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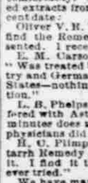

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TRACED IN BLOOD
OR
The Little Old Man of the Batignolles.

EMILE GABORIAU.

CHAPTER I.

When I was finishing my medical studies—it was high time, for I was twenty-three years old—I lived in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, almost at the corner of the Rue Racine. There, at thirty francs a month, attendance included, I had a furnished room which would now be well worth a hundred; it was so large that I could easily put my arms through the sleeves of my overcoat without opening the window.

Leaving early in the morning to go to my hospital, and returning very late, because the Cafe Leroy possessed irresistible attractions for me, I scarcely knew by sight the lodgers in the house, who were all quiet people of independent property, or small tradesmen. There was one, however, with whom I gradually became intimate.

M. Mechinet was a man of middle height, with a commonplace countenance, always scrupulously well shaved. The *concierge* treated him with marked consideration, and never failed to hastily raise his cap whenever he passed his room.

As M. Mechinet's door opened upon a landing directly opposite to the door of my room, we often met, and on these occasions were in the habit of bowing to each other. One evening he came in to ask for some matches; one night I borrowed some tobacco of him; one morning we happened to go out at the same time and walk some distance talking together.

Such were our first relations.

Without being either curious or suspicious—people are not at the age I was then—one likes to know something about the persons with whom one is acquainted.

Therefore, I naturally began—not to watch my neighbor's life, but to think of his acts and movements.

He was married, and Mme. Caroline Mechinet, a fair, plump, merry little woman, seemed to worship her husband.

But this husband's mode of life was not very regular. He often left the house before dawn, and the sun had frequently risen when I heard him return to his domicile. Sometimes he disappeared for weeks.

How pretty little Mme. Mechinet could tolerate this was what I could not understand.

In my perplexity, I thought our *concierge*, who was usually as talkative as a magpie, might enlighten me.

Wrong! I had scarcely uttered the name of Mechinet when he sent me about my business, saying he was not in the habit of being a spy upon his lodgers.

This reception so increased my curiosity, that, banishing all shame, I set about watching my neighbor.

Then I discovered things that seemed abominable.

Once I saw him come home dressed in the latest fashion, his buttonhole adorned with five or six orders. The next day but one I met him on the stairs attired in a dirty blouse and with a ragged cloth, which gave him a most sinister expression, wrapped round his head.

This isn't all. One beautiful afternoon, as he went out, I saw his wife follow him to the threshold, and passionately embracing him, say:

"I beseech you, Mechinet, be careful; remember your little wife."

Be careful! Why? For what reason? What did this mean? Was the wife an accomplice?

My astonishment was soon redoubled.

I was sleeping soundly one night, when some one suddenly knocked hurriedly at the door.

I rose and opened it.

M. Mechinet entered, or rather rushed into the apartment, his clothes torn and disordered, his cravat and shirt crushed, his head bare, his face covered with blood.

"What has happened?" I exclaimed in terror.

He signed to me to be silent.

"Lower," he said, "somebody might hear you. It may be nothing, though I am suffering terribly. I thought, as you were a medical student, you could doubtless attend to me!"

Without saying a word, I made him sit down, hastily examined the injury, and gave him the necessary assistance.

The wound, although it had bled freely, was very slight. In fact, it was only a scratch, commencing at the left ear and stopping at the lips.

"Well, I'm safe and sound this time," said M. Mechinet, when the dressing was finished. "A thousand thanks, my dear Monsieur Godeuil. Please say nothing about this little accident to anybody, and good night."

Good night! I was very likely to sleep!

When I remember all the absurd ideas and romantic fancies that passed through my brain, I can't help laughing.

M. Mechinet assumed fantastic proportions in my mind. The next morning he quietly came in to thank me again, and invited me to dinner.

It may be supposed that I was all eyes and ears when I entered my neighbor's home. But it was in vain that my attention was on the alert. I detected nothing calculated to dispel the mystery that so greatly perplexed me. From the time of this dinner, however, our relations became more intimate. M. Mechinet had evidently taken a fancy to me. A week rarely passed without an invitation to eat his soup, as he expressed it, and almost every day he joined me at the Cafe Leroy, and we played a game of dominoes together.

So on a certain evening in the month of July—one Friday about five o'clock—he was on the point of beating me, when a man of very shabby appearance, it must be confessed, entered and whispered in his ear a few words I did not understand.

M. Mechinet started up with a troubled face.

"I'll go," said he; "run and say I'll go."

The man set off at full speed, and my old neighbor held out his hand to me, saying—

"Excuse me; duty first—we'll continue our game to-morrow."

And as, burning with curiosity, I showed great annoyance, saying how much I regretted that I could not accompany him:

"Well," he muttered, "why not? Do you want to come? Perhaps it will be interesting."

My only reply was to seize my hat and we went out.

CHAPTER II.

I was certainly far from suspecting that I was taking one of those apparently insignificant steps which have a decided influence on the whole life.

"Now," I thought, "I shall get the key to the puzzle."

And full of foolish satisfaction, I trotted like a lean cat by M. Mechinet's side.

I say trotted, because I really had some difficulty in keeping up with the worthy man.

He walked on and on, along the Rue Racine, resembling the passenger as if his fortune had depended on his speed.

Luckily a *fiacre* passed us at the Place de l'Odeon.

M. Mechinet stopped it, and opening the door, said, "Get in, Monsieur Godeuil."

I obeyed, and he took his seat beside me after calling to the driver in an imperative tone—"Rue Lecluse, 39 aux Batignolles—and be quick!"

The distance drew a volley of oaths from the driver. No matter, he gave his horses a violent blow, and the carriage rolled on.

"Ah! so we're going to the Batignolles?" I asked, with the smile of a courtier.

But M. Mechinet made no reply. I doubt whether he heard me.

A complete metamorphosis was taking place in him. He did not seem exactly agitated, but his compressed lips and the contraction of his large, bushy eyebrows betrayed intense preoccupation of mind. His eyes, fixed on a vacancy, seemed to be studying the terms of some insoluble problem.

He had drawn out his snuff-box, and was constantly taking immense pinches, which he kneaded between his finger and thumb and raised to his nose, but did not inhale.

This was a trick I had noticed, and which greatly amused me. The worthy man, who had a horror of tobacco, was always provided with a snuff-box worthy of a stage financier.

If anything unforeseen occurred, whether pleasant or disagreeable, he pulled it out of his pocket and began to take snuff furiously. The box was often empty, but his gestures remained the same.

I afterwards knew it was a trick of his to conceal his impressions and divert the attention of his questioners.

Meantime we drove on.

The *fiacre* ascended, not without difficulty, the Rue de Clichy, crossed the outer boulevard, turned into the Rue de Lecluse, and ere long stopped at some distance from the address given.

To go further was impossible, the street was so blocked by a dense crowd.

Before the house, bearing the number 39, two or three hundred persons were standing with outstretched necks and sparkling eyes, panting with curiosity, and with difficulty kept back by a half-dozen policemen, who vainly shouted in their harshest tones, "Pass on, gentlemen, pass on!"

Alighting from the carriage, we approached the house, forcing our way through the loungers with great difficulty.

We had already reached the door of No. 39, when a policeman rudely thrust us back.

"Stand back! No admittance here!"

My companion eyed him from head to foot, and drawing himself up, said:

"So you don't recognize me. I am Mechinet, and this young man"—he pointed to me—"is with me."

"Pardon me! Excuse me!" stammered the man, raising his hand to his hat. "I didn't know—walk in."

We entered.

In the vestibule a stout woman, evidently the *concierge*, redder than a peony, was talking and gesticulating amid a group of lodgers.

"Where is it?" M. Mechinet asked roughly.

"On the third floor, my dear monsieur," she answered; "third floor, right-hand door! Oh Lord, what a misfortune! In a house like ours! Such a good man!"

I heard no more. M. Mechinet had darted up the stairs, and I followed, my heart beating as if it would stifle me.

The right-hand door on the third floor stood open.

We entered, crossed an antechamber, dining-room, drawing-room, and at last reached a bed-chamber.

If I could live a thousand years I should never forget the spectacle that met my eyes. As I write, after so many years, I can see the smallest details.

Two men were leaning on the mantelpiece opposite the door; a commissary of police, with his scarf round his waist, and an examining magistrate.

On the right, seated at a table, a young man, the clerk, was writing.

In the centre of the room, on the floor, amid a pool of black, coagulated blood, lay the body of an old man with white hair. He was stretched on his back, with his arms extended. Terrified, I stood rooted to the threshold, so near fainting, that to save myself from falling I was obliged to lean against the door.

My profession had familiarized me with death; I had long since conquered the terrors of the hospital, but this was the first time I found myself confronted with crime. For it was evident that an abominable crime had been committed.

My neighbor, less impressionable than I, had entered with a firm step.

"Oh! it's you, Mechinet," said the commissary of police. "I'm very sorry to have troubled you."

"Why?"

"Because we sha'n't need your wits. We know the criminal. I have given my orders, and he must be already arrested."

Strange! From M. Mechinet's gesture, one would have supposed this assurance annoyed him. He drew out his snuff-box, took two or three of his imaginary pinches, and said:

"Ah! the criminal is known."

The examining magistrate answered:

"And known in a very certain and positive fashion; yes, Monsieur Mechinet. The crime having been committed, the assassin fled, believing that his victim had expired. He was mistaken. Providence watched the deed. The unfortunate man still breathed. Summoning all his strength, he dipped one of his fingers in the blood that was flowing in streams from the wound, and wrote on the floor his murderer's name, thus denouncing him to human justice. Look."

Thus informed, I perceived what I had not noticed at first.

On the floor, in large, ill-shaped, scarcely legible letters, was written with blood: MONIS.

"Well?" said M. Mechinet.

"That," replied the commissary of police, "is the beginning of the name of the poor old man's nephew—a nephew of whom he was very fond, and who is named Monistrol."

"The devil!" said my neighbor.

"I don't suppose," continued the magistrate, "that the scoundrel will try to deny it. The five letters are an overwhelming charge against him. Besides, who profits by this cowardly crime? He alone, the sole heir of the old man, who leaves a large fortune, they say. There is more evidence; the crime was committed yesterday evening. Well, yesterday evening no one visited this poor old man except his nephew. The *concierge* saw him come in about 9 o'clock and go out a little before midnight.

"That's plain," said M. Mechinet, "that's very plain. This Monistrol is a fool."

Then, shrugging his shoulders, he continued:

"Did he steal anything, did he break any article of furniture, to put people on a wrong scent in regard to the motive of the crime?"

"Nothing seems to be disturbed," replied the commissary of police. "The scoundrel hasn't gone away. When he leaves this house he is discovered, he will confess."

The commissary of police and M. Mechinet then retired into the recess of a window and conversed together in a low tone, while the magistrate gave some instructions to his clerk.

CHAPTER III.

Henceforward my mind was settled.

I had wanted to know exactly what my mysterious neighbor did. Now I knew. Now his desultory mode of life was explained, his absences, the late hours at which he returned, his sudden disappearances, his young wife's fears, the wound I had dressed.

But of what use was my discovery?

I had gradually recovered my senses, the power of reflecting and deliberating had returned, and I scrutinized everything around me with eager curiosity.

From the place where I stood leaning against the door, I could survey the whole apartment.

Nothing, literally nothing, betrayed the scene of a murder.

Everything, on the contrary, revealed comfort, but at the same time parsimonious and methodical habits. Everything was in its place; there was not a fold awry in the curtains, and the frames of the furniture glittered, implying daily polishing. Besides, it seemed evident that the suppositions of the magistrate and commissary of police were correct, and the poor old man had been assassinated the evening before, just as he was preparing to go to bed.

In fact, the bedclothes were turned back, and on the quilt lay a shirt and nightcap. On the table at the head of the bed I saw a glass of sugar and water, a box of matches, and an evening paper—the *Patrie*.

On one corner of the mantelpiece glittered a candlestick—a large solid copper candlestick. But the candle that had illuminated the crime was consumed, the murderer had fled without blowing it out, and it had burned down, blackening the alabaster save-all on which it was fastened.

These details I had perceived at once, without effort, without, so to speak, any exertion of my will.

My eye performed the part of a photographic object-glass, the scene of the murder was fixed on my mind as if on a prepared plate, with such precision that no circumstance was omitted, with such permanence that even now I could draw the chamber occupied by the "little old man of the Batignolles" without forgetting anything, without omitting even a cork half covered with green wax, which I can still see on the floor, under the clerk's chair.

The faculty of investigation, which has been bestowed upon me, is a very extraordinary one. I had never before had occasion to exert it, but it suddenly revealed itself.

At that time I was far too deeply agitated to be able to analyze my impressions. I had but one obstinate, burning, irresistible desire—to approach the corpse, lying two yards away from me.

At first I struggled against this wish. But there was a fatality about it. I approached.

Had my presence been noticed? I think not.

At any rate, nobody was paying any attention to me.

M. Mechinet and the police officer were still talking together near the window, the clerk was reading in a low tone his report to the magistrate.

So there was nothing to prevent the accomplishment of my plan.

Besides, I must confess, a sort of feverish eagerness had taken possession of me, which made me insensible to external circumstances and utterly isolated me.

I ventured to kneel down by the body, to see it better and more closely.

Far from thinking somebody was going to exclaim: "What are you doing here?" I moved slowly and steadily, like a man who, having received a mission, is going to execute it.

The unfortunate old man seemed to be about seventy or seventy-five years old. He was small and very thin, but had evidently been strong, and likely to live to be a hundred. He still had a great deal of hair, of a yellowish white color, curled on the back of his neck. His gray beard, strong and thick-set, did not seem to have been shaved for five or six days; it must have grown since his death. This circumstance, which I had often noticed among subjects brought to the hospital for dissection, caused me no surprise.

What did astonish me was the unfortunate man's face. It was calm, nay, smiling.

The lips were parted as if for a friendly greeting.

Death had been terribly sudden, since he had kept that pleasant expression.

This was the first idea that presented itself to the mind.

Yes, but how could I reconcile these two irreconcilable circumstances: a sudden death, and the five letters—Monis—which I saw in characters of blood upon the floor?

What effort must it not have cost the dying man to write that! Only the hope of vengeance could have given him such energy. And what must have been his rage to feel himself dying, ere he could trace the whole name of his assassin!

Yet the face of the corpse seemed to smile at me.

The poor old man had been struck in the throat, and the weapon had cut the neck from ear to ear.

The instrument of the crime must have been a poniard, or rather one of those terrible Catalonian knives, as wide as the hand, which cut on both sides and are as sharp as a needle.

Never in my life have I experienced sensations so singular.

My temples throbbed with unprecedented violence, and my heart swelled as if it would burst.

What was I going to discover?

Urged on by a mysterious and irresistible power which annihilated my will, I took between my own hands the cold, rigid hands of the corpse.

The right one was clean; it was one of the fingers of the left, the forefinger, that was stained with blood.

What! The old man had written with his left hand! Come, come!

Overwhelmed by a sort of giddiness, with wild eyes, bristling hair, and a face paler than that of the corpse lying at my feet, I started up, uttering a terrible cry.

"Great Heaven!"

All the others, startled, surprised and bewildered, exclaimed in a breath—

"What is it? What is the matter?"

I tried to answer, but my emotion stifled me; it seemed as if my mouth was full of sand.

I could only point to the dead man's hands, stammering—

"There! there!"

Quick as lightning, Mechinet had thrown himself on his knees beside the corpse. He saw what I had seen, and received the same impression, for, starting to his feet, he claimed—

"It was not this poor old man who traced these letters."

And as the magistrate and commissary of police stared at him with mouths wide open, he explained to them the circumstances which I had discovered, he will confess."

"And to think I didn't notice it," said the commissary, mournfully.

M. Mechinet took snuff furiously.

"That's always the way," he remarked. "The things in plain sight are the very ones that are not seen. But no matter, the situation is entirely changed. Since the old man did not write the letters, his assassin did."

"Evidently," assented the commissary.

"Now," my neighbor continued, "can we imagine a murderer stupid enough to denounce himself by writing his name beside the body of his victim? No, that isn't it. Now let us conjecture."

The magistrate had become anxious.

"It is plain," said he, "that appearances have deceived us. Monistrol is not the criminal. Who is he? It's your business, Monsieur Mechinet, to find out."

He paused. A police officer entered, who, addressing himself to the commissary, said:

"Your orders are executed, monsieur. Monistrol has been arrested and imprisoned. He has confessed everything."

CHAPTER IV.

The shock was the ruder because so unexpected.

It was impossible to describe our astonishment.

What! While we were there trying to find proofs of Monistrol's innocence, he was confessing his guilt.

M. Mechinet was the first to regain his composure.

He hastily raised his fingers from his snuff-box to his nose five or six times, and, advancing to the policeman, said:

"You are mistaken, or are deceiving us; there's no half-way course."

"I assure you, Monsieur Mechinet"—

"Silence! Either you have misunderstood what Monistrol said, or you are intoxicated by the hope of astounding us by telling us that the affair is settled."

The policeman, hitherto humble and respectful, now rebelled.

"Excuse me," he interrupted. "I'm neither a fool nor a liar, and I know what I'm talking about."

The discussion was verging so near a quarrel that the magistrate thought it his duty to interfere.

"Keep your temper, Monsieur Mechinet," said he, "and wait till you have all the information before you form an opinion."

Then turning to the policeman, he continued:

"And you, my friend, tell us what you know, and the reasons for your confidence."

Thus supported, the policeman crushed M. Mechinet with a sarcastic glance, and displaying a very perceptible touch of conceit, began:

"Well, then, this is the state of affairs. The magistrate and commissary here present ordered us, Inspector Goulard, my colleague, Poltin, and myself, to arrest the man named Monistrol, dealer in imitation jewelry, living at No. 75 Rue Vivienne, the aforesaid Monistrol being accused of the murder of his uncle."

"That is correct," said the commissary in an undertone.

"Thereupon," continued the policeman, "we took a *fiacre* and drove to the address. On our arrival we found Monsieur Monistrol in his back shop, just about to sit down to dinner with his wife, a remarkably beautiful woman twenty-five or thirty years old.

"On seeing us all three enter in a row, my gentleman started up. 'What do you want?' he asked. Goulard instantly drew out the warrant and answered, 'I arrest you in the name of the law!'"

M. Mechinet seemed to be on thorns. "Couldn't you hurry a little?" he said to the policeman.

But the latter, as if he had not heard the remark, continued in the same quiet tone—

"I have arrested several individuals in my life, but I never saw any one so discomposed as this man. 'You are joking, or have made a mistake,' said he. 'No, we haven't made any mistake.' 'But why do you arrest me?' Goulard shrugged his shoulders.

"'Don't act like a child,' said he. 'Your uncle—the body is found, and there are overwhelming proofs against you.'

"Oh! the rascal. He tottered, and at last fell into a chair, sobbing and stammering some reply which it was impossible to understand.

"Seeing this, Goulard shook him by the collar of his coat, saying—

"'The shortest way is to confess everything.'

"He looked at us with a bewildered expression, and muttered—

"'Well, I'll confess everything.'"

"Well managed, Goulard," said the commissary approvingly.

The policeman was triumphant.

"The point in question was to make no disturbance in the shop," he continued. "We had been ordered to avoid causing any gossip, and the loungers were already assembling. Goulard seized the prisoner by the arm, exclaiming: 'Come, start; we are expected at the prefecture!' Monistrol managed to stand on his trembling limbs, and in the tone of a man who is plucking up his courage, said, 'Let us go.'

"We thought the worst was over, but we hadn't reckoned upon the wife.

"Up to that moment she had remained in an arm-chair as if fainting, without uttering a word, or seeming to understand what was passing. But when she saw that we were really taking her husband away, she started up like an angry lioness and threw herself before the door, crying, 'You shan't not pass!' Upon my word, she was magnificent; but Goulard has seen a great many people. 'Come, come, my good woman,' said he, 'don't interfere with us; you shall have your husband again.'

"Far from making way for us, she clung still more convulsively to the door, swearing that her husband was innocent; declaring that if he were taken to prison she would follow him; sometimes threatening us and overwhelming us with curses, sometimes pleading with us in the sweetest tones.

"Then, when she realized that nothing would prevent us from doing our duty, she moved away from the door, and, throwing herself into her husband's arms: 'Oh! my dearest,' she moaned, 'is it possible you can be accused of a crime, you—you! Tell these men you are innocent.'

"'We were all touched; but he, more callous than any of us, had the cruelty to push his poor wife away, so brutally that she fell like a lump in a corner of the shop.

"Fortunately this was the end.

"The wife had fainted. We took advantage of the opportunity to pack the husband into the *fiacre* we had brought.

"Pack is the right word, for he had become like a lifeless thing; he could no longer stand and had to be carried. To forget nothing, I must add that his dog, a sort of black pug, actually tried to jump into the carriage with us, and we had the greatest difficulty in getting rid of it.

"On the way, as was right, Goulard tried to divert our prisoner's thoughts and make him talk. But it was impossible to get a word out of his mouth. Not until we reached the prefecture did he seem to recover his senses. When he was safely and duly installed in one of the 'close-confinement' cells he threw himself full length on the bed, repeating, 'What have I done, oh, God! what have I done?'

"At that moment Goulard approached him for the second time. 'So,' said he, 'you confess that you are guilty?' 'Yes, yes,' replied Monistrol, and then added, in a hoarse voice, 'pray let me alone!'

"We did so, taking care, however, to station an attendant at the grating of the cell, to watch lest the fellow should attempt to commit suicide.

"Goulard and Poltin remained there, and I—came here."

"That report is exact," muttered the commissary of police; "it couldn't be more so."

This was also the magistrate's opinion, for he muttered:

"How can there be a doubt of Monistrol's guilt after that?"

I was confounded, yet my convictions were improbable. I even opened my lips to hazard an objection, when M. Mechinet anticipated me.

"All this is very fine!" he exclaimed. "Only, if we admit that Monistrol is the assassin, we are also forced to admit that he wrote his name there on the floor—and, zounds, it's hard—"

"Stop!" interrupted the commissary of police; "since the criminal confesses, what is the use of troubling ourselves about a circumstance that will be explained?"

But my neighbor's remark had once more aroused the magistrate's doubts. So, without pronouncing any opinion, he said:

"I am going to the prefecture; I want question Monistrol this very evening."

And after having told the commissary of police to carefully execute all the formalities required by the law and wait for the physicians summoned to make a post-mortem examination of the body, he went away, followed by his clerk and the policeman who had come to tell us of the success of the arrest.

"If these doctors only don't keep us waiting too long!" grumbled the commissary, who was thinking of his dinner.

Neither M. Mechinet nor I answered. We remained standing face to face, evidently haunted by the same idea.

"Perhaps the old man wrote it after all," murmured my neighbor.

"With his left hand? Is that possible? Without considering that the poor man's death must have been instantaneous?"

"Are you sure of it?"

"From the nature of his wound I would take my oath upon it. But some doctors are coming who will tell you whether I am right or wrong."

M. Mechinet tormented his nose in a perfect frenzy of excitement.

"Perhaps there is really some mystery in it," said he.

"Inquiries must be made again. Well, let's make them; and to begin let us question the *concierge*."

And running to the staircase, he leaned over the railing, calling:

"*Concierge! Concierge!* Come up here for a few minutes, if you please."

To be continued.

WHAT HIS EYES WERE FOR.

"Take care! Flora, take care. You are playing with edged tools. You may offend Ralph forever."

"Offend him, indeed! Don't talk to me, Kate; I tell you he is perfectly hateful. I have flirted with him till my head aches; played with him, sang at him, romped or been dignified, till my wits were fairly bothered how to create a new sensation; and yet the wretch sits staring at me as if his eyes were made for nothing but to see with."

"Well, what are his eyes made for?"

"Such eyes as his were made for a thousand things; great black ones, with such long, silky lashes! Why, he could make no end of a commotion in the feminine fancy with his eyes alone.

"What are they made for? They are made to say unutterable things, to look a million varying emotions, to raise with favor, to cast down with modesty, to melt with feeling, or flash with pride. And, upon my word, I don't believe the man has the slightest idea that they were made for anything but the convenience of seeing. And to think that I am engaged to him!"

"I thought you could break the engagement."

"Yes, and lose every penny of my property and bring the whole family about my ears. No. Uncle George portioned off Glenville to us if we took it together; if not, it was to go to some distant relatives who live in Philadelphia. So, down comes my sharer of this world's goods, and, in a most matter-of-fact way, says, 'I think we had better be married in the fall, Flora.' And I, like an idiot, said 'Very well.'"

"He is certainly very handsome, Flora!"

"Yes, so is uncle's bust of Napoleon. Looks like him, by-the-way, and one has about as much animation as the other. The most provoking thing about him is, he will never do anything that is not strictly proper and dignified. I never saw him take a glass of water without a desire on my part to tip the whole of it down his neck, and see him jump. Though for that matter, he wouldn't jump if I did.

"I haven't done a harum-scarum thing since he came that he has not caught me in the act. I never scramble over a fence that he is not on the other side with a profound bow for my especial benefit, and as sure as I dare to climb a tree or undertake the least bit of a frolic, his most magnificent highness is the first object to meet my eyes. Kate, I wonder if I couldn't make him jealous? I mean to try. Harry Vane came home yesterday and is all ready to fall at my feet."

"Harry Vane is a brainless fop, Flora."

"He knows how to use his eyes, even if he is, and he is the best fun in the world."

"And would you offend Ralph?"

"I tell you I hate him!" and Flora dashed out of the room, leaving her invalid cousin and confidante aghast at her sudden outburst.

In the parlor the merry beauty found her betrothed, his large eyelids closed over the useless eyes, and apparently fast asleep.

"I wish I could play some joke and see if it would astonish him when he awoke," she said.

"Not in the least, if I knew it beforehand," said Ralph, lazily opening his eyes.

"How dare you pretend to sleep?" cried Flora, indignantly; "I might have talked secrets."

"Then I should not have listened."

"Oh, of course not; nothing half so naughty could occur to you," she said rather scoffingly.

"I trust nothing dishonorable could," was the quiet reply, though for a moment his cheek crimsoned with vexation.

"I ask your pardon. I did not mean to be so rude," said the frank penitent, holding out her hand.

He only bowed gracefully, and, snatching away the rejected hand, she threw herself down on the piano stool and dashed off her pique in a stormy polka.

The polka went off into a dream-like waltz; and one of Beethoven's sonatas followed; till, as the room grew almost dark, the subduing influence became stronger, and, as the last note died away, she began to sing, not as he had heard her sing before, in dashing opera airs; her voice rose clear, but subdued, in sad melodies, old ballads, and those lingering airs of "Auld Lang Syne," so seldom heard now-a-days.

The tea-bell broke in upon the pleasure, and the light dining-room found Ralph as dignified and Flora as saucy as if no music had stirred their hearts into a new and strange communion.

Kate heard, day after day, with pain, of the marked coldness between Ralph and Flora, and of her increasing flirtation with Harry Vane.

At last the crash came.

"I am free!"

Flora threw back the door and rushed in, with burning cheeks and flashing eyes.

"I am free, Kate. My charming cousin came to me one hour ago and asked an interview—a private one—which I granted, of course. He informed me that when he graduated as a physician, with his heart full of the glory and responsibility of his profession, he had come here trusting to find a wife who would be his companion and true helpmate in the arduous life before him. He had hoped that my liveliness was merely youthful spirits, but finding me heartless and frivolous he pre