

"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,

stripped of all ornament, was twisted into a coronal around her graceful head.

She had dismissed her attendants, and sat beside a table of white marble, holding in her hand a book which she seemed to read—yet not to read. She turned its pages, and her eyes were fixed upon them, but little saw Laura of their contents, she was looking into another book, the book of her own heart; and mysterious were the pages thereof, half painful, half pleasant, to peruse.

Around her all was silent. From time to time the night wind sighed through the branches of the trees without, and a few sorrowing leaves fell rustling to the ground, while she, her book now laid aside, and her pretty hands folded in her lap, gazed and gazed at sky and earth, at moonlit paths, and darkly looming trees, but saw nothing of them all. Something broke the perfect stillness. It was neither summer breeze, nor rustling leaf; 'twas the crackling gravel that was being displaced by approaching footsteps. The sound was all unheeded by Laura, who heard nothing but the voice of her heart as it sang its first anthem of love.

The moon emerged from a silver cloud, and Eugene's figure darkened the threshold. For one moment he contemplated the beautiful picture before him, then with noiseless steps he approached and knelt at her feet.

"Kill me for my presumption," whispered he, "for I deserve death. But I would rather die at your feet than live another hour out of your sight."

Laura spoke not a word in return, but neither did she cry out in terror or surprise. She merely gazed at Eugene with distended eyes, whose mysterious expressions he dreaded to interpret.

A feeling of anguish inexpressible pervaded his being. "I thought so," murmured he, bitterly. "I thought so; and yet I could not have done otherwise. Had I known that I was to be racked for my temerity, I must have sought you, alone and unattended—sought you as I would my Maker, when no curious eye was upon me to see my tears, no mocking tongue to echo my sighs; but when, unfettered by the bonds of a conventional world, I was free to pour out the

oceans of love that are drowning me in their sweetness; and then!—to live or die, as you should determine. I love you! Do you hear? I love you! And with such strength of love, that if I am unworthy; if, poor, ill-favored, unfortunate, the Prince of Savoy may not aspire to your hand, then call your people, and drive me hence; for whether you welcome or whether you spurn, you still must hear me, while my yearning heart cries out for judgment. Speak, beloved! I await my sentence—is it life or death?"

He raised his pleading eyes to hers, and as they met, her beautiful head drooped lower and lower, until it almost touched his own. He felt the soft touch of her hands upon his shoulders, and heard the thrilling accents of her trembling voice, as, in tones so inaudible that none but a lover's ear could have guessed their sweet import, she whispered these words:

"I was waiting for thee."

With a wild cry of rapture, Eugene caught her to his heart, and imprinted one long, loving kiss upon her lips. Then he gazed upon her with an expression of passionate tenderness, which transfigured his homely features and lent them beauty.

"Say that thou lovest me," cried he, "oh, say it again—again—again."

"I love thee," repeated Laura, "I love thee, Eugene. When first our eyes met, I knew that my heart had found its sovereign. Oh, sweet vassalage, that never again will seek enfranchisement! Oh, happy bondage, than liberty more precious! Bondage that makes me thine, and thou mine forever!"

"Ay, forever!" echoed Eugene, while tears streamed from his eyes at sound of her delicious avowal. "We love each other! Oh, my Laura, what magic in those blessed words! We love each other! I could weary echo with repetition of the sound: WE! 'Tis the first time in my life that my name has ever been joined with that of a fellow-being. My brothers, who enjoyed the privileges of their birth and rank, looked down with contempt upon one who was condemned to the obscurity of the priesthood; my young sisters feared me, and I

was too shy to ask for their love ; in my proud and beautiful mother's heart there was no room for the son, to whom fate had allotted no share of her loveliness and grace. Alone in the midst of a family circle, alone in society, alone in the world, I thrust back into my sorrowing soul the hopes, the loves, the aspirations of youth, and refused to listen to their pleadings. But in the depths of the night, when no mortal was by, and I stood alone in the presence of God, I called them up, and bade them weep with me that life and light were denied them. I mourned, and prayed for deliverance, but no friendly voice ever bade me be comforted. And so I lived, shunned and despised by my fellows."

"No, no, my Eugene, not shunned and despised," exclaimed Laura, while her gentle hands wiped away the tears that were streaming down her lover's cheeks. "You belie yourself and the world. It may not love you, but it has divined your worth."

Eugene answered with a faint smile. "My worth is small, beloved ; but no human being has ever divined the secrets of my ambitious heart. But ah ! how changed is life to me to-night ! I went to that ball to throw down the gauntlet of my hate before Louvois and his son. I was rebuked by the king, slighted by his nobles ; but I had no eyes to see, no pride to resent their insults. When I saw thee, the sun shone upon my heart, and there was light and love within. But oh ! when thou camest so near that I felt the perfume of thy breath upon my cheek, and the touch of thy hand within my hand, then I was born again to a life of hope and happiness. My soul's better half was found, and nevermore shall it wander from my side. I am here at thy feet to ask thee for my wife. I have neither wealth nor repute to offer thee : I am a poor ap-panagist, a prince without fortune or distinction. But, dearest, if thou wilt be mine, I swear by all the imprisoned aspirations which thy coming has liberated, that the wife of Eugene of Savoy shall have pride in her husband ! Be mine, be mine, and I will make thy name illustrious !"

"I am thine," said Laura, fervently, "for time and for eternity. I care not whether thy name be obscure or thy fortunes adverse ; I love thee as thou art." And so saying, she extended her hand.

He grasped it in his own and covered it with rapturous kisses. "From this blissful hour, then, thou art my betrothed ; and to-morrow I shall ask the consent of madame to our marriage. Or hast thou relatives whom I must know and propitiate ?"

At this innocent question, Laura's youth and animal spirits got the better of her sentiment. She laughed heartily. "What !" cried she, "you do not know who I am ?"

"No, sweetest ; I know not, I care not who thou art. What have I to do with thy surroundings ? I love thee—only thee. If thou hast father and mother, I will throw myself at their feet, and beg their blessing for us both."

Laura's hilarity had all vanished. As Eugene had spoken of her father and mother, her cheeks had blanched, and the smile had died from the rosy lips. "Alas !" cried she, clasping her hands, "he knows not who I am !"

"I know thou art an angel, and that is enough to make me the happiest of men."

"True, true," murmured Laura. "When my grandmother retired from court, he was but a boy."

"And had I been a man, what to me are the comings and goings of the ladies of the court ?" said Eugene, simply. "But why art thou troubled, my beloved ?"

"Alas ! alas !" murmured Laura, her eyes filling with tears. "May God grant that you spoke the truth, Eugene de Carignan, when you said that you cared not who was my father or my mother !"

"So help me Heaven, I do not care !" was the fervent response, while he gazed passionately upon his new-found treasure.

She bent her head, and lowered her voice to a whisper. "Eugene," said she, almost gasping for breath, "I bear my mother's name ; but I am the daughter of your bitterest enemy, Louvois."

Eugene started back in horror. "Louvois ! Louvois !" echoed he, mournfully. "And Barbesieur, her brother !"

"Not my own brother," cried Laura, terrified at the effect of her revelation. "Before I had seen you, I approved your act, and bade God bless the son that had avenged his mother's

wrongs upon her traducer. Ah, Eugène ! my affianced, say that you do not hate me ! I knew that you were the son of the Countess de Soissons, and yet I loved *you* !—perhaps the more, that Barbesieur was your enemy.”

“And I love *you*, my own one, despite your parentage. I love you so far beyond all feelings of pride or enmity, that I am ready to humble myself before my mother’s enemy, and be to him a son.”

“He will never receive you as such,” cried she, bitterly. “Woe is me, if he should learn what has transpired to-night between us ! He would part us by force.”

“Part us he shall not !” exclaimed Eugene, passionately, while he flung his arm around the maiden’s slender waist, and pressed her wildly to his heart. “Thou art Louvois’ daughter, but my betrothed.”

“I am Barbesieur’s sister, but thou art my affianced !”

“Neither daughter nor sister of any man, my Laura ; thou art thyself—and being thyself—mine.”

“Thine for life and death,” was her reply, “and from this hour I know no will of mine.”

“Then, ere thy father suspects our love, it must be sanctified before the altar of God. Our faith once plighted there, no hand of mortal can wrest thee from my side. Art ready to speak the irrevocable words that bind us together as man and wife ?”

“I am ready,” replied she, clasping her hands, and looking solemnly up to heaven. “If, in my eager acquiescence, I seem unmaidenly, forgive me ; but I dare not be coy, Eugene ; we have no time for conventional reserve, and I must act as becomes a brave and trusting woman, for every moment is fraught with danger. I am surrounded by spies, even of my own household, and, until I hear the blessing of the priest, I shall disbelieve my own happiness.”

“Then hear me, dearest. I know how crafty are the spies of Louvois, and I tremble lest the whispering breeze betray our secret. Yes, we must be diligent, so diligent that Fate shall stand between our love and all contingency. For two days I shall part from thee—long days that will steep my soul in darkness ! But day after to-morrow, at this same hour of the

evening, I shall be here with the chaplain of the Princess de Carignan, an old and dear friend, who will bless our bridal. As witnesses, I will be accompanied by my kinsmen, the Princes de Conti, two of the worthiest nobles of France. Be in readiness, my best beloved, that not a word need be spoken until we are married. Then away with me to the Hôtel de Soissons, where those who love, may seek thee in thy husband’s home.”

“So soon ?” murmured Laura, blushing. “Shall I leave my dear mistress without a word ? Is *she* not to share our secret ?”

“Assuredly not ; for it would burden her with a painful responsibility. It would be her duty to betray you, artless child.”

“Oh, I will not speak !” exclaimed Laura, eagerly. “I will be silent ; and when—when we are married, we will beg so humbly for forgiveness that she will have to grant it.”

“You must leave a note declaring everything ; for with our marriage ends all secrecy. I will neither see you nor write until the appointed time. Dismiss your household as early as possible, and, if all is propitious, place a light in yonder window. If I see it, I will enter with the priest, and, lest there should be interruption, he will begin the ceremony at once.”

“Alas, Eugene !” said Laura, looking anxiously around, “some evil spirit is about. It whispers me that this shall never be ! Speak to me—in mercy speak ! Let me hear thy voice, for even now its sinister threatenings are freezing the blood in my veins !”

“Nay, sweet one, fear nothing ! My love shall compass thee with a charm that shall keep away all evil spirits, and make thy life a waking dream of bliss.”

“How can I ever prove to thee how much I love thee ?”

“Thou wilt prove it to me when, day after to-morrow, thou forsakest father and brother, to cleave to me alone ; for never will my mother’s son take the hand of Barbesieur Louvois.”

“Nor my mother’s daughter,” cried Laura, vehemently, “for she, too, has a debt of hatred to pay to the man who broke that mother’s heart. And believe me, our marriage will avenge us both ; for it will end his contemptible intrigues to

sell my hand to whomsoever chinks most gold in his. And now, dear Eugene, good-night !”

“Must I be exiled so soon, Laura ? What have I done to be thus driven from paradise ?”

“Nothing—nothing,” stammered she. “But my mother’s name has made me fear that—that I am wrong to hold such long parley with you in secret and at night. Methinks I see that mother’s pleading eyes before me, and oh, Eugene ! whenever they rest upon me thus, ’tis because danger threatens ! Go, beloved, and God be with you !”

“I go,” sighed he. “I would not stay one moment to wound your sweet scruples, my madonna. One more kiss, and then—good-night !”

They walked side by side until they stood upon the threshold. Eugene put his arm around her waist, and kissed her fair brow.

“Look,” said she, “at yonder star that is just emerging from a fleecy cloud. It soars joyously upward now, and shall be to us an omen of hope and happiness. Farewell.”

“Farewell !” was the sad response, and Eugene went slowly down the dark avenue, until he was lost in the gloom of night. Laura lingered for a while, listening to his footsteps, then resumed her seat at the table.

A half hour went by, and Laura sought her chamber. To her surprise she found her waiting-woman stretched at full length on the carpet, in a deep sleep, so deep that her mistress had much trouble to waken her. When, at last, she had been made to rise, she seemed scarcely to know where she was, or to whom she was speaking.

“I beg your ladyship’s pardon,” said she drowsily, “I was dreaming. I thought I heard robbers in the house, and when your ladyship spoke, I was struggling.”

“God be thanked, there are no robbers here !” returned Laura, kindly. “Perhaps you heard the sentry’s step in the park, and you ought to know that the Palais Royal is strictly guarded. But why are you not in bed with the rest ? I dismissed you all.”

“I have no right to retire before my mistress,” returned the girl, obsequiously. “Therefore, I sat in your ladyship’s room

to await you, but sleep overcame me, and I humbly crave your pardon. Shall I close the door that leads to the garden ?”

“What ! still afraid of robbers, Louise ?” laughed Laura. “Well—close the door, if you will—good-night.”

“Can I do nothing for your ladyship ?”

“Thank you—yes. Open the door of Madame Dupont’s room, and let me feel that I am within hearing of my dear old Cerberus. That is all.”

The waiting-woman did as she was bidden, and then retired to her room, but not to sleep. She seated herself before a table, drew out her portfolio, and began to write. Now and then she paused and looked up, when the sinister light that shone in her eyes streamed through the room like the phosphorescent glow of the lichen that moulds in the churchyard.

She wrote the whole night long, and day dawned before she rose from her task.

“Ah,” sighed she, “for such a service surely he will return to me ! I have repeated their conversation, word for word, not a sigh or a kiss have I forgotten. Who but his poor Louise would have served him so faithfully ! ’Tis a vile trade, that of a spy ; nor would I have accepted such a mission for all the gold in the king’s treasury ; but, for love of Barbesieur Louvois, I would sell my own sister to infamy—why not his ?”

While thus soliloquizing, she had left her own room and crossed the corridor that led to the men’s apartments. She opened the door of one of the rooms without knocking, and going directly up to a bed she touched the sleeper, and having wakened him, whispered :

“George, awake—awake !—rouse up quickly !”

“What is it ?” mumbled George, stretching himself.

“Hist !—It is I, Louise. Dress yourself as speedily as you can, and away with this packet to your master. Give it to no messenger, but place it in his own hands, and he will reward you magnificently, for you will have done him a great service.”

She glided away and returned to her own room, leaving the door open. In less than fifteen minutes George stood before her, equipped for secret service. “Mademoiselle Louise,” whispered he, “I shall be with Monsieur de Louvois in ten min-

utes; for I have the key of the postern, and can slip out and back again without anybody being the wiser for my little excursion."

"So much the better. Away with you, and the sooner the better!"

George went on his way, and Louise stood in her doorway until she heard him softly open and close the outer door below; then she threw herself upon her bed to sleep. Her last words were these:

"Oh, faithless but loved—now can I dream that thine arms are around me once more!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE BETRAYAL.

THE sun was high in the heavens when Laura awoke, and rang for her waiting-woman. Mademoiselle Louise, fresh, smiling, and officious, came at once from the anteroom, and began the toilet of her mistress. She seemed to take more pleasure than usual in gathering her magnificent dark coils into a net of gold and pearls, and to linger more admiringly than ever over the last little touches given to the lace that bordered Laura's negligé of spotless white mull.

She certainly was one of the loveliest of created beings, and so thought good Madame Dupont, as her ex-pupil came into the dining-room, and imprinted two hearty kisses on her withered old cheeks. They sat down together to breakfast, and George, looking as innocent as if he had just awaked from the sleep of the righteous, came in with their morning chocolate. All went on as usual, except with the young marchioness, who, instead of laughing and chatting of Italy, and Bonaletta, as she was accustomed to do with her "dear Dupont," sipped her chocolate in silent abstraction. Breakfast had long been over, and still she sat in her arm-chair, looking dreamily into the garden, her head leaning on her hand, her lips sometimes rippling with a smile, sometimes opening with a gentle sigh.

She had been plunged in her blissful reverie for almost an hour, when the door was opened, and George appeared before her.

"Your ladyship," said he, "a man without desires speech with you."

"Who is he, George?" asked Laura, reluctantly returning to the world and its exigencies.

"He will not say, my lady. He wears no livery, but says that your ladyship knows whence he comes and why. He has a bouquet which was forgotten yesterday evening."

Laura darted from her chair; then, blushing deeply, she stopped, and recalled her wandering senses.

"Admit him," said she, trying to speak carelessly. "I will inquire what this means."

"Oh, 'tis a greeting from him," thought she; but before she had time to surmise any further, the door reopened, and a young man entered the room, holding in his hand a superb bouquet of rare and exquisite flowers.

"Who sent you hither?" asked Laura, with wildly-beating heart.

"A cavalier whose name I do not know," replied the young man, looking timidly up at the dazzling vision of beauty that stood before him. "I am first clerk in the largest establishment of the *Marché aux Fleurs*, and the gentleman who bespoke the bouquet ordered the handsomest flowers in our collection. Your ladyship sees that we have filled the order with the greatest care; for this bouquet contains specimens of our rarest and most expensive flowers. To be sure, the gentleman paid an enormous price for it, saying that nothing we could furnish was too costly for the occasion."

Laura had listened with wonderful patience to all this idle babble. "Give me the flowers," she said. "They are indeed most beautiful, and I am grateful for them, both to you and the amiable unknown who sends them."

"He is very small; of sallow complexion, but with large black eyes," replied the clerk, while, with an awkward scrape and bow, he presented the bouquet to Laura. "He was so pleased with our selection, that he kissed one of the flowers."

Before she had time to control her tongue, Laura had exclaimed, "Which one?"

"The blue one, your ladyship, called *Comelina cœlestis*."

Laura looked down at the *Comelina cœlestis*, and fain would she have robbed it of its kiss, but she consoled herself with the thought that she would rifle it of its sweets as soon as the messenger left.

He came closer. "Your ladyship," said he, in a very low voice, "I bear a message, as well as a nosegay. Is there any one about, to overhear me?"

"No one," replied Laura, breathless and eager.

"Search the bouquet, and under the *Comelina* your ladyship will find something."

Laura's rosy fingers were buried in the flowers, and she drew from its fragrant hiding-place a small slip of paper.

"Your ladyship is requested, if you consent, to return, as an answer, the four first words of the note."

Laura unrolled the paper, and read: "*Not to-morrow, but to-day*. Danger threatens, and we must anticipate.—E."

Her face flushed, and her eager eyes were fixed upon that little scroll which, to her and her lover, was of such great import. What could it mean? She read it again and again, until the words danced before her reeling senses.

The clerk came closer yet. "Your ladyship," whispered he, "I must take back my answer. Somebody might come in."

"The answer?" gasped she, scarcely knowing what he said. "True, true, there must be an answer." She stood for a moment irresolute, then a shudder thrilled through her frame, and she felt as if some evil spirit had again come nigh. She raised her eyes to the face of the messenger, as though she would have looked into the penetralia of his thoughts.

"I am to write four words?" asked she, plaintively. "You know, then, where he lives?"

The clerk replied without the least embarrassment: "Pardon me, I told your ladyship that I was unacquainted with the cavalier. He awaits my return in the flower-market, and lest I should be too long absent, he hired a *fiacre* to bring me forth and back."

"He awaits my answer," thought Laura. "Oh, it must be so! He shall not be left in suspense!"

She went hurriedly to a table, and wrote, "*Not to-morrow, but to-day*."

"Here," said she, "is my answer, and before you go, I beg you to accept this for your trouble."

She was about to hand him a purse of gold, when he retreated, and raised his hand in token of refusal.

"I thank your ladyship, I have already been paid, and have no right to a reward from you. May I be permitted to take my leave?"

"Yes; hasten, I implore you," returned Laura, wondering at his disinterestedness.

Scarcely had the commissionnaire taken his leave, when the door of the antechamber was opened, and a lackey announced:

"Madame, her royal highness the Duchess of Orleans!"

Laura hastily thrust the paper in her bosom, and, coming forward, kissed the hand of her friend. But as she did so, she felt the blood rush to her temples, and bent low her head to hide her confusion.

"I could not stay away any longer," began the unsuspecting duchess. "For three days monsieur has been confined to his room with some trifling ailment, for which peevishness seems to be his only palliative. He is one of those who, when he sneezes, imagines that the earth is shaken to her foundations; and when he snuffles, that all the angels in heaven drop on their knees to pray for him. With some trouble, I prevailed upon him to give me one hour wherein to make some change in my dress. I have accomplished the change in fifteen minutes, and the remainder of the hour I come to spend with you."

"Thank you, dear friend," replied Laura, who had now recovered her self-possession, and was sincerely glad to see the duchess. Then leading her to a divan, the graceful young hostess dropped down on a cushion at the feet of her royal guest, and continued: "I have been wondering why I did not see my gracious mistress; I thought she had forgotten me."

"How could you do her such injustice?" replied Elizabeth-

Charlotte, affectionately. "I have been longing for the sound of your carolling voice, and the sight of your beaming face. Let me look at you," continued she, taking Laura's head between her two hands, and gazing upon her with fondest admiration.

Poor Laura could ill bear the test of such loving scrutiny. She blushed scarlet, and her long black eyelashes fell at once under the searching look of the duchess's round blue eyes.

"Laura!" exclaimed she, anxiously, "something ails you, my darling; what have you on your heart that you are hiding from me?"

"Dear, dear duchess," stammered Laura, "I have nothing to—"

"Nay, child, do not stoop to untruth—"

"I cannot—I will not," cried Laura, bursting into tears. "I have a—secret—but you shall know it—soon."

"Gracious Heaven!" cried the duchess, turning very pale, "what has happened? What evil tidings am I to hear?"

"No evil tidings, my dearest mistress, no evil tidings! Nothing but joy—joy unspeakable. Do you remember what I told you on that happy morning of the ball, that if I ever loved I would leave even your dear self to follow the man of my choice? Well!" cried she, her face breaking out into bright smiles, while glistening tears lay like dew-drops upon her rose-tinted cheeks, "he is here! He came down from the moon on yesternight, and brought two great stars in his head instead of eyes; stars that I had no sooner looked upon, than I fell madly in love. Oh! he was sent hither by the good God, and it is His will that I love him, and forsake all others, to follow whithersoever he leads!"

"Is she mad?" cried the duchess, in alarm. "Yesternight?—came from the moon?—Who came, Laura?"

"God and my mother know his name, and both have blessed us; but I dare not tell it yet—not even to you. Pray ask me no more—for I may not say another word."

"Not say another word?" said the duchess, shaking her head, and looking reproachfully at her favorite. "Then there is something wrong in this headlong love, and it is no message to your heart from above. Afraid to say more to your

best friend—to her who replaces your mother?—When saw you this preterhuman being? Who?—Great God!" cried she, suddenly, putting her hands to her heart, "can it be! Yes—it must be Prince Eugene!"

Laura clapped her hands, and then threw herself in the duchess's arms. "Yes—you have guessed—it is he whom I shall love to-day, to-morrow, and forever. But not another word, my own dear mistress. To-morrow you shall know all, and be assured that there is no wrong either done or to be done—I can say but this to-day, that he certainly came down from the moon, and is the only luminary whose rays shall ever shine upon my heart!"

While Laura was pouring out her childish half-confidences, her disinterested friend, the commissionnaire, was similarly engaged in the anteroom with Master George.

This latter worthy, after a few whispered words from the former, excused himself to the lackeys of her royal highness, who were in waiting there, and retreated to the corridor with the clerk.

"Now, George," whispered he, "mark what I tell you. Your master says that the coachman must be ready with the travelling-carriage of the marchioness at ten o'clock to-night; that Mademoiselle Louise must secretly pack up some of her lady's effects and her own, and have them conveyed to the chariot throughout the day; and that all must be done so that her ladyship shall suspect nothing."

"It shall be done. And so her ladyship is to go on a journey at ten o'clock to-night? What an hour to set out!"

"Yes, at ten o'clock precisely, and the blessing of God go with her!"