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POUDRE ROSE.

[CONCLUDED.]

The elasticity of hope is in youth rarely completely crushed; and before many days had gone by, Adrienne's brain was again busy with expedients for bringing about the family reconciliation upon which her mind was set with such morbid intensity; and all the more eagerly, that the third annual visit of her relatives was close at hand. But the resources of tears, supplications, incantations, votive-offerings, having failed, what other device remained likely to insure a fortunate result? Mademoiselle Beaudesert was thus anxiously ruminating, when Lisette Meudon, a favorite and shrewd attendant, took occasion, whilst perfecting the transparent-thoughtful young lady's dinner-tollet, to remark, with reference to a wedding soon to take place among the chateau servants, how extraordinary it was that *ce gros vicieux Bonnard* should have won so easily the affections of young and pretty Fanchette Lenoir, who was, moreover, quite as well, if not better off, than he. "Certainly," she added with emphasis, "such a match could not have been brought about without the help of the poudre rose, or similar magic compound."

"Poudre rose!" murmured Adrienne, turning her inquisitive, dreamy eyes upon the attendant; "I have heard that spoken of before.—What are its real or supposititious qualities?" "I can assure mademoiselle," replied Lisette, "that there is no supposition in the case. The poudre rose is well known to possess extraordinary virtues, though I should not like Madame de Vautpre or the Abbe Morlaix, both of whom have unreasonable prejudices upon such matters, to hear me say so. For example, there was Marie Devenille, a widow with a strong cast in her eyes, four small children, and not a bird's worth of property, who married, about a fortnight after she was seen to pay a sly visit to the late Madame Delpech, Jean Lucas, a good-looking young farmer, and one of the most prosperous in the commune. It must be admitted that nothing short of very marvellous magic could have accomplished such a marriage as that. For my part," added Lisette, "I should feel no scruple, if an opportunity occurred—but I am fatiguing mademoiselle."

"Not at all, Lisette; you interest me on the contrary. How is this precious poudre rose administered?" "Nothing more simple, mademoiselle. The prescribed quantity is placed in a glass of wine, a cup of coffee—no matter what. The wine or coffee is then handed—let us say by way of illustration, suppose—to Jean Lucas by Marie Devenille, she looking her future smilingly in the face all the while; he drinks, and the affair is finished. Certainly, there can be no such great harm in all that, even if everybody, with the exception of Madame la Baronne and Monsieur Morlaix, deceive themselves as to the wonderful powers of the poudre rose."

"No harm, as you say, Lisette, if no good. And is it not said to be equally efficacious in reconciling enemies—between, for example, estranged relatives?"

"Oh yes, mademoiselle; I could tell you of several such instances—one particularly, where—"

Lisette's instances were cut short by the last summons of the dinner-bell. But the interesting colloquy was renewed the next day, when the wily confidante succeeded, if not in persuading Mademoiselle Beaudesert into an absolute belief in the miraculous properties of the poudre rose, to at least consult Delpech *per se* upon the subject. "My father's friend," thought Adrienne, "who will be sure to deal frankly with me. My grandmother, she added aloud, "had great faith in such charms. Still, I can hardly—but, as you say, Lisette, there can be no possible harm in making the trial;" and she scribbles this silenced, the rash girl sat down to write a note appointing a private interview with Delpech on the morrow, at a place indicated by Lisette, and not very distant from the chateau.

"Paul Delpech, mademoiselle," hastily interposed the waiting woman, as her unsuspecting mistress was about to address the note.

"Yes, certainly. I had it in my head, as I told you, that Paul was the son's name; but of course you know. You will keep this, perhaps foolish, matter, profoundly secret," she added, as Lisette was leaving the room.

"Secret as the grave," replied the young woman quickly, and with averted face, "Adrienne should see the triumph flashing there." "Delpech himself shall not suspect that I am aware of the contents of this note; mademoiselle may fully rely upon me."

"Here is the *assignation*, monsieur," said Lisette Meudon about an hour afterwards, addressing Jules Delpech. "You turn pale, and tremble very much," she presently added.—"There is, I hope, nothing more meant by this frolic than what I know of it."

"Nothing—nothing, Lisette," replied Delpech, fumbling in his purse with shaking fingers for some gold pieces, and placing them in her ready palm.

"And when the wedding takes place, yours with Claude Simonet—if a fat dowry can win the old man's consent—will not be far off."

"That is well understood, Monsieur Delpech. But tell me why," added the young woman, still under the influence of a suddenly awakened feeling of distrust—"if you are so positive Mademoiselle Beaudesert has a decided penchant for your handsome son, are you so anxious to compromise her by these pretended assignations? As to the poudre rose pretence that, excuse me, is as absurd as the faith of the credulous fools about here in its wonder-working powers."

"You err, Lisette," replied Delpech. "If Mademoiselle Beaudesert once partakes of some wine, tinged with poudre rose, in Paul's presence, I shall have no fear that the wedding

will be long delayed after Madame la Baronne has taken her place in the vaults of the Church of the Assumption."

"That may be, Monsieur Delpech; but you know Mademoiselle Beaudesert will never do anything of the kind, just as well as I do, that you dare not propose it to her. I have no misgivings upon that point. Mademoiselle is as sensitive and proud as she is pure and simple-hearted. Still," added Lisette, one of that numerous class of persons whose aid in evil purposes may, for a sufficiently tempting reward, be counted upon to a certain extent, but no further—"still it occurs to me, that if you really are so confident."

"I will be frank with you, Lisette Meudon," interrupted Delpech, swallowing the rage he felt at the woman's persistence. "I saw Madame la Baronne a few days since; she is going fast; Mademoiselle Beaudesert will soon and suddenly find herself in a dazzling position, which now she can have no just idea of. Her mother, a woman of the world, will be with her—parasites, flatterers, suitors innumerable, will crowd about her. All this may turn her head. It is prudent, therefore, to strengthen Paul's hold upon her fancy by these little compromising arts, which, when one is prompted by a laudable ambition, are, you will agree, perfectly permissible."

"Perhaps. However, I do not see that any harm can accrue. The marriage-portion," added Lisette, opening and holding the door in her hand—"the marriage-portion, Monsieur Delpech will do well to remember, should he succeed in his audacious project, must be a liberal one, and legally secured before the grand wedding takes place."

"Precisely, *ma fille*. Paul and myself, moreover, will owe you a large debt of gratitude for your services and silence."

"Chut, chut! I look to be rewarded by money, not moonshine, Monsieur Delpech."

"Claude Simonet," said Jules Delpech with a wry grimace, meant for a complimentary smile—"Claude Simonet won't be the father of fools, if his children take after his pretty wife."

"He won't, in that case, be the father of *dupes*," was the retort; "a fact which, I repeat, the Delpechs, father and son, will do well to bear in mind. *Bonjour, monsieur.*"

"*An plaisir, Mademoiselle Meudon.*" responded Jules Delpech, adding with a savage snap of the teeth as the door closed: "The insolent lussu! I should like, instead of a dowry, to accommodate her with a—What, he did not say; but one might have sworn from his looks it was something which Lisette Meudon would have decidedly demurred to as the substitute for a handsome marriage-portion."

The child-heart of Adrienne Beaudesert beat violently, and a vague feeling of terror so oppressed her, upon approaching the appointed rendezvous on the following day, that she was upon the point of turning back, and abandoning her purpose. "It was the last effort," she afterwards said, "of my guardian angel to draw me back from the precipice to which I was madly hastening. It was made in vain. I shook off the warning impulse, bade the valet remain where he was for a few minutes and hastened on."

Jules Delpech would have made a capital actor, if one might judge by his natural assumption of surprise and deferential interest, as Mademoiselle Beaudesert, blushing and painfully agitated, stood before him. It was some time before he appeared able to even dimly make out her meaning from the confused, hurried sentences in which it was expressed. At last he seemed to catch it, but still uncertainly.

"Mademoiselle Beaudesert wishes to know of me if there is any truth in the reported marvels effected by the poudre rose. Do I rightly comprehend her?"

"Yes, that is the question I wish to put; and if—if; but perhaps it is all an idle tale?"

"It is not an idle tale," replied Delpech, with well-tempered gravity and earnestness.—"The miraculous properties of the poudre rose have been proved over and over again; but Mademoiselle is perhaps not aware that to dispense it is to act in contravention of the law, though not of morality?"

"Oh no, I had not thought of that; and I would not for the world that—"

"If, mademoiselle," interrupted Delpech, "will tell me frankly for what purpose she requires the poudre rose, the wish to serve a daughter of the noble-minded victim who once honored me with the name of friend, will if I see a probability of doing so effectively, render me indifferent to any legal penalties I may incur."

"Ah, monsieur," said Adrienne, her soft eyes filling with tears at the allusion to her father, "it is because you were his friend that I wished to consult you, knowing that I should not be either deceived or exposed to ridicule. I have a fancy to try the effect of poudre rose upon—upon Madame de Vautpre."

"Madame de Vautpre!" ejaculated Jules Delpech, in a tone and with a start that would not have disgraced Talma—"Madame de Vautpre! For what purpose, in the name of Heaven?"

Adrienne explained; Jules Delpech the while, as she subsequently recalled to mind, though too agitated and confused at the moment to appreciate its strange significance—Jules Delpech, I say, gazing the while into her eyes with a piercing intensity, as if more desirous of reading there the secret of her soul, than of listening to the words of her mouth.

"I understand you, Mademoiselle Beaudesert," said Delpech, with slow, stage-solennity of speech. "The poudre rose will effect your purpose in giving it to Madame de Vautpre."

"Seriously, I am so glad; for do you know, Monsieur Delpech, I felt almost sure that you would say it was a childish, absurd illusion."

"When shall I place it in mademoiselle's hands?" inquired Delpech.

"To-morrow, if you please, at this place and hour."

"Be it so, mademoiselle; I will be punctual and silent."

"Almost a woman, and a charming one, too, in person," murmured Delpech, looking after

Mademoiselle Beaudesert as she hurried back to where she had left the valet—"in mind, the veriest child! The amiable Ursulines may prepare their pupils very well for heaven, but certainly they do not succeed in fitting them to deal with this wicked world. After all, Paul will make her an excellent husband; and if, which is quite possible, we have deceived ourselves as to the young lady's partiality for him, or at least that it is so decided as to induce her to stoop to a union with him from the link which I have so successfully begun to forge, to coerce and bind her prideful will.—And yet, at all events, I can say *been jeu, bien jeu*; and, best of all, should our audacious project, as it may be truly called, fail, neither Paul nor I shall be seriously compromised, as I will manage; but it will not, *cannot* fail."

Madame Beaudesert and her daughter Clarisse had passed the stipulated number of hours at the Chateau d'Em, and were seated at breakfast with Madame de Vautpre, M. Morlaix, and Adrienne; which repast concluded, the two visitors would be conveyed, in a carriage already in waiting, to the *Messageries Royales*, Lyon, en route for Clichy. M. Morlaix could not help remarking that Adrienne was very much more restless, perturbed, ill at ease, than on the like former occasions. And why were the burning eyes of the pale, agitated girl turned with such intense, sudden scrutiny upon Madame de Vautpre's countenance when Madame and Clarisse Beaudesert handed chocolate to that lady? Was it that Adrienne's solicitude was awakened by the signs of recent and severe suffering visible there, for Madame de Vautpre had passed a much worse night than usual, and at her own request had received the sacrament soon after rising.

The abbe would fain have believed so, but could not, knowing what he did. It was rather, he greatly feared, that that young, and, as he once thought, guileless, unworshipful heart, was agitated by criminal hopes, which those signs of probably mortal disease had quickened and inflamed.

A harsh but perhaps not unnatural judgment! Poor Adrienne's criminal hopes, were, in sooth, limited to the magical effect produced by the poudre rose. Certainly, Madame de Vautpre's demeanor was more gracious towards her mother and sister than on former occasions; and, unhoped-for confession! suffering and feeble as she was, Madame la Baronne would accompany them down the grand stairs to the entrance-hall; had shaken hands with Madame Beaudesert, and was about apparently to embrace Clarisse, when she suddenly staggered, caught wildly at vacancy, and fell heavily upon the tessellated pavement, before a hand could be stretched forth to save her. A medical gentleman, who had resided for several weeks at the chateau, was quickly on the spot, and opened a vein; a few drops of dark blood flowed, and at the end of a few breathless minutes, the man of science announced, in a grave whisper, that Madame de Vautpre was dead—dead of apoplexy!

"Apoplexy! you are certain of apoplexy!" said the abbe, addressing the surgeon, but with his stern glance fixed upon Adrienne's changing countenance, till she, overcome by a rush of contending emotion, lost her senses, and sank with a low, moaning cry into her mother's arms.

Towards evening on the same day, and whilst Adrienne was still in a manner stunned by the suddenness and magnitude of the event which had changed the aspect of her life, she received a message from the Abbe Morlaix, requesting to see her immediately, and alone.

She obeyed the summons, and divined its meaning the moment she was in the abbe's presence. He wore his priest's stole; and a velvet cushion had been placed behind his chair. "I have sent for you, Adrienne Beaudesert," said he, "on this day in which He, in whose hands are the issues of life and death, has visited this house with such sudden judgment, in the hope, the confidence, that at such a solemn moment you will not refuse or delay to lay bare your whole heart to God."

The abbe's words and tone wounded the susceptibility of the young girl, who, with the *hauteur* inspired by conscious purity and innocence, answered that she had no present intention of placing herself under Monsieur l'Abbe Morlaix's spiritual superintendence. The abbe was enraged beyond all bounds by such a reply, and in the first movement of his anger, gave partial vent to the dreadful suspicions that had arisen in his mind. Mademoiselle Beaudesert only appeared to comprehend in his angry, menacing language and reproach, that she rejoiced at the death of Madame de Vautpre; and even that was too much for her shaken strength; and again losing consciousness, as in the morning, she would have fallen on the floor but for the dismayed and bewildered abbe. Directly assistance came, M. Morlaix left the room, and soon afterwards the chateau, to seek counsel as to what course, under the circumstances, he was bound to pursue.

Whatever that counsel may have been, remained unknown to those whom it must have chiefly concerned, since it was not, visibly at least, developed in action. The routine of the chateau went on as usual; and on the appointed day, the corpse of Madame la Baronne de Vautpre was borne in state to the vaults of the Church of Assumption, to be laid by the side of that of her nephew. The funeral display was yet more splendid—the catafalque more gorgeously emblematic of the dignity that lay rotting beneath its imposing upholstery, the crowd more dense, the oration more effective than on the former occasion; albeit the essentials of the show were identically the same in both cases: the same catafalque, only more splendidly bedizen; the same crowd in larger numbers; the same oration from the same text, "Whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him," skillfully amplified to include certain special admonitions, which found their way to at least one conscience, if it might be fairly so inferred from the convulsive sobbing of ostensibly the chief mourner amongst that throng of seeming mourners! The spectators whispered to each other that Mademoi-

selle Beaudesert was more violently affected than at her father's funeral; and some others of the more observing sort noticed that Jules Delpech, present with his son Paul, was again recognized by Madame de Vautpre's grandniece, as she left the church; but this time with a start, shudder, a crimson suffusion of face and neck, rendered more striking by the instantly recurring paleness. What might that mean, coupled with the flashing looks interchanged between the father and son? A question that which Adrienne Beaudesert herself could not have answered, had she chosen to do so, except by saying, that since the death of Madame de Vautpre, immediately after drinking the chocolate in which poudre rose had been mixed, the idea of the men who had provided her with the unholy drug—it was Paul Delpech who was waiting for her with the sealed packet at the second interview, Mademoiselle Beaudesert being accompanied by Lisette Meudon—had been associated in her mind with images of death and sin!

Lisette Meudon could have given a more plausible solution of the seeming mystery—namely, the conflict in mademoiselle's mind of pride and high station, with the suggestions of a romantic attachment to handsome Paul Delpech; and Lisette, a young woman of strong feeling, though lax in principle, would not have hesitated to give up the money recompense she was to receive of the Delpechs, were not her marriage with the amiable son of miserly old Simonet dependent thereon, if she might thereby have assisted in breaking the ignoble fetters in which a vagrant fancy, helped by cunning arts, had bound her gentle-minded mistress. But, alas! Lisette Meudon, keen and wary as she deemed herself, had been as fatally duped by those cunning arts as Adrienne Beaudesert herself. So at least confidently calculated the two Delpechs.

The death-rites duly celebrated, the affairs of life regained regard and prominence; and it was found that the large possessions of Madame la Baronne de Vautpre were secured to Adrienne Beaudesert, clogged by one condition only, that whosoever she married was to assume the name of Beaudesert; and it was also provided that during Adrienne's minority, Cardinal Retz and the Abbe Morlaix were to have a certain control over her expenditure—M. Morlaix to reside of right during that period at the Chateau d'Em, and to receive for life the same *honoraries* as had been paid him by the testatrix. The instruments by which the property was thus devolved had been executed only about three months previously.

The brilliant future that had so long eluded the grasp and mocked the hopes of Madame Beaudesert was at last more than realized, to her exuberant delight, unbounded exultation; and it was not very long before the dark, fitful fancies that haunted the imagination of Mademoiselle, her daughter, were chased away, or superseded by the excitement attendant upon the novel and dazzling position to which Madame la Baronne's death had raised her.—The Abbe Morlaix, who kept himself very secluded, rarely interfered with the management of affairs; and Adrienne, with her prouder, and more elated mother and sister, seemed never weary in realizing to themselves, in a thousand ways, the intoxicating possession of riches, power, social supremacy. It was the acted fable, so far, of the *beggar on horseback*, with the catastrophe of the dizzying ride to come.

After three months' enjoyment of home splendors, however, *ennui* began to arise, and a lengthened tour was projected by the ladies, through Switzerland and Italy.

During these three months, the Delpechs had made no demonstration whatever. The father's timidity of temperament had operated to suspend the blow, the possible recoil of which might bring about his own destruction. Might—yes; but not if his brain retained its mastering, guiding power. After all *l'audace, et encore de l'audace.*

"*Sacre bleu*—yes; we know that very well," sullenly exclaimed Paul, who had heard that soliloquy, or one very like it, a hundred times before; "but when the moment of action arrives, your heart is to be found in your shoes, if anywhere. It was worth while, truly, to venture so far, only to short when the prize was in sight—within hand-clutch, as you well know! Not long to remain so," added the young man bitterly, "for it is quite certain the Beaudeserts leave France for one, perhaps two years; but whether one or two, Mademoiselle will not return, we may fully assure ourselves, says Lisette Meudon—the confiding simpleton she is, or more correctly, had been."

"You have seen Lisette Meudon?"

"I have seen Lisette Meudon, who through me, returns the three Napoleons you once lent her, with her compliments, and a polite intimation that, for the future, she must decline the honor of our acquaintance."

"The insolent baggage!"

"That polite preterpitory intimation," continued Paul, "did not prevent her from condescending with me upon the sad blight in my hopes caused by the discovery that Mademoiselle Beaudesert cares no more for my facinorating self than for any other of the country clouds upon which the light of her countenance may have occasionally fallen."

"And what, pray, may be the meaning of all that insolence?"

"The meaning is plain enough; la demoiselle Meudon, thanks to the powerful interposition of her mistress, was Madame Claude Simonet in a day or two; elevated, therefore, above our position in life—and, *cent diables!* that is true, too," added Paul Delpech, with an explosion of savage temper.

"True! Surely, Paul!"

"True—yes, certainly it is true," interrupted the son, with a heat inflamed by the liquor he had been drinking, "but it shall not be for long. Hear, now, my unalterable resolve, if you please, sir. Having striven so far, having sunk so deep, I at least will not hesitate at the final leap or plunge; and since you will not evoke the power you have acquired over Adrienne Beaudesert, I will do so myself; and but a few hours shall have passed before that young lady is made to thoroughly understand

that the sole choice left her is between marriage with Paul Delpech, and public exposure, followed by shameful death!"

"You would fail, Paul—utterly fail," trembled from the ashen lips of Jules Delpech. "I—I, since you are so resolved, will set about the business at once—by letter first—obscure, preparatory hints, awakening preludes to the else overwhelming thunder burst. Don't you think it will be best so, Paul?"

"As you please; only, if possible, get rid of your coward fears. A bold, determined thrust must win; but a shaking hand will lose both fortune and fair lady, skillfully as the dice have been loaded."

Thus urged, Jules Delpech managed to screw his courage to the sticking-place; and Mademoiselle Beaudesert, while busied with preparations for the impending journey, was surprised and startled at receiving several brief notes—not disrespectfully phrased, but indirectly menacing in tone, subscribed D. "D!" thought Adrienne—a child disporting itself in a parterre of gorgeous flowers, from amidst which a serpent suddenly appears its flaming crest, delaying only to strike—"D! that must mean Delpech. What can he require of me? What shall I do?"

It was difficult to say. Lisette was unfortunately absent—just set off upon a wedding-trip to her relatives in Paris; and after considerable hesitation, arising from an unacknowledged dread lest the vague, shadowy terrors which the letters had excited in her own mind, should, were those letters submitted to the clearer, stronger vision of others, assume tangible shape and substance, Adrienne Beaudesert determined upon showing them to her mother and sister.

"How absurdly nervous you are, Adrienne," said Madame Beaudesert, after running them over. "The man of whom you, silly goose, obtained that precious poudre rose, wants to be handsomely paid for his nostrum; but, from a wholesome dread of the law, does not choose to distinctly specify the nature of his demand. *Voilà tout, cher fille.*"

"I hope so," said Adrienne, only partly reassured; "and yet, would that Lisette were here; she would go and conclude the affair at once." Madame Beaudesert remarked that Lisette would be back again in quite sufficient time to attend to such a bagatelle; and changed the conversation to other topics.

Not, unhappy maiden, not to be so concluded even by clever and zealous Lisette, as the following note, received the next day, too plainly showed: "Mademoiselle Beaudesert, I have already sent you three letters, which, though only signed by the initials of my surname, must have been perfectly intelligible to you, requesting an interview at an address enclosed. Has the elevation to which Mademoiselle has been so suddenly raised, precisely eight days after her interesting conference with me, seen after that with my son, turned her brain, blinding her to the fatal consequences of a refusal to reward, in the only manner reward is possible, the love, the devotion—at what cost evinced Mademoiselle Beaudesert too well knows—of that son? I demand, then, for the last time, a strictly interview with Mademoiselle Beaudesert, to take place within the next twenty-four hours—JULES DELPECH."

"What, *maman*—what mean those wild looks, this pale face?" gasped Adrienne, as her mother, having glanced over the letter, stood transfixed as by the stroke of a dagger.—"Speak, or I!"

"My child—my precious, innocent child," interrupted the mother, clasping, straining Adrienne in her embrace, with terrified, convulsive tenderness; "I see it, understand it all now. The villain of whom you had the— the poudre rose, means, O God!—means to assert that you—you, beloved Adrienne—you, sweet, sinless child—knowingly obtained—obtained, under the pretence of poudre rose, a drug of him—to—O Father in Heaven, can such things be?"

"What things?" exclaimed Clarisse.—"Speak, mother. You are killing Adrienne."

"That—that Adrienne obtained a drug of him—to—to shorten the life of Madame de Vautpre."

With those words, the flame-crested serpent leaped at Adrienne's throat, and life for a time forsook her. It was long before the distracted mother and sister could recall her to consciousness, and to what consciousness, when successful? What else but this, that she, Adrienne Beaudesert, was the murderer of her relative and benefactress—in fact, though not, blessed be God, in purpose—that she held her life, and (minor, but still bitter consequence), the splendid position which had so lifted her up with pride, at the mercy of a miscreant whose forbearance could only be purchased, it seemed, by the abhorred pollution of a marriage. But no; she would die a thousand deaths first!

For all this, however, before the expiration of the stipulated twenty-four hours, a message reached Delpech to the effect that Mademoiselle Beaudesert wished to see him early in the forenoon of the morrow at the Chateau d'Em.

The hoary-headed conspirator did not fail to attend at the time appointed, sprucey attired, and prepared with a number of careful conned phrases in deprecation of the outburst of wrathful terror with which he expected to be assailed if the young lady or her mother had fathomed, and he could hard believe they had not fathomed, the true purport of his menacing letters. "But the first flash of the tempest over," argued Jules Delpech, "the stern necessity of the—"

The current of his thoughts were checked, and he himself staggered back in dismay from before the apparition, as it were, of Adrienne Beaudesert, who, with her face the color of the loose white morning robe she wore, her hair in disorder, her eyes flaming with insane excitement, came swiftly towards him from a door which silently closed after her, grasped his arm, and whilst perusing his countenance with intense scrutiny, said in low, rapid, earnest accents:—

"I have consented to see you, sir, not to defy, to curse you—human maledictions could not reach *pend-nature* such as yours—but to

say this: your object in inventing the horrible lie!—yes, lie, lie, lie! with which you have sought to stab my life, is, must be, money.—Well, confess that it is a lie; give me proof, easy for you, that it is one; proof that Madame de Vautpre died—as she *did* die—a natural death, and I will secure to you the half of all I possess! The half, did I say? Ah, all, will I give in exchange for unstained life—in redemption of my else lost soul!"

Adrienne's voice ceased, not so the fierce inquisition of her eyes; and Jules Delpech, amazed and shaken by the wild distraction of her aspect, could with difficulty stammer out, in a low, husky undertone, that Mademoiselle's own words betrayed a knowledge complete as his own—though not so much as hinted at in his letters of—of—the cause of Madame de Vautpre's death—of what the pretended poudre rose really was.

As these words, slowly distilling from the man's poison-lips, fell upon Adrienne's ear, her erect, rigid form seemed to collapse, and presently tossing her arm distractedly in the air, she turned away with a scream of terror, made as if to flee from Delpech's presence, and was received in the embrace of her mother, who, with Clarisse, had been a trembling listener close without the door. Delpech, quite satisfied with his progress so far, now hastened to be gone, first, however, muttering to Madame Beaudesert, that such violence and agitation were absurd, uncalculated for, as the profoundest secrecy would of course be observed—at all events, till a definite understanding was arrived at; and that there was not perhaps one great family in all France whose private archives, if brought to light, would not reveal secrets of a similar kind.

Mademoiselle Beaudesert did not leave her bed for many days after this; and Delpech's negotiation with the wretched family at the chateau—M. Morlaix, as it happened, was, fortunately or unfortunately, absent in Paris was carried on through her mother. The substantive position of the two parties, the Delpechs and Beaudeserts, was set forth by Jules Delpech at those interviews, with a quiet coolness, derived from the poor lady's panic-fears, that looked courageous, bold-faced ruffianism.

Madame Beaudesert has since frequently declared, that while listening to Delpech's atrocious talk, she felt as in the actual presence of a fiend from the bottomless pit, specially commissioned to achieve the perdition, body and soul, of herself and children! Once or twice, indeed, the thought, piercing with momentary light the thick darkness, glanced across her mind, that it was surely impossible a man, however reckless, who had really committed the dread crime of murder, could speak of it with that calm cynicism, *parle* so glibly of the awful penalty he by his own showing—if that showing were true—had primarily incurred. But how to act upon that blessed hope? Write to already deeply prejudiced M. Morlaix, entreating his immediate return, and upon his arrival, take counsel of his judgment, his knowledge of the ways of men, and all too late, find Delpech's assertions confirmed! Impossible—utterly impossible to incur that tremendous risk—to desperately stake character, life, the innocent life of her child, upon that fearful issue!

Finally, for the suggestions of unreasoning fear prevailed, and Adrienne Beaudesert was at last subdued—terrified into consenting to a compromise, by which it was settled that the civil and legally binding form of marriage was to be gone through by her and Paul Delpech—the blessing of the Church, unnecessary to the validity of the contract, she would not ask for such constrained, unnatural vows—immediately after which, and in accordance with the provisions of a solemn instrument subscribed and attested beforehand, the nominal wife and husband were to separate and remain strangers to each other forever. Adrienne—till such time as arrangements could be made, without attracting too much public attention, for her seclusion for life in a convent—to inhabit with her relatives one wing of the chateau—the Delpechs the other; and the disposition of the property was settled by the same document, which Jules Delpech drew up in imposing words. It was formally executed, and the civil marriage, it was agreed, should take place on that day's evening.

In the meantime, it had been industriously set about, that the seclusion of Mademoiselle Beaudesert, the anxiety and consternation observable in the demeanor of her mother and sister, were caused by the thwarted but obstinate determination of the young lady to wed one so far beneath her in station as Paul Delpech, with whom, it was asserted, she had all along been upon terms of secret lover intimacy—one note addressed by her to the young man, appointing a private interview, had been seen by Madame Sabin, a most respectable person, well acquainted with her handwriting; and her impulsive, affectionate recognition of the elder Delpech amidst the crowd in the Church of the Assumption at her father's funeral, was cited as corroborative proof, if any were wanting, of the early, deep-rooted attachment which had gained strength and intensity with every day of her life! Scarcely any thing else would, one may be sure, be talked of or written about by the gossips in the village of the Chateau d'Em; and it thus fell out that Madame Claude Simonet, or Lisette, as I may continue to call her, heard, in Paris, of the astounding marriage on the very day the same intelligence reached M. Morlaix; the immediate result being, that Lisette and her husband and the abbe met a few hours afterwards at the bureau of the Lyon diligence, and were fellow, and exceedingly communicative, passengers during the journey homewards.

Instantly upon reaching the Chateau d'Em M. Morlaix demanded an audience of Mademoiselle Beaudesert. It was preterpitorily refused, in accordance with an understanding come to with the Delpechs; and the half-demented abbe could only extract from Madame and Clarisse Beaudesert that Adrienne was determined upon the marriage, and would not suffer herself to be importuned upon the subject. M. Morlaix had next recourse to the lawyers, with equally disheartening result—the mother's consent, he was informed, being

some wine, tinged with poudre rose, in Paul's presence, I shall have no fear that the wedding

that young lady is made to thoroughly understand

the mother's consent, he was informed, being