

as he caught a glimpse of Laura on the dance. "The half of my fortune, the half of my life, if, with one half of either, I might call her mine!"

"Nay," said Barbesieur, with a sinister laugh, "I am neither robber nor devil. I wish neither your fortune nor your soul in exchange for my wares. Laura is so headstrong, that she will have to be forced into happiness, and made to take what even now she is longing to snatch. So if I make you both happy, you will not then object to giving me a few of the crumbs that fall from your table?"

"I will give you any thing you desire, and my eternal gratitude to boot, if you will help me to become possessor of that angel."

"I am passionately fond of hunting, and the Marchioness de Bonaletta has the most tempting bit of woods that ever made a hunter's heart ache to call it his. Now if you marry Laura, you become her guardian, and have absolute power over her property."

"I care nothing for her property," cried the marquis, passionately. "Her beauty, her sweetness, and her noble birth, are wealth enough for me. In the golden book of Venice the name of the richest noble there inscribed is the Strozzi."

"Everybody knows that, dear marquis, and therefore you will not refuse the reward I claim from my sister's own possessions. 'Tis but meet that she make a present to her brother on her wedding-day. So, then, we understand each other: immediately after the ceremony of your marriage, you make out a deed by which you relinquish to me the usufruct of the Bonaletta estates in Savoy for life. Who gets them after me, I care not."

"I consent; and add thereunto a yearly pension of one thousand ducats. Does that content you?"

"Your liberality is really touching. A thousand ducats to boot! They will fall like a refreshing shower into a purse that is always as empty as the sieves of the Danaides. It is a bargain. You wed Laura Bonaletta, and I get her estates, and one thousand ducats a year."

"Here is my hand."

"And mine. In one month you shall both be on your way to Venice; you a happy bridegroom, and she—your bride."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LADY OF THE BEDCHAMBER.

THE dance was over, and the king reconducted Laura to her chaperone. "My dear sister," said he, "the fascinations of the partner you selected for me are almost enough to reconcile one to a refusal from yourself. I am convinced that I have been the envy of every cavalier present. I withdraw, therefore, that I may not stand in the way of the fair Laura's admirers."

And gracefully saluting his partner, the royal flirt betook himself at last to poor De Montespan, who had tact enough to smother her chagrin, and give him a cordial reception. It was better to be noticed late than never.

"Your highness," whispered Laura, bending over the back of the duchess's chair, "pray command me not to dance any more. Do you see that swarthy, sinister face over there, close to Barbesieur? It is the Marquis de Strozzi staring at me already. He is about to come hither, and if you do not assist me I shall have to dance with him."

"Never fear, darling," whispered the duchess in return. "They shall not rob me of you so soon. Take your place, and, being on duty, no one can claim you, were it the wild hunter himself."

Laura hastened to resume her station, and, in doing so, glanced toward the window, where stood the pale young man whom she had noticed before. Their eyes met again, and again she blushed. Laura bent her head, and, feigning to arrange a displaced ringlet on the head of her mistress, she said, in low, earnest tones: "Pardon me, gracious mistress; but will you tell me who is that young cavalier in the recess of the window opposite?"

"Certainly, my dear," replied the duchess in the same tone

of voice. "He is one whom all the courtiers avoid to-night—miserable timeservers as they are—for he has fallen into disgrace with your father and the king. He is Prince Eugene of Savoy."

"Prince Eugene!" echoed Laura. "He who laid the weight of his whip over Barbesieur's shoulders this morning!"

"Yes, the same, and he has been publicly rebuked for it to-night. Your father has received full satisfaction, Laura; for, not only has his majesty offered a pointed slight to the man who disgraced Barbesieur, but he has paid him a signal compliment by opening the ball with his sister."

"If I had imagined that any thought of Barbesieur mingled with the compliment paid me by the king, I would have refused to dance with him."

The duchess looked up astounded. "Why, Laura, such an insult to his majesty would almost amount to treason. For Heaven's sake, never utter such sentiments at court, child!"

"What care I for the court?" cried Laura, her eyes filling with tears. "I am overwhelmed with the shame of having been made use of as a tool wherewith to humiliate the noble Prince de Carignan! But I shall repair the wrong I have done him, and that in presence of the court!"

"Thoughtless, impulsive child, what would you do?" said Elizabeth-Charlotte, anxiously. "I really believe you are ready to go up and give him a kiss, by way of proving that you are not a party to his humiliation to-night!"

"Perhaps I am!" exclaimed Laura, passionately. "The prince was right to punish Barbesieur for his cowardly attack upon a noble lady; and my brother-in-law, De la Roche Guyon, was one of those who justify him. I, too, applaud his spirit; for, in avenging his mother, he avenged mine. This morning, when no king was by to uphold the calumniator, all these nobles were the friends of the prince, and not one of them would lift the gauntlet which, with his brave hand, he flung to the world. And to-night they desert him!—They are not worthy to touch the hem of his garment!—But I will take his hand—the noble hand that had disgraced his mother's traducer beyond the power of royalty to undo!"

"You will do no such thing, you dear little madcap!" returned the duchess, glancing admiringly at the beaming countenance of the beautiful enthusiast. "You have a brave heart, dear child; but you must not allow it to run away with your judgment. You must keep your place at my side, nor let magnanimity get the better of discretion. The latter is a cardinal virtue in woman. But—see how the Marquis de Strozzi devours us with his eyes; he is waiting until I cease speaking to come forward and claim your hand. Be comforted—he shall not have it. Here he comes—let the chamberlain have a chance to present him."

So saying, she turned away from Laura, and began to fan herself vigorously, while the marquis and the chamberlain advanced.

"Your royal highness," said the latter, reverentially, "may I present the Marquis de Strozzi?"

"I am acquainted with him," interrupted the duchess. "He needs no introduction. How do you like Paris, marquis? Why are you not dancing this evening?"

"Your royal highness has anticipated my wishes," was the reply. "I am anxious to dance, and crave your permission to offer my hand to the Marchioness de Bonaletta."

"I regret to disoblige you," answered the duchess, "but you see that she is on duty, and etiquette forbids her to leave her post, except for two dances. His majesty has had the first, and for the second she is engaged."

"Then I shall follow her example, and decline to dance," returned De Strozzi, with his burning glances rivetted upon Laura's face.

She drew back haughtily. "The Marquis de Strozzi will oblige me by following the example of some other person. I have no desire to be remarked by him in any way."

The marquis's brow grew dark, and his eyes glowed like coals of fire. But he made an attempt to smile as he replied, "However I might be inclined to obey your commands, I have it not in my power to comply with a request so unreasonable."

The duchess saw how the crimson blood was mantling in the cheeks of her "dear little madcap," and she thought it

prudent to put an end to the skirmish by rising from her seat.

"I will take a turn through the ballroom," said she. "Come, marchioness."

She came down from the platform reserved to the various members of the royal family, and mingled with the gay groups below, addressing here and there a greeting to her friends, or stopping to receive their heartfelt homage. Side by side came the duchess and her lady of the bedchamber; the latter all unconscious of her beauty, enjoying the scene with the zest of youth, unmindful of the fact that at every step she took, her admirers increased, until the cortège was as long as the trail of a comet.

But one face she sees—the noble countenance of Prince Eugene—who, as she approaches the window near which he stands, looks as though the morning sun had shone upon his heart, driving away all darkness and all night. She sees that joyous look, and with a wild bound her heart leaps to meet his. Her brow crimsoned with shame, and she presses close to the duchess, as if to seek protection from her own emotion.

Elizabeth-Charlotte misunderstood the movement, or she may have guessed the longing that was struggling with decorum in the heart of her young attendant. She advanced toward the prince, and signed for him to approach.

Eugene started forward and stood directly in front of them. "How is the Princess de Carignan?" asked the duchess, kindly, "and why is she not here to-night? I hope she is not indisposed!"

"Your highness," returned Eugene, with a smile, "she is ill with a malady that has attacked every member of our family."

"What malady, prince?"

"The malady of royal disfavor, your highness."

"That is indeed a fearful malady, prince, for it rarely attacks the innocent."

"Pardon me, your highness," returned Eugene, calmly, "since the death of Cardinal Mazarin 'tis a heritage in our family, and—"

"Madame," said a voice behind the duchess, "be so good as to take my arm. The queen desires your attendance."

Eugene looked up, and saw a small, effeminate personage, magnificently attired, and wearing the broad, blue band of the order of St. Louis. He recognized the king's brother, the Duke of Orleans.

The duchess, with a sigh, laid her arm within that of her husband; but, disregarding his frowns, she remained to say a parting word to the victim of kingly displeasure.

"Give my regards to the princess, your grandmother, and tell her that if her indisposition lasts, I will go in person to express my sympathy with you both."

"Madame," said the duke, angrily, while, with little regard to courtesy, he almost dragged her along with him, "you will do no such thing. I cannot understand your audacity; still less will I countenance it. The Prince of Savoy has been so pointedly slighted by his majesty, that no one dares be seen conversing with him; it seems to me that you set a shameful example to the court by noticing one whom your king has been pleased to reprove."

"It seems to me that my example would be worse, were I to ignore my acquaintances because they happen to be momentarily out of favor at court," replied Elizabeth-Charlotte. "Such miserable servility may beseeem a courtier, but it ill becomes our princely station. And if the king speaks to me on the subject, I shall say as much to him, for his majesty has a noble heart and will approve my independence."

While their royal highnesses were thus interchanging opinions on the subject of court ethics, a scene was being enacted behind them, which, had he witnessed it, would have called forth the indignation of the duke.

The Marchioness Bonaletta, as a matter of course, had followed her mistress; but during his short colloquy with the latter, Eugene had received so sweet a smile from her attendant, that he followed at a distance; resolved, since he could do no more, to gaze at her until the ball was over. In spite of the throng which closed as fast as the ducal pair went by, Eugene saw that the marchioness had dropped her fan. It

became entangled in the train of another lady, and finally was dragged to the floor.

Eugene rescued it from destruction, and hastened with it to its owner, who appeared just to have discovered her loss.

"You are looking for your fan?" said he, with a beaming smile.

"Yes, prince," replied she, giving him in return a look that almost maddened him with joy—it was so kind, so, gentle so sympathizing.

"I have been so fortunate as to find it," replied he, in a voice whose music thrilled the heart of her to whom he spoke. "And to be permitted to return it to you, confers upon me the first pleasurable sensation I have felt since I entered this unfriendly palace to-night."

"I am happy to have been the means," she began. But just then the Duke of Orleans turned around, and his indignation may be imagined when he saw the Prince of Savoy in conversation with a lady of the duchess's household!

"Call your lady of the bedchamber hither," said he, imperiously. "That little abbé has the assurance to follow us, as though to defy his majesty, and prove to the court that, if nobody else esteems him, he has friends in the household of the Duchess of Orleans. Send that young lady on some errand."

The duchess walked a few steps farther, then turning around she beckoned to Laura. "Come, Marchioness de Bonaletta, I must present you to the queen."

"Ah!" thought Eugene, as he took up his position in the window again, "if I may not follow her, at least I know her name! Marchioness Bonaletta—what a pretty name it is! I have never heard it before, nor have I ever seen any thing that reminded me of her lovely person. 'Tis plain that she is a stranger at this corrupt court. Those limpid eyes, that brow of innocence, those heavenly smiles—O my God! what sudden thrill of joy is this which pervades my being? What flood of ecstasy is this which drowns my soul in bliss! Oh, angel of beauty—"

But his raptures were suddenly brought to a close by the sight of Louvois, who with his son joined the party of the Duchess of Orleans. He did not like to see him so near his

angel; but his uneasiness increased to positive pain when he saw her extend her hand, and greet him with one of her sweetest smiles.

"So," thought Eugene, "she is like the rest! Louvois is the favorite of the king, and of De Maintenon, and therefore she greets him as though he were a near and dear friend. But what is it to me? I came here to show his majesty that I shall maintain my rights in the face of his displeasure, and here I shall remain, though she and every other woman here do homage to my foes. What is the Marchioness Bonaletta to me?"

But, in spite of himself, his eyes would wander to the spot where she stood, and his heart seemed ready to burst when he beheld Barbesieur approach her. He spoke to her and she answered him; but Eugene could see that she was displeased. Could he have heard the words she addressed to Barbesieur, he would have hated himself for his unworthy suspicions, and would have acknowledged that she was not like the rest.

"So my lovely sister has refused to dance with the Marquis de Strozzi?" said Barbesieur.

"Yes," was the curt reply.

"And may one venture to inquire why?"

She darted a glance of contempt at him. "Because he is your friend."

Barbesieur laughed. "I really believe that you are in earnest, my candid sister. It is enough for a man to be my friend to earn your enmity."

"You are right," said she, deliberately.

"But you will hardly go so far as to say that it suffices for a man to be my foe, to be your friend," said he with an ugly frown.

"What if it were so?" said she.

"If it were so, I would advise my sister not to provoke me too far. I would advise her not to make any more demonstrations of regard to the little abbé of Savoy, and to remember that she is my sister."

"When I heard of all that took place this morning at the Pré aux Clercs," said Laura, "I remembered it to my shame and sorrow."

Barbesieur grew pale with rage and hissed into his sister's

ear—"Have a care, girl, how you rouse me to retaliation! I can crush you like a worm under my heel; and as for yonder princely beggar, be assured that I shall remember him to his cost."

"Which means that you will bring suit against him, and obtain damages," replied she, contemptuously; "for you know that the Prince of Savoy will not condescend to fight a duel with Barbesieur de Louvois."

"I would not make myself ridiculous by fighting with such an apology for a man; but I will crush him as I would any other reptile that attempts to injure me. There shall not be a day of his life that does not bring him some pang which he shall owe to the hate of Barbesieur de Louvois. And I counsel you not to imitate his audacity, for—"

"Why, you scarcely expect me to bestow a horsewhipping upon you?" laughed Laura. "But I am not afraid of you, Barbesieur; it is not in your power to injure me."

"If you are not afraid of me, so much the worse for you; I should have thought that you had learned from your mother, how Barbesieur de Louvois nurses his hate, and how it blossoms into misery for those on whom he bestows it."

Laura's eyes filled with tears, and her voice faltered. "I did learn it from her martyrdom; but she was not like me. She submitted where I would resist."

"Resistance will only increase the bitterness of your punishment, and once more I warn you not to make friends of my enemies, and not to offer slights to my friends. The Marquis de Strozzi wishes to marry you; your father is anxious for the match—*so am I*, and you shall marry the marquis, of that be assured. He has asked you to dance, to-night, and you shall dance with him, too. This plea of an engagement is a falsehood. Where is your partner?"

"I will remind him of our engagement, now that I am prepared to fulfil mine," answered Laura. And, yielding to an impulse of aversion to Barbesieur, resolved to give him then and there proof unquestionable of her contempt; impelled, too, by an enthusiastic longing to sympathize with one whom all had united to slight, and forgetful of the social restraints which it is always unwise for a woman to overleap, Laura

pressed through the crowds that were assembling for the dance, and stepped so proudly by, that all wondered at the solemn earnestness of her mien, more resembling that of a priestess than of a young maiden at her first ball.

If all other eyes were gazing upon her, those of Eugene were riveted upon her advancing figure with mingled rapture and wonder. He had long since forgotten the rudeness of the king and the contumely of his courtiers. Laura's image filled his heart, and left no space therein for painful emotions. He had watched her countenance while Barbesieur had been speaking to her, and had guessed that their colloquy was anything but friendly. He had seen her turn suddenly away, and now she came nearer and nearer, until her dazzled worshipper lost all sense of time and place, and his enfranchised soul went out to meet hers.

But at last she came so near, that he wakened from his ecstasy, and remembered that he had nothing in common with that high-born girl; for, shame had fallen upon his house, and royalty had turned its back upon him.

But he had scarcely time to pass from heaven to earth before she stood directly before him, her starry eyes uplifted to meet his, her sweet voice drowning his senses in melody.

"Prince," said she, in clear, self-possessed tones that attracted the attention of those immediately around, "it appears that you have forgotten the engagement you made to dance with me this evening. Pardon me if I recall it to you."

So saying, she extended her little hand to Eugene, who, bewildered with joy, was almost afraid to touch the delicate embroidered glove that lay so temptingly near his. He was afraid that he had gone mad. But Laura smiled, and came a step nearer; whereupon he gave himself up to the intoxicating dream, and led her away to the dance.

They took their place among the others, but the dancers looked upon them with glances of uneasiness and displeasure. How were they to know that they might not be compromised by their vicinity to an ostracized man, and how did they know that the king was not observing them, to see how they would receive this bold intruder?

They might have spared themselves all anxiety; for, in the

first place, the king was in another room, at the card-table, and, in the second place, their sensitive loyalty was soon relieved from its perplexities.

As a matter of course, Laura's generous indiscretion had been witnessed by Barbesieur; not only by him, however, but by her father and the Duchess of Orleans. Barbesieur, enraged, would have followed, and torn her violently away, but Louvois' hand was laid upon his shoulder, and Louvois' voice (imperious even in a whisper) bade him remain.

"No *éclat*, my son: we are the guests of his majesty."

"But I cannot brook her insolence," muttered Barbesieur, in return. "She is my sister, and before she shall dance with a man that has insulted me, I will fell him to the earth, were the king at my side to witness it."

"Be quiet, I command you, or you shall sleep to-night within the walls of the Bastile," was the reply. "God knows that you ought to avoid notoriety; for, your affair with Prince Eugene has not covered you with glory. Retire, then, if you cannot control yourself, and I will find means to put an end to this foolish demonstration of your sister."

The means were at hand; they were concentrated in the person of his royal highness the Duke of Orleans. He had been about to join the dance, when he, too, witnessed the terrible sight of Laura de Bonaletta standing at the side of the little abbé of Savoy!

With a hasty apology to his partner, the Duchess de Chevreuse, he strode away and joined madame. Elizabeth-Charlotte saw him coming and heaved a sigh.

"Now for a tempest in a teapot!" thought she. "To be sure, the anger of my lord is not much like that of a thundering Jove; yet I don't know but what it is better to be struck dead by lightning, than to live forever within sound of the scolding tongue of a fishwife! I must try, however, to be conciliatory in my tones, or poor Laura will get into trouble."

So she smiled as graciously as she could, but her affability was lost upon the duke. He was in a towering passion.

"Madame," said he, in a low, but snappish voice, "do you know that your lady of the bedchamber is dancing with the Prince of Savoy?"

The duchess turned around, as if to see whether Laura were not at her post. "True enough," replied she, "she is not here. I was so absorbed in my conversation with the queen that I had not missed her. I suppose she thought I could spare her for a while, and so allowed herself to be persuaded to dance."

"But when I tell you that she is dancing with Prince Eugene!—with the son of the Countess de Soissons!" cried the duke, impatiently.

"I understand your highness. The prince is in disgrace, and has the plague. But you must pardon my little marchioness, for she is new to court customs, and does not know how contagious is her partner's malady. She will learn prudence, all in good time, and, perchance, become as obse—I mean as discreet—as the rest of us."

"You will be so good as to begin her education at once, by reproving her sharply for her indecorous behavior here to-night," said the duke, beginning to stammer.

"When he stammers," thought his wife, "he is in a rage. I had better try the effect of soft words. What would your highness have me say?" added she aloud.

"I would have you send a peremptory message to the marchioness to quit the dance immediately; and, if she does not obey, I would have you go yourself and—"

"My dear lord," whispered madame, laying the weight of her hand upon monsieur's arm, "do you forget that she is the daughter of Louvois, and that we dare not affront her lightly? And have you forgotten that her father has promised to obtain for you, from his majesty, the woods of St. Germain. In accordance with your desire and that of her father, who is powerful enough to command everybody at this court, I have taken this young girl into my service since this morning. Would you undo what I have done for your advantage?"

"But it is an outrage," murmured the duke, somewhat pacified. "It is an outrage against his majesty."

"I will put an end to the outrage then, but I will do so by gentle means.—My Lord Marquis de Valmy, I am suffering terribly with a *migraine*, and am compelled to retire. Will you bear my apology to the Marchioness de Bonaletta, and say

that I regret to be obliged to interrupt her pleasures, but must request her attendance."

The marquis hastened away with his message, and just as Prince Eugene had so far recovered himself as to be able to address a few murmured words of thanks to his beautiful partner, just as she was looking bashfully into his face, and had seen that his large black eyes were moistened with tears, she heard a voice at her side:

"Madame is suddenly indisposed, and regrets to say that she requires the attendance of the Marchioness de Bonaletta. Her highness is sorry to be obliged to interrupt you, mademoiselle."

"I will have the honor of conducting mademoiselle to her highness," replied Eugene, regaining in a moment all his self-possession.

Laura had just laid her arm within his, when monsieur approached with most undignified haste.

"Give me your arm, mademoiselle," said he. "Her highness has requested me to accompany you to her seat."

And without a word or look significative of his knowledge that Eugene was nigh, the duke placed Laura's other arm within his own, and stalked away.

The prince left the dancers, and retired again to his window-seat. He was pale with the shock of his sudden disappointment, but was callous to the fresh insult offered him by the king's brother. Still less was he conscious of the titter that was going around at his expense, or of the scornful looks directed to him from the eyes of many who until that day had called themselves his friends. He had neither eyes, ears, nor understanding, for any creature but the one who had braved the ridicule of the court, and the displeasure of its sovereign, to show her sympathy with a man in adversity. He must—he *would* see her again! He must thank her for her magnanimity, let the consequences be what they would!

He darted forward toward the door through which the Duke and Duchess of Orleans were passing, with their suite. On the stairway he caught a glimpse of Laura's white satin dress, and one look at her beautiful face. He made a desperate effort to follow, but before he could put his foot on the

top step, the Duke of Orleans and his suite, returning to the ballroom, stopped the way.

"Too late! too late!" groaned Eugene. "But I will see her again, if it costs me my life!"

The carriage of madame, meanwhile, was rolling homeward. She and her attendant were seated opposite each other, both keeping a profound silence. At length Laura could bear it no longer. Gliding from her seat, and kneeling at the feet of the duchess, she took her hand and pressed it to her lips.

"Dear lady," sobbed she, passionately, "have I done wrong? If I have, reprove me; but speak. Your silence is harder to bear than rebuke."

The duchess, no longer able to keep up her affected displeasure, put her arms around the young girl, and kissed her forehead. "I certainly ought to reprove you," said she, "for your conduct has been almost unmaidenly, but I have not the heart to chide you for indiscretion that springs from the overflowing of a generous nature. You have violated every rule of etiquette and decorum; but what would you? I am the least conventional of beings myself; and, instead of condemning you, I positively admire your impropriety. You have raised a tempest about your ears, child; but I will do my best to defend you against the king, monsieur, and the censorious world. Against your father and your brother you can defend yourself."

"They may think of me whatever they please," cried Laura, joyfully. "I shall not defend myself against anybody, for *you* are not displeased, and *he*!—oh, I believe that I conferred upon him one moment of happiness!"

"He! Who? Of whom do you speak?"

"Of Prince Eugene," murmured Laura, blushing.

"Prince Eugene!" echoed the duchess.

"Yes," exclaimed she, passionately, "of him, the noble, brave knight, who, like another St. George, sets his foot upon the dragon of this world's wickedness, and towers above its miserable worshippers, like an archangel!"

"Great Heavens! what has possessed the girl?" exclaimed the duchess. "She speaks of that little abbé as if he were an impersonation of manly beauty!"

"And so he is! His eyes are aflame with the light of a noble soul, and his face is as that of a demi-god!"

"A demi-god!" cried madame, clasping her hands. "I do believe she has fallen in love with him!"

Laura buried her face in the folds of the duchess's dress. "Pray for me, dear lady," sobbed she; "pray for me. Never would my father consent to bestow my hand upon the son of the Countess de Soissons, and I!—oh, if I should love him, I would forsake the whole world for his sake. Alas! alas! I believe that he is lord and sovereign of my heart, for it bounds to meet his, as though it felt that he was master of its destiny!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST LOVE.

FOUR days had elapsed since the ball, and its events, triumphs, and contrarieties were already forgotten. Nobody bestowed a thought upon Prince Eugene, who, concealed from view by the thick cloud of the king's dislike, had fallen into complete oblivion.

Nobody said a word about the ignominious punishment administered to Barbesieur de Louvois, for the king had treated him with consideration; and his majesty's countenance had healed his stripes, and cured his wounded honor. So that Barbesieur de Louvois was greeted with the courtesy due to a noble knight, and Eugene of Savoy was spurned as a base-born churl.

Was it for this that he was so pale, so silent, and so shy? Was it for this that he sat alone in his room for hours, murmuring words of passionate tenderness, and extending his arms to heaven, as if he expected some seraph to visit him in his desolate home? Was it for this that by night he paced the length of a garden-wall, and stood with folded arms before its trellised gates? Had sorrow and slight unsettled his reason?

If they had, there was "method in his madness," for his

steps were ever directed toward the same place, the hôtel of the Duke of Orleans.

On this fourth day after the ball, at dusk, Eugene left the Hôtel de Soissons, and took the way, as usual, toward the Palais Royal. Its long façade was dimly lighted, and every thing within seemed hushed.

"I am fortunate," thought he; "the duchess has dismissed her attendants, and *she* has retired to the pavilion."

He continued his way along the side-wing of the palace, until he arrived at the garden which occupied the space now contained between the Rue Vivienne and the Bourse. This magnificent garden was refreshed by plashing fountains, and decorated by noble trees and gay parterres; but it was encompassed by a high stone wall, of which the summit was defended by short iron spikes whose uplifted points gave warning to all passers-by that intrusion into this paradise was attended with danger.

But what cares love for "stony limits," or when did danger ever intimidate a stout heart?

Eugene was now at the extreme end of the garden. The deep, unbroken stillness of solitude reigned around. At times, and at a distance, was heard the faint rumbling of a coach; but otherwise nothing interrupted the loneliness of the place and the hour. For, although nine o'clock had just sounded from the tower of St. Jacques, all Paris was at rest, save the few aristocrats who were on their way to balls and banquets, or the houseless wretches who, with their dark lanterns, were searching the gutters for a lost penny.

So that Eugene was unobserved, and had full opportunity to draw from his cloak a package which proved to be a rope-ladder of silk; to unroll, and fling it over the garden wall. It caught in the prongs, and in a few moments he was within the enchanted walls of the palace where Laura de Bonaletta dwelt.

She was alone in her pavilion, in the room which led into the garden, and its glass doors now stood wide open. She had thrown aside her court-dress, and was now attired in a white peignior edged with delicate lace. Her feet were encased in slippers of blue satin embroidered with silver, and her hair,