our young lord?" said Marie Jeanne; "but he is not near so fine a man as his father was. Do you not think," she said, slily, "that Monsieur Chauvin has a more lordly air?"

Liline had stood in stupefied silence. The

cunning expression in the woman's face roused her wits.

"I!" she spoke, haughtily. "What should I know about a gentleman's looks?—instead of chattering you should mind your own business, Marie Jeanne. Go to the Presbytery at once and give Monsieur Édouin the message—and then—well, you can see if that chicken of your grandmother's is ready to kill; she said I was to have it."

Marie Jeanne gave a grunt of assent, and turned to depart.

Liline went on to her own room; she wanted to be alone; she had begun to suspect that Marie Jeanne watched her, and this morning she could not bear a witness to her mortification.

Very soon she heard the clatter of the wooden shoes on the door-stone, and then the heavy thud, thud, as Marie Jeanne trudged off to the Presbytery.

"Thank Heaven! I am safe for two hours at least."

Liline sat down in a little easy-chair, a gift from her patroness, and began to cry.

It was all over, then. For so many years she had looked forward to this meeting, and now she had seen the idol of her dreams and he had despised her. He had not bestowed the notice on her which he would have given to a pretty child, for she had learned from Nathalie how keenly Monsieur le Marquis admired beauty.

"It was this hateful rumpled gown that disgusted him," she sobbed. "Ah, if only I had had sense enough to keep out of sight."

She had covered her eyes with her hands. Now she drew away her right hand to seek her handkerchief, for the tears had streamed over her face. The room had grown darker, she fancied.

"Ah!" she cried in alarm. She saw a face pressed against the window. The next minute she smiled, for she recognised Monsieur Lucien. She had scarcely time to wipe her eyes before he tapped at the door of her room.

"Come in," she said. She would not go to the

door lest he should think her too much pleased by the honour of his visit.

Lucien opened the door. He stood a minute on the threshold of the room admiring the dainty neatness of its arrangements.

Liline had risen at his entrance. She curtsied, but she did not speak.

He bowed to her. "I fear I have disturbed you," he said, kindly. "The truth is, I felt bound to apologise for leaving you so hurriedly; but I was unwilling to keep your father waiting. I thought, perhaps, now, I might come in and rest a moment on my way to the Château."

At this Liline opened her bright eyes widely. What could he mean? Why, he had hardly been gone twenty minutes; he could not need rest. She, however, pushed a chair towards him, and asked him to sit down.

"Thank you," he said; "but you must go back to your seat, or I shall feel that I have disturbed you. I fear I did, eh?"

He laughed and looked so mischievous that Liline laughed too.

"Ah, I am glad to see you laugh," Lucien went on. "You were looking sad enough just now."

Liline's deep blush made him inquisitive.

"What was the matter, eh?" he said.

"I—I——" she stammered. "It is dull here, my lord."

"Of course it is dull; a charming girl like you wants to be seen and to receive the admiration due to her. I cannot fancy what your father is thinking of to shut you up here."

Liline did not answer; she was delighted. When Monsieur Gustave had talked to her about his love, he had not told her she was beautiful—his eyes perhaps had said so, but it was more delightful to be assured in words. As she gave a sudden upward glance, she saw that Monsieur Lucien's eyes were fastened on her blushing face with undisguised admiration.

He rose from his chair and came closer to her.

"You are a jewel, worthy of a better setting," he said. "I must talk to your father; it would pain me to think of you passing your life here when I leave Vougay. At what time does your father come in?"

"At dusk, my lord."

Liline's delight overpowered her. She fancied the Marquis was going to tell her father to place her in Paris, or, at any rate, somewhere less out of the world than this wood—which now seemed to her no better than a tomb.

"Father is selfish," she said, and the anger she felt made her natural and unconstrained. "Father would sacrifice me altogether just to have me with him."

Lucien's eyes sparkled; he was stroking his moustache with rapid fingers; undoubtedly the girl was very lovely, but he was not quite sure that her innocence was as genuine as it appeared to be.

"Ah," he said, slowly, "that is a pity. It is natural, of course, that he likes to keep you with him—who would not?—but he must not forget that others also like to look at you."

Lucien's eyes were not pale now; the pupils had dilated, and the eyes themselves had deepened in colour as he kept them fixed on Liline's changing face.

She sat quite still. She had read in one of Nathalie's novels that a calm, reposeful manner was lady-like, and also that it gave an especial charm to beauty. Liline had never been timid, and her intercourse with Gustave had given her self-confidence; her freedom from commonplace flutter captivated Lucien's cultivated taste. It was rare, he thought, to meet with so much freshness and so much reticence in a young girl. He felt very inquisitive about Liline.

"You lived here as a child, I believe."

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis." She looked at him, and he felt how fascinating she was.

"And then—what happened after? I am sure, Liline, you have not been brought up in this cottage—that is impossible."

Liline was puzzled; how was it, she wondered, that he did not know as Gustave did that she

had spent two years at the Hôtel de Vougay? Well, he could not always remain ignorant of it; so, she had better tell him.

"I lived, my lord, with my aunt in Rouen, and then I was with Madame la Marquise, at the Hôtel de Vougay, till my father left the army."

"Really!" Lucien's eyes sparkled. He understood Nathalie's words; and although, after a fashion, he loved his mother, it amused him after all her care to be able to circumvent her, and to have discovered this little pastime for himself. "By-the-bye," he said, as a sudden thought came to him, "you know my cousin, Gustave Chauvin, I fancy?"

Liline fell into the trap. She guessed that her lover had spoken of her to the Marquis, and she wondered at it. Gustave could not be so very much in love, or he would be anxious to keep her to himself.

"I have seen Monsieur Chauvin."

She tried to speak carelessly; but he saw the effort she made.

"Ah," he said; "does he visit you here, or when do you see him?"

Liline could not look up, she feared to betray herself; she did not know that her changing colour had already betrayed her intimacy with Monsieur Chauvin.

"I have met him in the wood, my lord. No, he has never come to see me; I—I did not ask him."

Lucien felt inclined to laugh. The position was clear to him, and there need be no scruple on his part about supplanting his cousin. Liline evidently did not care for Gustave, and she liked to listen to him. Still, he did not feel sure how far he dared go with her; she might repeat all he said to her to his cousin.

"Well," he said, "I am rested; now I am going. I should like to stay; I should like to spend the day here, Liline. Would it bore you, I wonder?"

She laughed and looked up with a bright sauciness that made her very tempting.

"You would get tired, my lord," she said.

He took her hand and held it.

"I do not say I should stop at looks, my sweet child. I might, perhaps, ask for a kiss by way of refreshment." Liline pulled her hand away, and drew herself up. "Oh, you need not look so scornful, mademoiselle. You have no right to distract a poor fellow with your beauty till he hardly knows what he is saying. Well, then, at least you will say '*au revoir*, Lucien ;' and you will send Marie Jeanne on an errand, or, better still, give her a holiday to-morrow."

He kissed both his hands to her, and then he went out. As he passed the window he looked in. Liline was standing near, evidently in the hope of catching another glimpse of him. Lucien smiled and raised his hat.

"Poor little bird," he said ; "she does not like dulness, nor sober-sided young men. Well, I must endeavour to give her all she wishes for. Meanwhile, if I judge her rightly, she will not chatter about my visit."

## CHAPTER XL

### A REPULSE.



ON the day after the meeting between Monsieur Lucien and Liline, Gustave Chauvin felt troubled and restless.

He had spent some hours yesterday, and again this morning, watching and waiting for Liline; but he could not get a glimpse of her. He longed to go to the cottage to satisfy himself that she was well; but she had already asked him not to come there because of Marie Jeanne, and he shrank from exposing her to this woman's gossip. He had guessed that Madame de Vougay had dismissed Liline from the Château because she expected Lucien, and he thought his aunt was right.

At midday Madame de Vougay sent for Gustave. She and Lucien were to go over next

day to Plou-anic, Madame de Lanneur's château, so that Lucien might become acquainted with Mademoiselle de Lanneur.

"If all goes as I hope," she said to Gustave, "we shall, perhaps, stay a fortnight. I shall ask you, my good Gustave, to return to Paris and settle Lucien's debts. It will be better, I fancy, for Monsieur Dupont to come to Plou-anic, so that he may confer with the notary of Madame de Lanneur. But I am going too fast; all this depends on our young people, and they may not care to marry."

"Lucien seems willing enough," Gustave sighed. He still pitied Adelaïde de Lanneur.

"You must remember that he has not seen Mademoiselle de Lanneur. Well, I shall not be long in finding out whether my hopes are to be realised. This is Wednesday; perhaps on Friday I shall send a messenger over with a note to tell you 'yes' or 'no.' Ah, my Gustave, if you continue to progress as you have done,

you will be asking me a .ore long to find you a wife."

"Thank you, dear aunt," he said, gaily. "I shall not give you so much trouble; I shall, perhaps, find one myself."

She shook her head.

"That is always a mistake, my friend; a man cannot judge as a woman can, whether a girl has good qualities for a wife, remember that always. Now I must go to Nathalie, and tell her to pack for our journey. Plou-anic is after all only a drive of three hours from Vougay. If all is happily arranged, you will, perhaps, join us when you come back from Paris."

Gustave bowed; he felt sorry not to confide fully in this kind friend; and, when she left him, he started for a walk. With all his outward self-control he was sensitive and impressionable, and he could not shake off an inward warning of coming misfortune.

This depression seemed to increase when he

reached a lonely heath, strewn with huge blocks of gray stone, on the confines of the park. The dreary, weird solitude was more than he could bear, and he turned again into the park by its furthest entrance. An importunate whisper had kept on telling him that then, even at that very moment, Liline was in some danger.

It was beginning to grow dusk as he advanced more deeply into the shadows of the trees. He stopped; the pain at his heart caused by this constant harass and uncertainty was unbearable.

"If I go to the house in the wood," he said, "Baptiste will probably be at home. I have nothing to be ashamed of; my intentions are honest, and he will believe me. At any rate, I shall satisfy myself that all is well with the sweet child, and I shall see her."

He quickened his steps. He was longing to see Liline. He had keenly felt these two days of separation, and he recalled the sweet, yielding glance she had given him just

before they parted. The longing presently overpowered him, and he wondered how he had endured the suspense of these hours. He believed that if Baptiste's approach had not scared Liline, she would have promised to become his wife.

He was near the cottage when he saw a figure among the trees. It was a man; but he had thrown something over his shoulders, and his head was bent.

"Some friend of Baptiste," Gustave thought, "I am glad I have escaped meeting him."

A few minutes brought him to the door of the house. He knocked at it with his stick.

There was no answer. Presently, however, he heard the click of flint and steel, and a light glimmered from the window of Liline's room. Gustave went on to the window, and tapped at it.

"Do not be frightened," he said; "it is I—Gustave—let me in."

He could not see into the room, for the light

had been screened. Presently the upper half of the house-door was opened, and he saw Liline.

He was at the door, and had taken both her hands before she could prevent him.

"Liline, my darling--my beloved. Will you let me come in? I have been very anxious about you."

She tried to draw her hands away; but Gustave kissed them, and held them fast.

"Please let me go, my father will be here directly. Do not get me into trouble. I dare not let you in till father comes. He would be so angry."

He loosed her hands.

"I am going to tell your father everything, my child; he will see that I am in earnest; he will consent to our betrothal. At most I ask you to wait two years, and I promise you, dearest, to shorten the waiting as much as I can."

He looked at her anxiously. It was not so dark here as it had been under the trees, and her

face puzzled him, she looked sad and changed. He wished she would raise her white, drooping eyelids, and let him read her thoughts in her sweet eyes.

But Liline stood silent; her eyes were fixed on the ground, and her arms hung listlessly beside her.

"Dearest Liline, may I not come in and wait for your father?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him calmly, and as if she were ignorant of the love that glowed in his face.

"Monsieur," she said, "you had better not say anything of the kind to my father—he would most likely vex you, and for the sake of our old friendship I should not like you to be vexed."

"What do you mean, Liline? What is this?" he said, in alarm.

"Please go away before my father comes, and then I shall not be scolded."

"You shall not be scolded, dearest girl. I will go on and meet your father as soon as I hear his

footsteps. I am, sure he will be content if you are—you are willing to accept my love, are you not, sweet child?"

He tried to take her hand again; but she drew back further from the door.

"Monsieur," she said, and Gustave felt chilled by her tone, "you are mistaken. I made no promise to you."

"Liline!" he spoke in a hurried, passionate way that frightened her. "What has changed you—what has happened? You accepted my love; two days ago I left you smiling—the sweet darling Liline that I know you to be; you have kept out of my way since then, and now you meet me as if I were a stranger. What do you mean by saying 'Monsieur'?—you, to whom I have always been 'Gustave.'"

He was leaning over the half-door, his arms held out to her; she put out both hands as if to warn him from any nearer approach.

"You are unjust to me," she said, in a vexed tone. "You said you loved me, and you asked

me some day to marry you. Your—your manner impressed me, and while I listened I began to think I could be happy with you ; but—but——”

“You *have* changed,” he broke in ; he tried to keep down his anger. “Some one has tried to set you against me.”

“No, monsieur,” Liline answered, so heartily that he could not doubt her. “It is not so. After you left me I reflected, and I saw that a marriage between us would be a mistake. We are not suited ; but we can still be friends. I want a friend badly, and I could trust you, Monsieur Chauvin.”

She said this sweetly as she looked up at him.

“Friends ! You do not know what you are talking about,” he said, roughly. “I could never be your friend—unless I were your husband. But you talk wildly. You give me no reason for this change—ah, Liline, you have no reason to give—it is mere caprice ; and yet,” he added, bitterly, “two days ago you loved me—or else you were not true.”

Lilene was losing her calm. Something in her pleaded for this man—he was so honest, so true, he

had loved her so long, and so faithfully. She pressed her hands together till she hurt them ; but she drew herself still further away from the door into the dark passage, as if she feared for her resolution.

"No, I did not love you," she said, at last. "I thought I did, and I wished to marry you while you talked to me ; but it all changed when you went away. No, monsieur, you could not make me happy—you could not give me what I want. I should be miserable if I could not have jewellery, and nice gowns and bonnets, and a carriage, and do as other women do in Paris. If I must be poor I may as well be here, where at least I am free."

"Then it was not me at all you thought of marrying," he burst out hoarsely, "only a husband who could give you all you wish for. *Mon Dieu*, who could have thought it of you?"

His tone mortified her. Liline liked to be thought well of by every one, and especially by Gustave ; she was not wholly heartless. In spite

of the new and dazzling prospects which had been opened to her ambition, she shrank more and more from giving pain to her old lover.

"You are again unjust," she said. "I liked you so much—I had liked you so long. My aunt, at Rouen, always said to me that a well-brought-up girl never loves any man till he becomes her husband. Until I began to think of these things, how could I tell? Yes, you are unjust."

She came forward as she spoke, and he saw tears in her bright, brown eyes, raised so pleadingly to his.

Gustave was softened—he felt he had been hasty and suspicious. He would not give up his hopes; but he would try to attain a position as quickly as he could that would satisfy Liline. After all, she was very young, and with her remarkable beauty it was natural that she should care for dress; even his good aunt cared for jewellery and dress, and he considered Madame de Vougay a singularly wise woman.

"Dearest Liline," there was a pathetic earnestness in his voice that touched the girl against her will, "I entreat you to be patient, and I will give you all you can wish for. Already I have been successful beyond my hopes; and the wish to make you happy will spur me on till I can satisfy you. I hear your father, I think, and I am going to tell him all my plans; I feel sure he will consent to be my father, too, Liline."

He caught her hand and kissed it passionately; then he vanished into the gloom under the trees.

Lilene clasped her hands with frantic impatience.

"Why did I not forbid him?" she said. "I could have called out 'no.' He has no real love for me, or he would not seek to degrade me. His father, too! No! When I marry I want to shake myself free of father."

## CHAPTER XII.

### LILINE'S HOPES.



LILINE stood waiting; but her father did not appear. She heard voices; but the wind blew the sounds away before she could identify them. At last she heard the well-known regular tread, and Baptiste came out of the deep shadow, an embodiment of the gloom he left behind.

He carried his gun under his arm, his head was sunk on his breast, and when he entered he pushed rudely past Liline, without saying a word to her.

She followed him into the kitchen; she was indignant at such treatment. At any rate, in Gustave's case she was free from blame; yet she shrank from her father's anger; she had never

provoked an outbreak, and she dreaded one now. No man had ever scolded Liline since her grandfather died, and she knew she could not bear to be spoken to harshly by her father; she felt that she could not control her tongue if he rebuked her.

The supper-table had been ready before Gustave disturbed her; and now she busied herself in cutting a hunch of bread from the long loaf, then she poured the soup, that stood ready on the hearth, into Baptiste's green porringer. She placed this on the table with a horn spoon beside it, and then she sat down on the bench beneath the projecting chimney-piece.

Her movement had not escaped her father's notice, but he ate his soup in silence.

"Liline," he said at last, "come here; I want a little talk with you, child." He tried not to be stern; but he could not make his tone pleasant. "Sit down." He pointed to a bench beside the table, and she sat down, swelling with sudden rebellious feelings. How could he treat her so

when she had given up home to come and live with him in this desert?

Perhaps Baptiste was a little surprised by his own behaviour, for when he began to speak, his voice was not steady.

"Child"—he fixed his open, frank, blue eyes on her face—"it is a great loss to you not to have a mother to guide you."

Liline moved restlessly on the hard bench. She bit her full red under-lip till she hurt it; it was hard to her to keep silence.

Baptiste spoke harshly against his will. It was so difficult, as he looked at his lonely child, to feel that it was his duty to give her pain. If he had been with Liline all her life, and had seen her gradually develop from childhood, her blooming beauty would not have, perhaps, so strongly impressed him; but she had been little more than a year old when her father left her, and he had not seen her again till they met in the Marquise's grand Parisian house; then the girl's dainty looks and

ways had abashed the rough soldier. Liline, too, had at first tried to fascinate her father, and he had willingly submitted to his beautiful child as to some one infinitely his superior; for he imagined her goodness to be equal to her looks. He often craved for more affection, but he supposed that he could not expect it. Sometimes the poor fellow told himself that so good a girl as Liline would surely be tender and pitiful to him in his old age. At present he was not much over forty, so he had some time to wait.

He had just met Monsieur Chauvin, and the news he had heard had upset him, and had dethroned Liline from the esteem in which he held her. Truth and honesty were Baptiste's cardinal virtues; and a deceitful woman was, in his eyes, worse than a thievish man. Still, he meant to let her justify herself if she could.

"Though you have not a mother, child," he went on, "you have not been neglected. Your Aunt Sophie was a good and virtuous woman, and I am

sure she taught you that to meet a gentleman unknown to your father was wrong and scandalous——”

“Scandalous !” The word burst from her in a cry of anger. “No one dares to talk scandal of me.”

Baptiste looked softly at her and shook his head ; her eyes were hard and angry, and her cheeks were aflame ; her lips parted, as she drew in her breath between her small white teeth.

“I do not say that any one talks scandal of you yet, child,” he said, gravely ; “they would not do it twice about you ; they would have to reckon with me a bit. What shames me, and makes me sore, is that you should do this thing secretly. God help me, child ! All this while I’ve been likening you to your mother ; I never thought I was doing the sweet saint a wrong in her grave.”

Liline rose up, she could not bear this. Though he was her father, she asked herself what right had this rough, ignorant man, who could not

even pronounce some of his words rightly, to lecture her? He had never been her teacher, and she was not going to submit to him now. Her self-will, so long fostered and cherished by the indulgence in which she had lived, rose up, strong and rebellious as an unsubdued colt.

"I know more about my mother than you do." She looked so contemptuous, that he winced as if she had struck him. The poor man loved her fondly, in spite of her coldness. "She would have seen no harm in anything that has passed between me and Monsieur Chauvin—she would have praised me for my discretion. Why, he wished to come in this evening, and I would not let him. He asked me to promise to be his wife, and I refused."

She looked so truthful now, so deeply injured, that Baptiste was forced to believe her. This was exactly what Monsieur Chauvin had said to him, and Baptiste had turned on the young man, and had told him he had no right even to seek to visit his daughter without first asking his leave. He

had refused to listen to Gustave's proposals until he had spoken to Liline.

Baptiste's slowness of mind, the quality which Liline so despised in him, was helping him now. Instead of answering his daughter, as she stood there quivering with anger, his thoughts went over those sentences exchanged with Monsieur Chauvin. He saw that the young fellow was in earnest, and also that he was deeply in love. Baptiste, as he recalled words and looks, once more doubted his daughter and believed in her lover. He wished he had been less hasty with Monsieur Chauvin; but the shock of the sudden news that his "innocent child," as he called Liline, had met a lover in secret, had scattered his wits.

"There was no harm in that, Liline," he said; "but you must have given this gentleman encouragement. You have met him, and that has led him on to hope. Child, child"—his anxiety hurried his words—"do you not know that a girl in your class of life must not talk to a gentleman if she

wishes to keep straight, she should not talk to any young man unknown to her father. Monsieur Chauvin is out of his senses; Madame la Marquise would not believe her ears if she learned that he had proposed for Liline Vivier; and remember, child, that if he were not poor, he would not have thought of you. Let me tell you, you would be far more suitably married as the wife of Loïc Perrin, at the mill of Rusquec, than to any poor gentleman."

Liline put her hands behind her, and made her father a low curtsy.

"Thank you," she said; "I am not going to marry a miller, or a farmer, or a lout of any kind—or a poor gentleman either. You may be easy about me; I am quite able to take care of myself, and you would do best to leave me alone."

She moved haughtily away, and went back to the hearth.

A groan from her father startled her. She shrugged her shoulders; but presently she looked round; she saw that he had set his elbows on the table, and covered his eyes with his hands,

"After all I am not wise," she thought. "I had best humour him, or he will watch me day and night."

She went back to the table, cleared it briskly, and then washed up the supper things with more cheerfulness than usual. When she had finished, she went up to her father.

"Good night," she said. "You make me cross and hasty when you doubt me; I cannot have you doubt me, father."

He raised his head and looked at her sorrowfully.

"God knows it is hard to do it," he said, with a sigh. "You look like an angel sometimes, Liline. There, good night; I am upset by all this; I am best left to myself to-night, child."

She was glad to light her lamp and to escape to her own room; and she drew the bolt across the door, lest her father should repent his harshness, and seek a more loving reconciliation.

She set down her lamp and walked up and down her room; she was too much excited with

her long day's work to go to bed. Many things had happened, and they had followed so rapidly one on another, that she had not had a chance of thinking them over. She unfastened the front of her gown and drew out a ring, which she had hidden in its folds. She took it up to the lamp, and her eyes sparkled as she watched its glitter with every turn she gave it. Then she put it on her round finger and looked at it with pride. Not because it was Monsieur Lucien's gift, and because he had placed it on her finger, but because she felt her foot firm on the way to her wishes. Only a lady, she thought, could wear a ring like this one. Surely Monsieur Lucien must have got it on purpose for her; it fitted her finger as if it had been made for it.

But the ring had an especial meaning for Liline. Monsieur Lucien had spent some time with her this evening; he had said he loved her, and he had asked for her love. Liline sat down and rested her pretty round chin in the pink palm of the hand that wore the ring.

When Monsieur Chauvin had said he loved her, she had been pleased and touched, but she had not felt frightened—she had full trust in him; but when Monsieur Lucien had bent over her, he had drawn his chair close to hers, and she had felt his warm breath on her cheek, a feeling of terror, of mistrust, had come to her suddenly, and she had hardly been able to keep from crying out.

"I suppose," she thought, as she nestled her chin into its rosy nest, "I care for Monsieur Lucien, and I do not really love Gustave; and yet if Monsieur Lucien had kissed me, I think I should have screamed."

For when the young Marquis had asked for this proof of her love for him, Liline had said she would never kiss a man who was not her husband; and then had come her crowning triumph. He had smiled tenderly.

"Then I will wait," he said. "No, not for long; for when I leave Vougay, you shall go with me as my wife, Liline."


He had left her abruptly, and before she could decide whether he was in earnest, Monsieur Chauvin had tapped at her window, and had persecuted her with his dull, commonplace hopes.

She sighed. Everything would have been so easy if Gustave had not loved her. She could have taken him into her confidence about Monsieur Lucien; for now alone with her thoughts in this silent semi-darkness, it seemed impossible to the girl that the young Marquis would dare to make her his wife. He was of age, certainly; but how could he venture so to displease Madame la Marquise?

Liline sat thinking long after her father was fast asleep in his box-bed in the kitchen. Her lamp burned low and spluttered; but she sat still, thinking and thinking, till she had dreamed out a future as gorgeous as the sheen on a peacock's plume.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE FOUNTAIN OF DRENNÉC.

HE postman rarely came to the house in the wood. Since her Aunt Sophie's death, there was no one from whom Liline could expect letters. But on the second morning after Gustave's visit, the postman came in sight just as Baptiste was starting from home. Liline had not come to the door with him ; she had been cheerful and docile since that stormy evening, and Baptiste had tried to make up for his harshness by every little kindness he could think of. He had brought her a pair of beautiful wood pigeons in a cage, which he had sent for to Morlaix, and her room was gay with wild ferns, and wreaths of climbing plants, which he had brought in from the woods. He had also brought a bowl of cream

from the farmer's wife, on the further side of the waste, for Liline had said how nice blackberries would be if she only had cream to put to them. Baptiste's own habits were frugal ; but he loved to indulge his darling in her whims.

The postman nodded at Baptiste ; said it was a fine morning, and then he handed him a letter from his greasy wallet.

"It is for your daughter." He nodded again, and hurried along the road to the village.

Baptiste looked at the letter. It was addressed : "Mademoiselle Liline Vivier," in a small, thin, female hand ; but it was not from the Marquise de Vougay. When Liline came out, he was carefully examining the post-mark.

"What have you got there, father ?" she said ; "ah, a letter," she looked over him. "It is for me. It is from Nathalie ; she is with her lady at Plou-anic."

Baptiste nodded, and winked.

"You must tell me the news later, I cannot stay now ; but I will be bound there is news in

that letter—there is more, I guess, in that journey to Plou-anic than there seems; but I am not one to gossip. Good-bye, child."

Liline felt too much excited to heed him. Nathalie had never written to her before, though she knew her writing. The girl was puzzled, and she looked all over the envelope before she opened it.

There were only a few lines on scented note-paper. They began "Dearest," and they were signed, "He who loves you."

"Do not believe a word you hear about me, or the cause of my journey. Meet me the afternoon you receive this, at the Fountain of Drennec in the middle of the forest. There I will tell you everything."

Liline trembled from head to foot. She went quickly to her room, lest Marie Jeanne should notice her agitation. Of course, the letter was written by Monsieur Lucien. But how came it that Nathalie had addressed it? How could that spiteful woman, the girl asked herself, consent to help Liline's marriage with her young master?

"It is his power over every one," she said ; "it was hard, even for me, to resist him when he wanted to kiss me, and Nathalie has been his mother's servant ever since he was a boy. It will be delightful when I can feel that I may yield to him."

There was, however, something in the letter which calmed her delightful anticipations, and that was the proposal to meet him at the Fountain of Drennec.

The forest of Vougay lay beyond the park, and bordered the wild granite-strewn waste, and in its very heart was the haunted Fountain of Drennec. The place had a bad name ; a woman had been murdered there, and evil spirits were said to haunt the spot.

Liline had once gone there as a child with Gustave, and he had taught her to laugh at the legend of the evil water spirit, the Korrigan, who had been seen, so old Barbe used to say, combing her yellow hair beside the fountain. Liline had forgotten both the place and its history, and she had

never ventured so far as the forest since her return to Vougay. Dared she go there, even if she could find the way? She could not question Marie Jeanne, lest she should be followed; she was so sure the woman watched her, that she tried to sit quietly at her sewing till dinner-time.

Baptiste had taken his dinner with him. He often did this in fine weather, so there was no fear of his coming home till evening. After dinner the girl sent Marie Jeanne with some eggs to the Curé, and she told the woman she need not return. Liline then dressed herself in her prettiest gown, and a hat which she had made as like the Marquise's travelling hat as possible, and started in good time for the forest.

At first the way was very pleasant, there was plenty of sunshine, and the changing leaves took a more vivid colour from it. At the end of the park she found herself in an oak wood. The leaves were a golden brown here, and had begun to fall, so that she walked on a soft carpet of withering foliage. Soon, however, the trees stood nearer

together, some were gnarled, and took most grotesque shapes; long gray lichens hung down from the distorted branches, dark green moss grew about the roots, and a strange smell of decay revealed the presence of the fungi, which Liline soon saw many-coloured, and many-shaped, in the deep shadow among the trees. Some of these fungi were so tall and pale that Liline shivered.

"It is well that I am not altogether Breton," she said, "I might think they were ghosts."

She wondered if it was much further to the fountain, now. She had kept to a straight, narrow track, but at this point another track crossed it, leading right and left as each end curved and disappeared into the thick forest.

Liline stood still and tried to recall her childish recollections of the place. She was almost sure that Gustave had taken her to the fountain by a straight path, and yet if she made a mistake she might never find her way.

Up the path on the right the silence was suddenly broken by the barking of a dog.

Liline grew white and faint. She remembered that her father had said only yesterday, he wished gentlemen would ask his leave before they took a dog into the woods; and she had guessed that he meant Gustave. If this were indeed Monsieur Chauvin with his dog, her only chance of escaping him was to hurry forward. She hastened on; but she had not gone more than a hundred yards, when the gloom suddenly deepened, the trees stood so thickly, she could scarcely find her way between them, and through the close growth of underwood.

All at once Liline stood still and drew her breath, with a feeling of relief. She knew where she was now, it had all come back to her. She saw that she had found the path to the Fountain of Drennec. On the right was a small clearing among the trees, and at the end of it was a narrow green path bordered by rough lichen-stained stones, which lay their length on either side of the narrow, green way; beside this, trees again grew thickly.

Liline crossed the clearing, and turned into this path, and she slipped, and nearly fell on her face on the treacherous green liverwort. She recovered herself, however, and went cautiously along the slippery incline till she reached a flight of broken steps. These led down on the left side of the path into a square stone-bordered enclosure, at one end of which stood the fountain. The fountain itself, built of square blocks of gray stone, uneven and weather-stained, turned its back to the way by which Liline had come ; it looked weird and dreary with its surrounding of half-dead, gnarled trees.

Above it was placed the figure of a huge misshapen woman in darker stone than the fountain, and below at, evidently, a much more recent date, a cross had been carved in the midst of the square gray erection, just above the small opening whence water trickled into a leaf-clogged stone trough below.

Liline stepped down into the enclosure and looked up at the figure, and then her Breton

blood asserted itself ; she shivered, and she felt that her limbs trembled ; it seemed to her the stone eyes were laughing at her with an expression of malice, and that the broken fingers of the stone hand warned her from the place.

Liline's first impulse was to run away ; but she thought that this would perhaps offend the idol, and that before she could get out of the tangled forest its vengeance would overtake her.

She stood pale, quivering with terror, all thought of her coming lover forgotten as one weird tale after another came back from her childish memories.

The dog's barking came again, nearer this time, and the sound brought comfort. It may be that the memory of her visit to the fountain with Gustave had softened her towards him. She looked eagerly towards the side from which the sound came, in the hope that he would come to her help.

Some one whistled the dog back, but the next minute she heard it come tearing through the underwood with loud barks of excitement.

Liline was seized with a new fear. What if the dog did not recognise her, and flew at her? She gave an involuntary cry for help.

There was a crashing sound among the branches, the dull thud of a stone striking a body, and then the dog howled with pain. In another moment Gustave had leapt down from the further side of the enclosure, and stood beside Liline.

Her nerves were so utterly shaken that she clung fast to his arm, and burst into sobs and tears.

He was stupefied by surprise at finding her in this lonely place; but he did not question her, he tried to soothe her; filling the cup of his hunting-flask with water from the fountain, he gave it her to drink, and then he led her to the stone steps and made her sit down.

He stood looking at her, bewildered yet overjoyed. To find himself once more beside her was an almost incredible happiness after these hours of fruitless endeavours to see her; for Liline had stayed indoors all the morning; yet Gustave hesi-

tated before he spoke ; it seemed unmanly to take advantage of her defenceless state to urge his love when she had refused it.

While he hesitated, Liline had recovered herself. She remembered that Lucien was coming to meet her here—he might come any minute.

"Please go away now," she said. "It is very kind of you to take care of me, but my father does not wish me to see you or talk to you."

"Do you really wish me to leave you here, Liline? It is a horrible place, and not a safe place for you. The fountain has got a bad name. Before now I have seen beggars and gipsies here, people who might frighten you. I cannot understand why you are here ; you know how completely the fountain is shunned by all the God-fearing people of Vougay."

She was feverish with impatience, but she forced herself to smile.

"I am not superstitious," she said ; "but if I were to disobey my father by talking with you, I

should deserve to get into trouble. I am not going to stay here long ; but I will not go away till you are out of sight."

Gustave looked at her, and the tender longing in his eyes softened her.

"Poor fellow," she thought, "it is very sad that he must be made unhappy."

He saw the change in her face, and his hopes revived.

"Let me say farewell, Liline. I have to leave Vougay to-night. I am going to Paris to make the arrangements for my cousin's marriage. Give me, dearest, this one hope to take with me, that you will try to love me a little. If you will be my wife, I promise you, by God's help, to give you all that you have told me you wish for."

His last words did not touch her ; indeed, she could hardly listen to them.

"The arrangements for whose marriage?" she asked, eagerly.

"You have not then heard? A marriage has

been arranged between my cousin Lucien and Mademoiselle de Lanmeur. It will take place in about a month at Plou-anic, and there will be no doubt grand doings at Vougay."

Liline felt as if some one were stifling her, she could hardly breathe; and then, while she stood looking up at Gustave, with despair in her eyes, suddenly the words of Lucien's letter, which had seemed meaningless as she read them, were clear to her.

"Oh, yes; I know all about that," she said, with a smile of superior knowledge; "but that is only a false report. There will be no such marriage."

Even before the warning came to her from Gustave's eyes she saw her folly.

"You know, Liline," he said, wonderingly. "How can you know?" and then the truth came to him; he had found the key to his puzzle about Liline's changed behaviour. "Do you know my cousin Lucien?" he asked, with such sudden stern-

ness that she drew back from him in alarm. "Is it he who has told you there is no truth in the report of his marriage with Mademoiselle de Lanmeur?"

His tone of rebuke roused to action all the evil in the girl's nature.

"Yes," she said, defiantly. "He told me, and I fancy he must know better than you do whom he means to marry."

The tone struck Gustave with a new fear, but he was far too anxious for Liline's safety to resent the manner in which she spoke.

"He cannot marry any one except Mademoiselle de Lanmeur," he said, very gravely. "I have received instructions about the marriage contract and other arrangements for the wedding."

She shook her head, and looked contemptuous, but she did not answer. She was feverishly impatient to send Gustave away.

"Liline," he went on, "did I ever deceive you? You have known me a long time, and have I not always kept my word with you? I have even now in my pocket a letter in which my cousin tells

me he has promised to marry Mademoiselle de Lanmeur."

Liline changed colour at this. Still, Monsieur Lucien would not have given her that warning unless he had known that she would be led to doubt him. She looked up at Gustave—she saw how he loved her still.


"That is why he tells me this," she thought. "He is jealous of his cousin, and he tries to set me against him. Surely, I ought to believe most in Lucien."

And yet, while she thought this, an uneasy, miserable doubt strove to be heard; and though she was offended with Gustave, she longed to be at peace with him.

"Well," she said. She had stood silent for a few moments after he finished speaking. "You must, of course, keep your opinion, and I shall keep mine. Now, the sooner you leave me, the sooner I shall go home—it is you who keep me here. I shall not go until you are at a distance. Please go at once; I cannot be seen with you."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE COUSINS.

USTAVE looked at her sadly, then he bowed and left her. A strange prevision had come to him while Liline spoke. He seemed to know by instinct that this lovely, imprudent girl was waiting at the fountain to meet his cousin ; it might be even that Lucien had made arrangements to take Liline away from her home. Gustave did not misjudge the girl. He felt sure that Lucien must have talked of marrying her before Liline would have consented to meet him in this lonely place. He was deeply, bitterly angry with his cousin ; but he had no time in which to realise his own ruined hopes, or Liline's folly. He had to think at once how best he could save her from his cousin's villainy.

He called the dog and went on for some distance till he thought all sounds of his footsteps must be inaudible at the fountain, then he sent the dog back to the Château, which lay on this side of the forest. He found it difficult to make the wild, yellow creature obey him, but at last he saw the dog hurrying along at full speed in the direction of the Château, then he went back quickly but quietly to the fountain. He had made up his mind what to do.

Half an hour had passed since he left Liline. As he drew near the dismal place, a murmur of voices reached him.

Gustave had told himself he must be very calm and wary if he was to succeed in unmasking Lucien. He came suddenly in sight of the fountain, for there was a gap on this side among the trees, and he saw a man bending over Liline, his arm round the girl's waist. The blood flew to Gustave's head at the sight, a sudden, uncontrollable fury mastered him; reason and caution were alike overpowered.

The lovers were too much taken up with one another to notice his approach. Lucien was persuading Liline to come as soon as it was dusk to the Château.

Before the girl had consented, Gustave had sprung forward to the low wall, and he jumped down beside them.

Lucien turned round, furious at the intrusion; but the sight of his cousin checked him. He recovered himself more quickly than Gustave did.

"What do you come here for? Pass on," he said, haughtily; "do you not see I am engaged?"

Gustave looked at him sternly.

"You are doing no good here, Lucien; you must let Mademoiselle Vivier go at once."

Lucien was taken by surprise. He had thought Gustave steady and rather clever; but he had fancied his cousin lacked courage.

"Must! Monsieur Chauvin. What have you to do with the matter?"

"I am bound to interfere with you. You can

have no right to meet Mademoiselle Vivier in a place like this, you have no right to meet her at all, when you are promised to another woman. Liline Vivier, if you have any respect for yourself, you will go home."

Lucien laughed; he was very angry, at the same time his cousin's masterful tone amused him.

"So far, this gentleman is right, Liline," he said, "you had better go, as he will not." He bent down and whispered: "Come again in an hour or so, I will be here, alone."

He handed her up the steps, and waited till she was out of sight, then he came down slowly to Gustave Chauvin.

It would have been difficult to say which of the two young men looked palest. Gustave's face was the more ghastly from the contrast of his dark, deep-set eyes, so sternly fixed on his cousin.

There was a cold glitter in Lucien's eyes, very unlike his usual indifferent expression, and he looked as determined as Gustave did.

‘ Really,’ he said, with a sneer, ‘ I do not want your guidance in this affair. I suppose I may sometimes act without asking your leave. You take too much on yourself,’ he said, with a sudden change of manner.

‘ Not in this case. Liline Vivier is my old, very dear friend. I have known her from a child, and I put myself in the place of her brother, or her father as he is not here.’

‘ Nonsense, my virtuous cousin. Her father would gladly shut his eyes to my little flirtation; he introduced me to Liline; and what harm is there if, when I happen to meet a pretty girl, I loiter a few moments with her? She is an old friend of yours, is she? How comes it, then, that you gave me to understand you had not seen a pretty girl in Vougay? Aha, you are unmasked. You meant to keep her for yourself. Eh, mon Dieu! be honest and say so.’

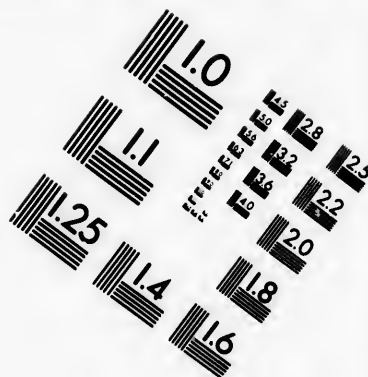
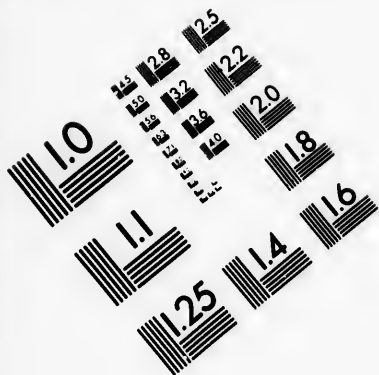
Gustave had cooled. He was not going to confess his own love for Liline. His object was to put a stop to Lucien’s pursuit.

"You know as well as I do, what you are about," he said. "I tell you of my friendship for Liline Vivier, to show you that I know she would not listen to you for a moment if she guessed at your plans. You must have promised to marry her, Lucien, or she would not have met you here. You mean," his voice trembled with anger, "to lead her to her ruin. I tell you, you shall not do it, while I live. Promise me to leave Vougay, go with me this evening to Paris, and I will keep silence; if not, when I have provided for Liline's safety, I shall go straight to Château Plou-anic, and tell everything to your mother, and to Madame de Lanmeur."

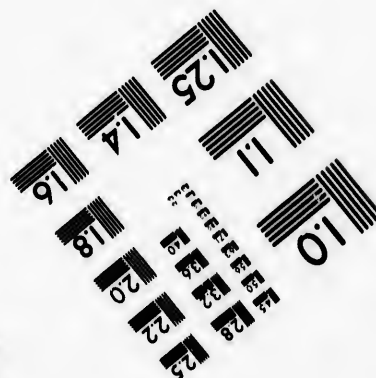
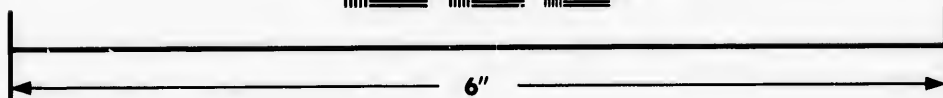
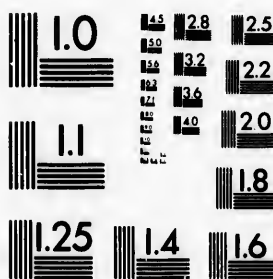
He felt so intense a loathing for his cousin, that it spoke in his voice.

Lucien became paler as he listened. "You may do your worst. You are arrogant, and you are a fool. Who will believe you? You have no chance against me with a woman, and they are all women at Plou-anic. Now be good enough to leave me. I am sorry to





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deprive you of Liline," he went on, in a sarcastic tone; "but you should have warned me off. Your secrecy has wrought your failure. I cannot help it if Liline prefers me; and I mean to enjoy my good fortune. She is mine, and your interference is a gross impertinence; it is unworthy of a gentleman."

Gustave's anger burst forth.

"You must apologise for this insult, or I demand satisfaction."

Lucien laughed insolently.

"I do not retract a word—the apology must come from you."

"Some one, then, will come from me this evening to arrange a meeting. I shall stay at the Château till to-morrow."

"Do not take so much trouble," Lucien answered, lightly. "To-morrow morning I shall be far away from Vougay."

"You will run away from me, then. Are you a coward as well as a liar? For you must

have told lies to that unhappy girl, or she would not have listened to you."

Lucien was not pale now; the blood flew to his face. He waited till his cousin had finished speaking; then he stepped forward, and struck Gustave on the mouth with his open hand.

Gustave Chauvin's eyes flamed; then he turned a sickly white as he struggled against his impulse to return the blow. He drew himself up and looked calmly at the young Marquis, who seemed confused by his own violence.

"You can no longer refuse to meet me," Gustave said. "We will not wait till to-morrow, and for your sake it may be better to settle the affair by ourselves. Stay here while I fetch my pistols from the Château."

Lucien bowed his head in acquiescence.

Gustave's feet seemed winged as he hurried up the steps and took the nearest way to Château de Vougay. Half-way he was tempted to turn back. A terrible fear had come to him;

would Lucien profit by his absence to carry off Liline? This terror quenched for a moment his longing to wipe out the affront he had received from his cousin.

But no; in spite of all, Lucien must have some feeling of honour—he must surely feel bound to face the consequences of what he had done.

Gustave hurried on to seek his pistols; they had belonged to his father, and they had always travelled with him.

Meanwhile, Lucien stood beside the fountain in a very peevish mood. He told himself this duel was a senseless affair; he was sorry he had provoked it. He knew he was a good shot; but he did not think Gustave was; on the whole, he was sorry he had quarrelled with his cousin. He might have pacified him—put him off the scent, and then his way would have been clear. He must disable Gustave. His cousin would certainly miss him, and then they would shake hands.

He would have Gustave carried to the Château and well looked after ; he would be better out of the way, and then he, Lucien, would play out the game he had planned with Liline, and to-morrow would probably find them in Paris together ; he would not be balked of his sweet prize.

His cousin's return roused him, he had not expected Gustave to be so rapid.

Gustave did not speak, except to ask Lucien to name the distance, and to offer his cousin the first shot.

"I will measure the distance when we reach a fit place, and we will fire both at once," was the answer.

Lucien took the pistols, which Gustave had brought, out of their box and examined them ; they were handsome duelling pistols.

Gustave turned to the slippery, green path, and the cousins moved side by side along it, till they reached the small opening in the forest where recognition of the spot had come to Liline,

Lucien looked round him. "This will do," he said; "shall I load the pistols?"

"Yes."

He loaded them carefully, like an adept.

Then he paced out the distance, and placed himself at one end, signing to his cousin where to stand.

"I will drop my handkerchief; when it reaches the ground—fire."

Lucien's voice sounded strangely calm. He felt as if he were acting in a dream. He was controlled by his cousin's silent, unflinching gaze.

Gustave's dark eyes were mournful as well as stern; for, amid all his anger, he shrank from what he was going to do. He too, had determined to wound his cousin so as to disable him. He tried not to think of Lucien's mother; but her kind face would obtrude itself, and along with it came the face of Lucien when they had been boys at school together, and when his cousin had been sometimes kind and generous. But he hardened himself against these thoughts, he called up the

remembrance of Liline, and he told himself that he was trying to save her from ruin. He fixed his eyes on Lucien with stern determination.

Lucien had taken out his white handkerchief.

"Are you ready?" he called out.

"Yes."

The handkerchief fluttered to the ground. As it reached it, the men fired.

Before the reports were heard, there came a woman's shriek. As the smoke cleared away, Lucien stood clasping Liline in his arms; but Gustave Chauvin lay motionless upon the ground.

"Leave go, Liline," Lucien cried, trying to free himself. "Let me go to him."

There was no answer. The girl lay heavy as lead on his breast, and as he raised her in sudden terror, he saw blood on the bosom of her gown.

Before Christmas came there was a trial at Rennes which created a great stir. When it ended, Lucien Anatole François Bourbon, Marquis de

Vougay, was declared not guilty of the murder of his cousin, Gustave Chauvin, or of having been accessory to the death of Caroline Vivier—which happened through misadventure. She no doubt had perished by her own fault—having intercepted the bullet intended for the Marquis de Vougay.

The young Marquis was, however, condemned to pay a fine and to three months' absence from France, on account of the duel, although it was stated that he had engaged in it in order to protect Liline from Monsieur Chauvin, who had determined to marry the girl against her will.

At the end of his three months' exile, Lucien came back to Brittany and married Mademoiselle de Lanneur; but Baptiste Vivier had already given up his post as keeper of the forest of Vougay.

THE END

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