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SAMUEL WRIGHT, Editor and Proprietor.

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Selections.

The Diamond Bracelet.

CHAPTER I.
It was a cold November night. The good town of Guernsey was asleep. The only sounds to be heard were the creaking of the cables where the ships rode at anchor, the heavy boom of the sea, and the measured tread of the sentinel as he paced to and fro on the pier. In the distance, about half-way up the hill, the lighted windows of a tall mansion threw a strong glare upon the black masses of building by which it was surrounded. This was the hospital, and among its inmates were many convicts broken down by hard and continuous labor. There sat in one of the windows a man in the prime of life. His head leaned heavily on one hand, and he appeared absorbed in reverie. "What is life," he thought, "without pleasure? And how can pleasure be obtained without money? Now, as to the means of acquiring money, it is only when a man fails that they are ever called in question. Perpetrate a larceny, if it makes you rich, who will blame you? A crime even; ay, there is remorse, very true; but which of the two makes life most bitter—desire that is unsatisfied, or repentance? I have no possible conception of the amount of pain which proceeds from a guilty conscience! but the bitterness of poverty I know from a long and sad experience. The poor man is nobody. He has no enjoyment of life. He is free! Yes; free to die of hunger! that is all. Shall my life pass always without enjoyment? I am young; I love mirth, pleasure; and my existence is spent between a garret and a hospital. What can I have done to deserve so hard a fate? why should I support it? If a favorable opportunity presented itself, I do not think I would hesitate at even a crime to better my condition; but even the opportunity of a crime is rare. It requires a special interposition in one's favor to bring it about. What is the boasted honesty of mankind? Little more than the difficulty of becoming the rogue with impunity."
To the metaphysician, here was a curious study. A man in the very flower of life, speculating on the impotence of poverty to commit sin with advantage, and wondering why Providence had surrounded crime with obstacles apparently insurmountable. The accurate observer might have detected in this morbid condition more the vague speculation of a turbulent and unsettled mind than actual perversion of moral feeling.—The thirst of ambition and the desire of opulence are maladies common to the spring-tides of youth, and proceed as frequently from its feverish restlessness as from actual vice.
The young physician was one of that class of men who prefer selecting their own place in the world rather than endeavoring to do their duty in the position where they find themselves. In railing at fortune they spend the time which they ought to pass in endeavoring to win her smiles. To every man born in an humble position, there are two courses open—either resigning himself to the poverty of his lot, or to apply his energies towards its improvement. Dr. Epernon would do neither; he preferred railing against social irregularities; life appeared to him in false colors. Absorbed by a thirst for pleasure, he had never learned the philosophy of Solomon; and even the sense of duty became in the idea which, once entertained, led him rapidly to the conclusion that any means were justifiable that would achieve success. In his meditations vice was becoming a familiar image, although he might still have shrunk from its practice. The power to will was growing gradually weaker in proportion as the senses acquired a stronger dominion over the intellect. His whole moral nature was in imminent danger of shipwreck.
The physician's train of thought was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of an attendant, who came to announce the death of one of the inmates. It was Number Fifty, the man said, for in a hospital no one has a name. He arose and walked listlessly to the dormitory. Passing along a double row of beds, he reached the spot, and, drawing down the coarse sheet which had been hastily thrown over the dead man, he looked at the corpse with that species of interest science feels in the presence of a power which has baffled all its skill.
A sudden idea seemed to strike him, for he ordered the servant to remove the body into the dissecting room.

The dead man was no unworthy subject for a disciple of Lavater. Convicted of burglary, he had been sentenced to penal servitude for life. During his many years of hard labor his mind had been occupied with one single idea—that of escape. His attempts had amounted to upwards of thirty, and thirty times had he been caught, tied up and severely flogged. These repeated punishments had gradually impaired his energy, without causing him to abandon his idea of flight. The desire of liberty seemed to increase in proportion to its difficulty of accomplishment, until it had become a sort of monomania. A weighty bar of iron was riveted to one of his legs. Deprived thus of any further hope, he drooped gradually; his spirits began to languish; he lost his strength, his appetite failed; a deep melancholy settled upon him; and he became, at last, a permanent tenant of the infirmary.
The physician prepared his instruments, approached the table, and uncovered the body.
The attenuated form was like that of an old man. The limbs were covered with scars, and an iron ring still surrounded the left leg, where it had left a deep mark.—Having looked curiously at one who had endured so many years of suffering in the attempt to break a chain which clung to him in death, the physician laid his lamp down and took up a dissecting-knife. But when he seized the arm of the convict, he experienced a slight sensation of resistance. Surprised and almost frightened, he raised the head towards the lamp. The eyelids seemed to tremble; he placed the light nearer. The dead man opened both his eyes, and stared hard at the doctor!
Epernon drew back in terror as the body slowly arose, and gaining a sitting posture, looked at him with an air of solicitude. He scarcely knew what to think, until he saw his patient glide gently to the ground, and creep towards the window. The movement enlightened him; for convicts had more than once feigned death in order to effect their escape. Recovering from his trepidation, he seized his subject by the waist, just as he had succeeded in throwing up the sash.
The convict struggled, and a hand to hand fight took place. It was soon ended by the fall of the man, who, weak and naked, was no match for his antagonist.
"You see you cannot escape," said Epernon.
The convict, convulsed with rage, made one or two more violent efforts, but finding them in vain, surrendered.
"Let me escape, in the name of heaven!" he said, in a suppliant tone. "What can it matter to you? It is not your duty to guard me."
"Yes, while you are sick. What would they say of a doctor who let a dead man run away!"
"They never will know it; and if they did, what matter? Let me only save myself.—I would be free in a moment. I have not breathed a breath of air since my last attempt."
"It is simply impossible."
The convict made a new effort to disengage himself, but he could not get rid of the doctor's grasp of iron. "You shall never be said to have succeeded in making a dupe of me."
"I only wish to be free—it is necessary," said the man. "O God! I have suffered so long in vain. I who have made no attempt for six months; who have remained days without food to qualify myself for the infirmary. I was able to feign even death—and then to fall, oh! it is too much, it is too much!" and the convict dashed his head furiously against the stone floor. The practiced nerves of the surgeon were touched by the depth of his despair.
"Why," he said, "do you so earnestly desire your liberty?"
"Why—oh, why! I have never been a prisoner. Why do I ask to be free?—because I cannot remain here. I wish to do in my own land, to warm myself in a southern sun; only think, it is twenty years since I have seen an olive tree."
"But you cannot resume your former employments; you have not health; you would die of hunger."
The man smiled. "I am richer," he said, "than you."
"You are a happy man, then!"
"Although the last words had been spoken ironically, there was something in their tone which seemed to inspire the poor felon with a ray of hope.
"Hearken!" said he; "would you wish to be rich? I have enough for both of us."
"You take me for an idiot?"
"I tell you I can make your fortune; help me to escape, and I will do it."
"Keep your stories for some one else," said the doctor, ashamed of having lent his ear to the ravings of a maniac.
"You do not believe me," groaned the convict. "Doctor, I have told you the truth—how can I persuade you?"
"Show me your treasures!"
"Ah! how is that possible in such a place as this? If I tell you where they are, will you believe I do not lie?"
"We shall see that."
"Will you promise them to set me free?"
"What? if you tell me?"
"Yes, if I tell you. You will promise me, then?"
"I do not risk much if I do."
"Swear it."
"Be it so—I swear!"
"Well, then, on the strand near St. Samfrons, close to the northern extremity of the rock, if you dig six feet below the surface you will find an iron box; it has been buried there for many years, and it contains, beside

jewels, bank notes to the amount of thirty thousand pounds!"
"There is a slight discrepancy in your story, my friend; you have been a prisoner for ten years at the least."
"It is exactly ten years since that box was buried by myself and a friend. We were both taken the very next day; he died at the galleys—I am the only living man who knows the place of that deposit."
Notwithstanding the doctor's efforts to preserve composure, it was evident that he was greatly struck by this story. He remained lost in thought, as if balancing its probabilities; then he looked up, and observing the convict's eyes fastened eagerly upon him, the doctor blushed.
"Your romance," he said, "my friend, is ingenious, but the story is an old one. Now-a-days one scarcely believes in concealed treasures, even in comic operas. Tell me another story."
The convict shuddered.
"You do not believe me?" he said.
"I believe you to be a clever fellow, who likes to exercise his imagination at the expense of such simple folks as I am."
"Doctor, I will give you two-thirds, believe me."
"Enough!" said the doctor, sternly; "not another word; rise, and follow me."
The convict uttered a yell of mingled rage and despair, and threw himself on the floor.
"It is every word of it true," he screamed.
"The box is there! there! Ah! how can I prove I do not lie? Oh! to think there are but five miles between me and that box—between wealth and misery. Doctor, you will repent of this. Ah! he does not wish to believe it!"
The story of this man had excited in the surgeon's breast all that crowd of turbulent emotions which had such strong dominion over him. On the one hand he felt a powerful inclination to believe it—on the other, the apprehension of being held up to scorn as the dupe of a rogue. Between these two conflicting feelings one course appeared to him the safest. He attempted to raise the convict in his arms and carry him back to the hospital, but his efforts were in vain; and he determined to go for assistance. Having carefully closed the door, he ran to the guard-room, and ordered two attendants to follow him immediately.
As they drew near the dissecting-room the report of a carbine rang forth; and almost at the same moment a man, naked and streaming with blood, staggered to the further extremity of the yard. It was the unfortunate prisoner, who had contrived, in the temporary absence of the doctor, to let himself down by the window. The sentinel on duty had fired—and he was dead!

CHAPTER II.
Bruchsal is a pretty little watering-place at the foot of a range of mountains near the Black Forest. The situation is charming, and quite worthy the attention of a poet who wished for a model of a terrestrial paradise; encompassed with mountains and forests, a valley stretches away from the village, enamelled with flowers, like a piece of spangled velvet. Bruchsal is famous for its wines, its dark-eyed frauleins, and its baths. Thither, in the season, resort invades of many different nations. The table d'hôte at the "Schwan" is excellent. The waiters are alert and active, the dishes of infinite variety, and the guests most interesting. The chances are, if you take your place at that festive board, you will have a liver complaint on one side, a chronic rheumatism on the other, and perhaps a disease of the heart or a pleurisy consumption opposite, and so on through the calendar of grisly ills which flesh is heir to; yet they all seem jolly, and partake with avidity of the delicacies provided for their entertainment. In point of fact, I believe there is an understanding between the hotel keeper and the faculty. Eat as much as you please, says the doctor to his patient. The landlord displays a tempting profusion. The patient obeys such pleasant advice, and as a natural result comes back again on the hands of the doctor.
The inmates of the Schwan are assembled under an alley of acacia trees, to enjoy the sultry afternoon. They are joined by Madame Goritz and her charming daughter. The elder lady, wife of a rich citizen at Frankfurt, was one of those uncomfortable dames, the object of whose existence is advantageously to dispose of their female offspring: "daughters to marry" was written in the good woman's face. She had hitherto been tolerably successful, having "planted" three charming creatures in rapid succession. But when the turn of the fourth came, difficulties arose. Her house had got a bad name among the young people. It was looked upon by them as a sort of lion's den. Three victims had gone in there, who had never returned; and the threshold of the stout lady was seldom passed; her domestic tents, once the fashion, were quite deserted. Like a wise woman, therefore, recognizing the impossibility of procuring for Clarence, her fourth darling, an eligible establishment in her native town, she made up her mind to emigrate to the baths, where she had been residing for several weeks.
Having saluted all the visitors by name, and asked each of them the latest news of their complaints, Madame Goritz took a chair, and seated herself comfortably in the sunshine, by the side of her daughter, while the conversation resumed its monotonous course.
"I observe," said a lady, whose com-

fortable proportions seemed to occupy three chairs, "something very strange in the conduct of Miss de Vismes. She is here alone—odd, is it not?"
"The little Englander is a coquette," observed Madame Goritz, "she has contrived to turn the head of Monsieur Epernon—a perfect gentleman; much too good for her."
"Hush!" said the stout lady, "here he comes."
As she spoke, a gentleman was seen advancing slowly. He saluted the party, and seated himself. Madame Goritz placed a chair between herself and her daughter, and motioned him to occupy it, but he politely declined; and the match-maker, piqued, grew spiteful without delay.
"Your presence, Monsieur, is quite an unexpected pleasure, at this hour," she said, "when you are accustomed to walk with Miss de Vismes. May I venture to inquire what has interrupted you?"
"Miss de Vismes informed me yesterday she did not intend walking out to-day."
"Indeed!" said the lady, viciously. "I see at this moment, some one very like your friend, with her inseparable companion, Monsieur Quinton."
Monsieur Epernon looked in the direction indicated. The English lady was at the door of the hotel, seated on a donkey, evidently just returned from an excursion. As her eye fell upon the group, she blushed, leaped to the ground, and entered the hotel without waiting for her companion.
Mr. Quinton, astonished, looked round for some cause to explain this sudden movement; but as he saw the young Frenchman approach, he seemed to understand matters at a glance. As he turned to enter the hotel, Epernon laid his hand on his arm.
"Sir," he said, "may I beg the favor of a few moments conversation with you?"
Mr. Quinton drew himself up. "Certainly, if you wish it."
They walked together towards the park. When they were alone, "believe," said Mr. Epernon, "you are aware of the motive which has impelled me to seek this interview?"
"Possibly I may."
"You cannot be ignorant either of my affection for Miss de Vismes, or of the hope I have been rash enough to entertain. Without being aware of the precise relation in which you stand to her, I know that she looks up to you as her best friend. Since your return, I am pained to observe an alteration in her manner towards me, she has become constrained and distant. I wish, therefore, to know why this is—why she has avoided walking with me this morning, and, in short, the reason of this total change."
"You ask me many questions almost in a breath," replied Mr. Quinton, gravely. "As to our walk, I had occasion to speak with her on a matter of business, and it was proposed by herself."
"Then she has deceived me."
"Say, rather, she wished to soften the pain of a direct refusal. You complain of a change in her manner since my arrival. You do not reflect that much of her future happiness must depend upon the nature of the connection she may form. Such an affair must always be a matter of grave and serious deliberation."
"I may not understand you aright; but if you require information as to my position and circumstances, I am quite ready to afford it."
"I am all attention."
"I am of good family. My father was a captain in the navy. I was educated as a physician; but a change occurred in consequence of a legacy, which made me independent of my profession. My fortune amounts to about thirty thousand pounds."
"These particulars may prove interesting to Miss de Vismes. They do not suffice for me."
"Sir, this is an insult."
"Say it is prudence."
"Then by what title do you require these details? In what relationship do you stand to the young lady?"
"A friend, who is interested in her welfare," replied Mr. Quinton, coldly.
"Then I can only reply that this information is not enough for me."
"Sir," said the Englishman, with dignity, "it is you who have sought an interview with me. I have neither asked for your confidence, nor do I feel it necessary to give you mine in return. Our respective positions do not appear to suit your views; it is not therefore likely our interview can have any satisfactory result."
Having said this, Mr. Quinton bowed with an air of distant politeness, and made his way back to the hotel.
As he entered, the young lady, who had watched the interview from a window, looked anxiously in his face as if to ascertain the result. It is to be inferred she saw nothing that could be construed as favorable to her views; for she clasped her pretty hands together, and sighed. Mr. Quinton looked at her with an air of grave compassion.
"Courage, my love; perhaps everything will turn out well after all."

CHAPTER III.
The first impulse of Epernon was to follow his late companion, in order to call him to account for his last words. But a moment's reflection, and the thought of Clara, were enough to restrain him. What he had taken place, although by no means agreeable, scarcely amounted to an insult. The language and demeanor of Quinton were that of a proud rather than of an angry man, and on the whole he thought it better to submit.
Epernon had for many years been a wanderer. He had traversed almost all the European countries, and chance led him to Bruchsal just about the period of the arrival of several English tourists. Availing himself of that amount of privilege which living in the same house, and dining daily at the same table afforded, he had contrived to effect an introduction; and his knowledge of the English language, which was sufficient to enable him to converse with ease, made him so agreeable an acquaintance among the crowd of foreigners by which they were surrounded, that an intimacy was soon established between him and Clara. The young lady was pleased with an opportunity of conversing in her native tongue; and the gentleman was not sorry to improve his knowledge of English, by a few lessons from the lips of so charming a promptress. In such conversations there is not uncommonly a rather dangerous charm, when a beautiful girl undertakes to correct a man's pronunciation. He must be strangely insensible if he fail to recognize her charms; and, in short, matters were so far gone, that by the time Mr. Quinton had arrived, these two young persons had contrived to fall seriously in love with each other. The current of their tranquil happiness his appearance had served to interrupt. Clara had mentioned him to her lover as a friend of the family, whom she loved and respected like a father; but without throwing any further light on the relation which existed between them. It was, therefore, not without a certain feeling of jealous discontent that Epernon recognized the influence of the new arrival, and the daily proofs of their mutual esteem and affection were by no means regarded by him with equanimity. He coldly responded at first to the friendly advances of Mr. Quinton; and he, in his turn, gradually enveloped himself in an air of dignity, which became more and more repelling. Under these circumstances the reluctance to speak of any particulars of his past life, on the part of Epernon, became more marked. The slightest reference to this subject would often cause him to stop short in the very middle of an animated conversation; and it soon became evident, even to a common observer, that there were some of the chords in his heart which could not be touched without pain. The English gentleman observing this, carefully abstained from any further intercourse. The young lady grew gradually more reserved, and her lover more distracted at the alteration, until matters had come to the point which brought about the conversation contained in the previous chapter. In the evening Epernon found Clara in the saloon where the visitors were wont to assemble. He acknowledged her presence by a distant salutation, and seated himself at the further extremity of a work-table, between Madame Goritz and her charming daughter. He could scarcely bring himself to forgive the young lady for her tacit submission to the will of Mr. Quinton. It was quite in vain that he conjectured what would be the possible reason of a submission as evident as this was complete. There appeared in it too much that was passive to have any foundation in mere friendship; and it was too tender to be based on fear. Meanwhile, the good Madame Goritz was quite enchanted by her neighbor, and omitted no means she thought calculated to make a favorable impression. She talked incessantly of the gayeties of Frankfurt; spoke of her rich uncle the burgomaster; from that worthy personage, by an easy transition, she passed to the beauties of Switzerland, and enlarged on the advantages of foreign travel in general. Notwithstanding her efforts, however, the conversation appeared to languish, and her auditor at length became so restless that he took up his album and began to draw. But his eyes passed unconsciously from the book to that distant corner of the room where Miss de Vismes was seated. Finding all attempts to fix his attention ineffectual, he threw the portfolio aside, and began to traverse the room with uncertain and hasty stride. Madame Goritz, hoping to lure him back, took the album into her hands, and began to expatiate on the beauty of his drawing. Failing, however, to attract the attention of the object of her solicitude, until she passed it to the hands of her next neighbor, who in turn gave it to another, at last, the work traveling round the room, reached the spot where Mr. Quinton and his party were seated.
Although Miss de Vismes recognized an old companion in the volume, she mechanically turned over the leaves, glad, perhaps, to have in her hands something which belonged to her lover. She paused at a study of rocks; and Mr. Quinton, who was close beside her, as he looked, exclaimed: "Ifa! there is St. Samfrons!"
Epernon, who had heard the exclamation, immediately changed color, and trembled from head to foot.
"Who told you that name?" he exclaimed, huskily.
"It is written at the foot," said Clara, gently.
"It is a mistake, then; it is not St. Samfrons; I never was there." And as he spoke, Epernon took the book, and looked at the drawing which had excited so much attention. "A sketch which I made in Switzerland," he added, as he felt Mr. Quinton's eyes fixed upon his countenance. Several days passed without producing

any change in the situation of the respective parties to this little drama. Epernon, wounded in his pride, awaited an advance on the part of his mistress, while she, although apparently not unwilling the intimacy should continue, seemed to submit almost in spite of herself to some species of restraining influence. It was clear there was a mystery somewhere, which time only could develop. One morning as Epernon returned from a long and solitary ramble among the mountains, he entered the saloon, and gazed from the window on the summit of the Black Forest, which were bathed with the splendor of a lovely sunset. His reverie was interrupted by a voice, and turning rapidly, he perceived he was not alone.—Clara had entered, and was seated in an embrasure of a distant window; an open letter was in her hand, on which she gazed with a deep interest. This sudden appearance of the young lady banished all her lover's scruples, and in an instant he would have been by her side, had not a sudden look from Mr. Quinton arrested his progress. Clara, however, had seen and comprehended the sudden movement and she extended her hand to him. Epernon, transported with delight, took it in both his own; then recalling the presence of the odious Englishman, he bowed courteously, and said:
"Forgive me, Miss de Vismes; but, observing your emotion, I feared that something serious might have taken place."
"Oh! no," she replied; in an unsteady voice, "nothing more serious than a little good news."
There was a moment's silence, during which the lover's gaze intently at each other. The Englishman seemed to feel himself rather *de trop*, and with a look full of kindness, obligingly took his departure. As soon as they were alone, Epernon said: "Ah! what a long time it seems since I have had you near me!"
"A single gesture would have intimated to me that it would have given you pleasure."
"Could you ever have doubted it?"
"You seemed so distant and cold."
"Something, then, has happened, pray tell me."
"Ah! do not ask; inquire nothing; leave me to-day alone with my happiness. Is it not enough for you to know that I am happy?"
"And yet you weep?"
"But my tears are not those of sorrow.—The only fear I have is that my joy will pass away along with them."
"Clara, you know how I love you; would you wish always to leave your hand in mine as it is now?"
The lady blushed and trembled; then she raised her eyes, moist with emotion, and hid her face on her lover's shoulder.
"Why then should our happiness be retarded?" he said.
"How do you know if I am free—if those on whom my destiny depends may not seek to influence me—may not have other and more ambitious views?"
"There is, then, an obstacle: your family may be rich, noble, and perhaps disapprove of a plebeian alliance?"
"No; it is not that; I must say nothing, only leave me for a little while; I am not quite myself."
"Be it so," said the young man, with abandon; "let us only continue to love one another; I shall ask for nothing more now. Do not drive me away from you; think how sad I have been all this long while!"
"You will be friends then with Mr. Quinton?" said the young girl, timidly. "It is necessary for both our sakes; ah! you do not know how much depends upon him."
"I will try my very best," said her lover, fondly.
"As for me, I will pray that our project may succeed," said Clara, radiant with joy.
Epernon clasped her in his arms, and kissing her forehead—"Pray for me also, Clara," he said.
CHAPTER IV.
The explanation which Epernon had obtained from the gentle Clara had caused a complete revolution in all his feelings. The sight of her tears, the sound of her voice, and with them came a sense of deep regret for the past. There is a time in the lives of all of us, when the errors we have committed rise in array against us, and we learn perhaps when it is too late, that duty and happiness are different names for the same things. Filled with these reflections, Epernon wandered into the valley, and gathered, as he went, a bouquet of flowers. As he returned he saw Mr. de Goritz near the door of the hotel. The stout lady was by her side. They were apparently in deep conference on some subject of important interest. Unable to avoid them, he endeavored to pass them as rapidly as he could; but this was not to be; for no sooner had his foot touched the first step, than the lady laid her hand on his arm.
"We were just speaking of you," she said.
"You are very good, madam."
"I have been relating your history."
"Indeed!"
"I am an *faute* in your past life."
"Madam, this is a joke; let me pass."
"It is no joke. I know you were a surgeon—that you suddenly became rich, and abandoned your profession!"
"Now, pray, where have you learned all this?" said Epernon, in an angry tone.
"Mon Dieu!" said the stout lady; "I don't want to put you in such a passion. I have not inquired anything about you; but there are people here who have. A letter found by accident has told me what I have just repeated."
"Where is the letter?"
"Here it is!" and the stout lady drew forth from her capacious pocket the identical letter which Epernon had seen in the hands of Clara.
He glanced at it, and found it was a reply to several minute inquiries respecting himself.
The discovery of this letter made him extremely angry. To suppose that the history of his life, which he wished to be kept a secret, should thus be ransacked, was far from agreeable. He mastered his indignation as well as he could, put the letter into his pocket, and went into the hotel.—Clara, who was waiting for him, smiled as he entered; but she was struck in an instant by the expression of his face.
"What has happened?" she said, full of alarm.
He handed her the letter.
She blushed as she recognized it, and her eyes fell before Epernon's angry gaze.
"There are prudent people," he said, "who only open their hearts, as bankers do their credits, after ample inquiries."
"Epernon!" said Clara, half rising. But he heard her not.
"To distrust," he continued, "is to despise. You prefer believing the stranger, of whom you have inquired, rather than the man whose whole soul was yours! Suspicion makes a poor foundation for alliance and the affection which is only given on solid grounds, can never be genuine."
Clara heard him to the end; when he had finished, she laid her hand lightly on his arm.
"If you had reflected a moment," she said, "you would have seen that this letter is not even addressed to me. I have not asked any questions. When I read it I wept for joy, because it was full of your praises, and removed all obstacles which had interposed. I could not have prevented this proceeding which has offended you so much; indeed I could not—and you know it."
These words were pronounced with so much genuine feeling and sincerity, that the only reply Epernon could make was to take both the hands of Clara within his own and press her to his heart.
"It is true," he said, at length, "I am a madman, and you are an angel; but the idea of distrust put me almost beside myself. I have been too quick; it is not you who are to blame, and the next time I feel inclined to be angry I shall remember to whom I am indebted for this insult."
"Do not be too harsh in your judgment on him; wait, at least, until you know him a little better."
"Whoever he is, ought I not to thank him for the injury he has done me?"
"Perhaps you ought."
"I do not understand you!"
"I have not asked you to understand me—only believe me, I require nothing more."
Epernon felt enraptured.
"Ah! I feel how wrong I am to torment you in this way. I am, in truth, so little accustomed to happiness, that I do not know how to deal with it when it comes. I shall try and learn how to deserve my good fortune."
"Go," said the girl, putting both her hands upon the mouth of her lover, "go—I forgive you, but do not be naughty any more."
"Ah!" said Epernon, "how could I be otherwise? I am so jealous. You grant Mr. Quinton favors which you would refuse to me."
"What now pleases you, is this?"
"For example, that brooch you wear—how gave it to you. Would you wear one of mine?"
"Why not, may I ask?"
"Indeed, I do not see why not. Let me give you a bracelet for this arm, Clara; each time that I see it, I will know that I am, at least, on a footing of equality with Mr. Quinton."
"Wait a little," said the young lady, rising. "at the same time, to accede to his request."
"I will send it to you this evening," said Epernon.
He kept his word. Clara received, the same day a magnificent bracelet, set with diamonds of the rarest brilliancy, but of a curious and old-fashioned setting. With the bracelet was a note; "This ornament belonged to my mother; it is she who offers it to her daughter."
As Epernon had foreseen, these two lines overcame the young lady's scruples; and when he came down in the evening to the saloon, where the visitors were wont to assemble, he saw Miss de Vismes so surrounded that, for some time; he was unable to speak to her; but the bracelet glittered on her arm, and he thanked her with a look full of gratitude and love.
Just at this moment Mr. Quinton entered and, having saluted the guests, made his way to where Clara was seated. All at once he stopped short; and, as his eye fell on the bracelet, he said sharply: "Gracious heavens! what is this?"
"What do you mean?" she inquired.
"I do not recollect having seen this ornament among your jewels," said he, looking at the bracelet. "How long has it been in your possession?"