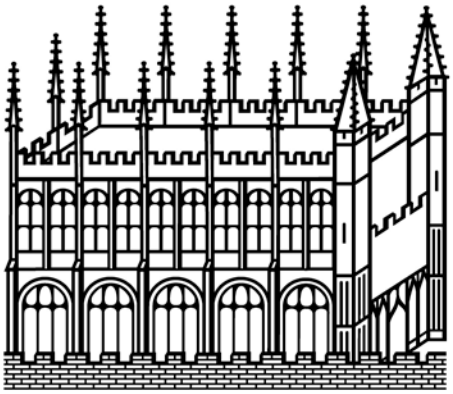


Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

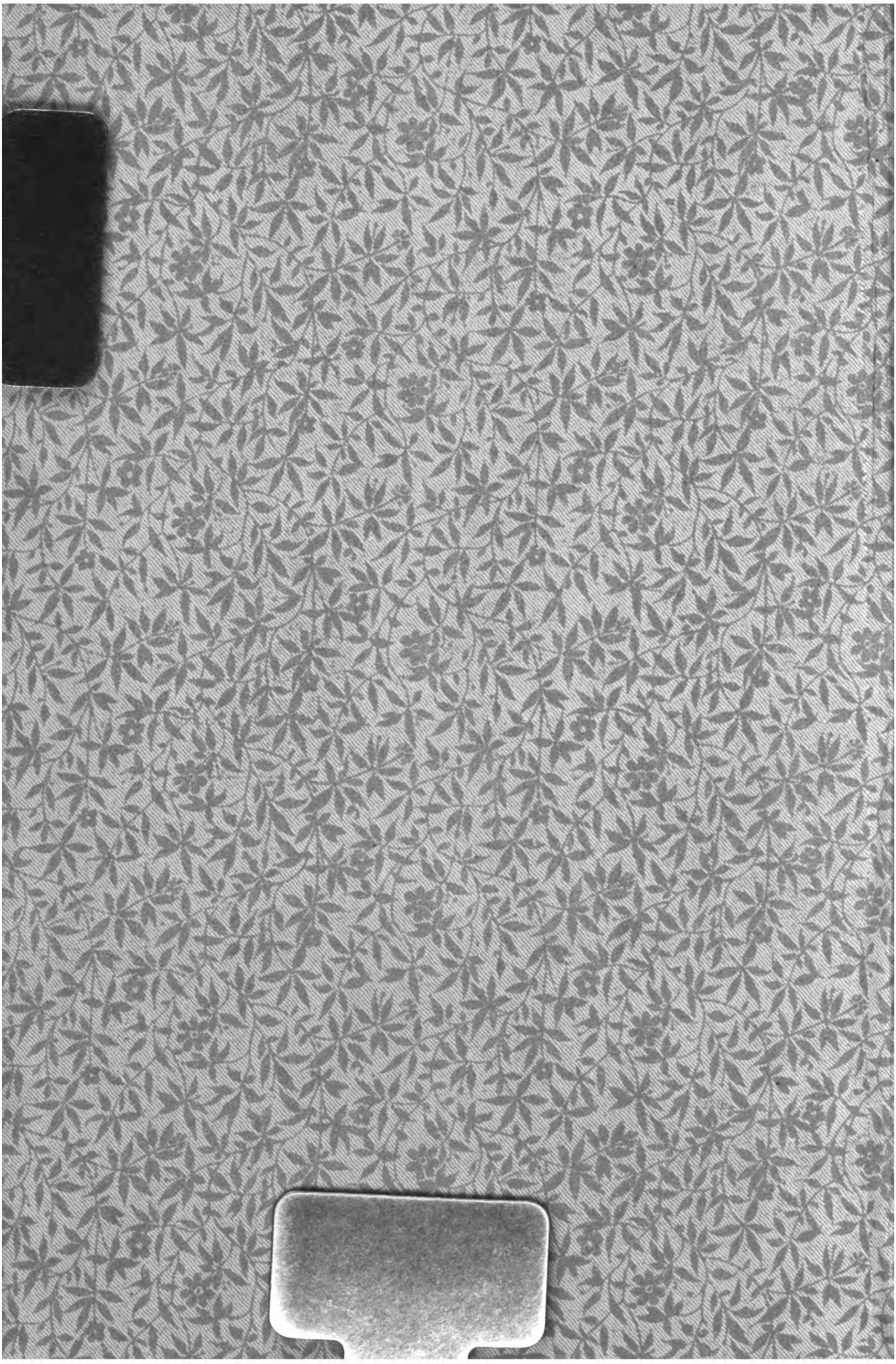
This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

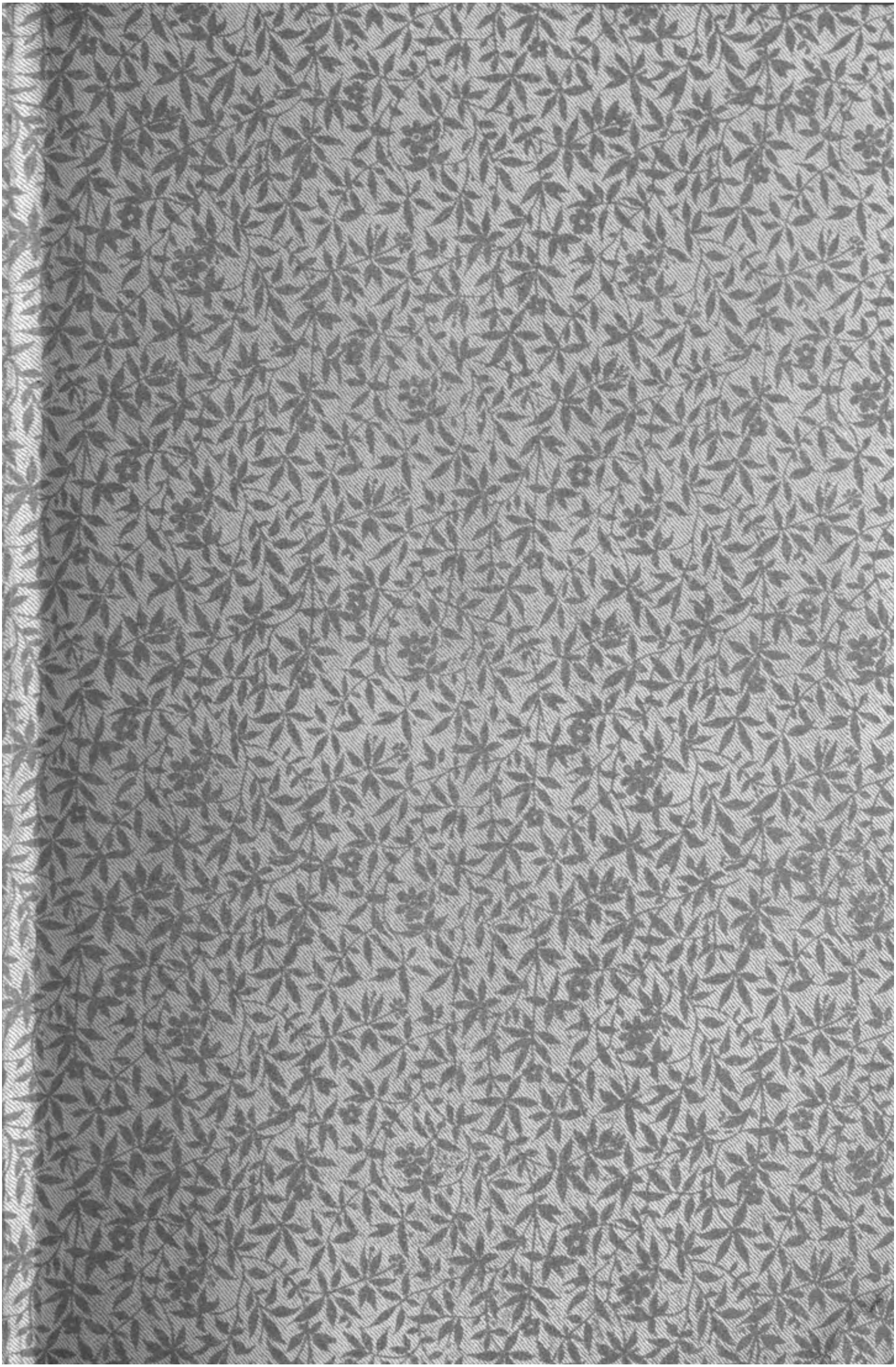
For more information see:

http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

The Prettiest Woman in Warsaw





THE PRETTIEST WOMAN IN WARSAW.

THE PRETTIEST WOMAN IN WARSAW.

A Novel.

BY

MABEL COLLINS,

Author of "An Innocent Sinner," "In the Flower of her Youth," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:
WARD AND DOWNEY,
12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1885.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

BODLEIAN LIBRARY
31OCT86
OXFORD

LEWES:

PRINTED BY H. W. WOLFF.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	1
CHAPTER II	25
CHAPTER III	40
CHAPTER IV	51
CHAPTER V	65
CHAPTER VI	86
CHAPTER VII	109
CHAPTER VIII	124
CHAPTER IX	133
CHAPTER X	152
CHAPTER XI	171
CHAPTER XII	183
CHAPTER XIII	209
CHAPTER XIV	229

PREFACE.

"*People will fit caps! The author of* THE PRETTIEST WOMAN IN WARSAW *is desirous of having it known that there is no truth in the published statement that Madame Modjeska is the heroine of the book. The story is that of a crime which was committed in a Roumanian château: two sisters, Polish actresses, are concerned in it.*"—*From* "*The World,*" *Dec.* 31, 1884.

I place here the above cutting by way of preface, in order to disarm such readers and reviewers as delight in the amusement of fitting caps. The American Press confidently made the assertion contradicted in that paragraph before "The Prettiest Woman in Warsaw" had left the printer's hands. Remembering how, in some recent cases, the Press and public have persisted in similar identification, spite of the author's denial, I think it well to state clearly once more that the incidents of this story are not drawn from the career of any celebrity whatever, and that the characters are not portraits of any persons known to the public. I fondly hope the reader will glance at this preface before beginning the story, and will therefore take it on such merits as it may have, and not regard it, as seems to be the growing habit in respect to novels, as the work of an "interviewer."

THE AUTHOR.

THE PRETTIEST WOMAN IN WARSAW.

CHAPTER I.

"I SUPPOSE this woman is handsome?"

"Of course, or she would not be the favourite comédienne of Warsaw."

"Then perhaps I shall follow Niko's example and fall in love with her also."

"That may be," said the other, with a most expressive gesture of the hand—a gesture which meant total indifference; "but, my dear child, you will not want to marry her!"

"No; nor would you be driven to take the trouble of a two days' journey in order to look after me. What a fool that dear Niko is! And only now, after he has had a dozen affairs with actresses! He never wanted to marry one before. I am curious to see the woman. She must be a maddening little beauty to make a man want to marry her."

So spoke Prince Demetri Ghyka.

It was because Prince Demetri was so great a favourite with women that his uncle, Prince Sacha Ghyka, had requested his companionship on this expedition.

Prince Sacha was a man of weight, of dignity, of great mental power, valued as a politician and a diplomatist. One would have imagined that such a man, alone, might be a match for a poor little comédienne of the Warsaw theatre. Yet Prince Sacha had brought with him, from his château far away in Roumania, his nephew, who was considered an irresistible fascinator. In case his own eloquence failed him, Demetri's powers must

be used. Prince Demetri might be able to make a woman understand, when the weightier language of the diplomatist would fail.

What was it that Prince Sacha was so anxious to make the actress understand? Simply that she must not marry the man she loved, his elder nephew, Prince Niko. It was impossible that this marriage could take place. Yet expostulation, threat, argument, entreaty, all had failed with Prince Niko. He told his family that they might attend to their own affairs, and that, as far as he was concerned, he positively intended to marry Mademoiselle Wanda Milovitch, of the Warsaw theatre.

But these gentlemen of royal blood, his cousin and uncle, considered that they attended to their own affairs in looking after his. It was simply an impossibility that a Prince Ghyka should marry an actress, a child of the mountain peasantry, the daughter of a ballerina. And as Niko was unreasonable, mad upon the subject, they adopted the only

course left them. They took the train for Warsaw, carrying with them a large sum of money, which they intended to give to Mademoiselle Milovitch if she would do them the favour of not marrying their kinsman. She might love him as much as she liked; she might squander what was left of his estate and ruin him; but she must not marry him and disgrace the family by introducing into it the blood of the peasantry.

Prince Sacha did not for a moment doubt that Mademoiselle Wanda would accept the money and give up her proposed husband; but he thought there might be a scene about it, and tears. He did not much care to have to dry the tears of an actress; but he thought Demetri was the very man for the purpose. When he had cut poor little Wanda's face with the east wind of his cruel determination, Demetri could be applied as a sort of cold cream. Demetri could make love to her himself if he chose. Anything, so long as the matter was easily and quickly arranged.

At the very time that these two Roumanian Princes were arriving in Warsaw, Prince Niko was walking restlessly up and down the little salon of Mademoiselle Wanda Milovitch. She lived in Zamojiski's Palace, a splendid building, which was let in flats. Her home was a pretty little suite on the second floor. The salon, though not richly furnished, was artistic and charming. Wanda was still poor, and she could not make of her room all that she would wish. It had in it the ordinary furniture of every Polish salon; the *canapé*, which is the place of honour, and is given up, at receptions, to the married ladies; the twelve chairs, the four fauteuils, and the big white porcelain stove. But there were one or two pretty sketches on the walls which had been given to Wanda by young artists who worshipped her genius; there were busts of Schiller, of Goethe, of Shakespeare, and of some of the great Polish poets. Goethe's head was crowned with laurel; a sign, to those who knew them, that Wanda

and her sister were just now reading German, and were, for the moment, Goethe-mad. Between the double windows were ferns, ivy, and flowers, making the room beautiful; on the table was a bunch of sweet-smelling blossoms, which filled the air with fragrance. Zadwiga, the younger sister, attended to the growing plants as though they were her children, and had mouths with which to kiss their gratitude. The sweet flowers had been brought by Prince Niko. They were the only offering he was allowed to make to the woman he loved; and he brought some to her every day.

"My dear child, my good angel," said Niko, "I cannot bear that you should see these men. Let me see them alone; or let me go to them and tell them you are ill, that you are unable to see anyone."

"I am never ill," said Wanda. "I can always act. It will be strange if I cannot see gentlemen who come to pay me a visit of ceremony."

"But you do not know what they will say —what they propose —"

"They are gentlemen?" interrupted Wanda.

"Certainly," said Niko, and for a moment was silent, while he walked excitedly about the room.

He knew that his uncle had come from Roumania for the purpose of giving Wanda money which should compensate for Niko's breaking his promise to her; yet he could not bear, knowing and loving her as he did, to tell her of this intended insult. He had not the courage nor the heart to inform her that these Princes Ghyka believed that they knew her price, and could offer it her in a porte-monnaie.

"Where is Zadwiga?" he asked abruptly.

"Reading, I believe, in the next room," said Wanda. "Do you want her?"

"I should like to speak to her. May I go and find her?"

"Certainly," said Wanda; and she took

up some work which for a moment she had put aside.

Upon a broad piece of very pale blue satin she was laying ivy leaves cut out in velvet; these she outlined with fine gold braid, sewing them on to the silk with fine stitches. It was very pretty work; and Wanda, as she bent her head over it, looked what she was—the prettiest woman in Warsaw.

Prince Niko opened the door and peeped through; then vanished, closing it behind him.

In the little *salle-à-manger* a young girl sat at the table on which she had before her a volume of Goethe, a German dictionary, and a German grammar. She was so absorbed that she did not notice that anyone was in the room till Niko leaned over the table and put his hand upon the page she was reading. She looked up, with a puzzled, abstracted expression on her lovely, fresh young face.

"Ah," she said, "it is you?"

"Yes," he answered, "it is I. And I want

to speak to you, my little sister. I want you to tell Wanda something which I have not the courage to say."

"What is it!" exclaimed Zadwiga, a look of fear coming into her eyes.

"It is this. You know, as she knows, that my uncle, Prince Sacha, and my cousin, Demetri, are coming here to prevent our marriage—"

"Yes, yes," said Zadwiga, "what more?"

"You know," he went on, "that they will not come to me, because they are well aware it is useless. They have done all with me, and failed. They come to see Wanda. They arrive here this morning. This very day it is probable they will visit her. I feel sure of it, for my uncle acts quickly, and as he does not speak Polish and has no friends here, he will stay no longer than he can help."

"She knows all this," said Zadwiga, looking up still with the fear in her eyes, and with her hands clasped before her, as if praying for good fortune.

"Yes, but she does not know that my uncle comes here with money in his hand to give her if she will not marry me. She will refuse it—he will force it on her—she will scream, cry out against him, and he will fling it at her if she will not take it. Oh, I can't bear the idea that she should meet with this insult. How shall we prevent it?"

"I will go and tell her," said Zadwiga, rising quietly.

"No, no, I think it will be better not. I came to ask you to tell her, but it is better not. Let us make some plan—let us think what to do."

"The best thing we can do is to tell her," said the girl, decisively. "Don't hide things; it never does any good. Let her know what to expect."

Utterly undecided how to act, Niko began precipitating himself about the room as if he intended to end his life against one of the walls. Zadwiga left him, and entered the

salon where Wanda sat quietly sewing with her golden thread.

"Wanda," said the younger sister, "do you know that the Princes Ghyka will very likely come to-day to see you?"

"Yes," said Wanda, not raising her head; "you do not expect me to make preparation for them, do you? Shall I paint my face and wear some stage diamonds?" she added, rather bitterly.

"I have to tell you," went on Zadwiga, quietly and steadily, "that they are coming here on purpose to offer you money if you will give up this marriage?"

"To offer me money?" repeated Wanda, looking up at her sister, holding her needle the while in mid-air.

"Yes, a large sum of money?"

"If I will not marry Niko?"

"Yes."

"Who told you?"

"Niko, just this moment."

"To pay me if I will not marry Niko.

Ah!" and her eyes, still fixed on her sister's face, seemed to look at something else, something which was not Zadwiga. A minute afterwards she slowly folded her embroidery and put it on the table at her side.

"Niko!" she called, raising her voice. It rang clear and strong through the room. In an instant the prince rushed in, and Zadwiga went back very quietly to her book.

Wanda put her hand on the prince's arm, and spoke to him in tones that were full and rich with love.

"You must go away," she said, "and not come back until your uncle has been to see me."

"Impossible, my dear child!" cried Niko; "I cannot leave you alone—I must be here."

"You must not be here," said Wanda; "I shall see them alone."

"Has Zadwiga told you—?"

"That they think I am like any other article of commerce?—that they come to buy me?—Yes."

She rose as she spoke, and burst out laughing. Her laughter was not infectious—sometimes it was terrible. She seldom laughed with pleasure—often from scorn. A hard life had taken pure joy away from her. A woman whose mother stabbed herself rather than accept the love of a Russian nobleman; a woman who has seen her father go to Siberia for no crime but that of loving his country, cannot readily find mirth in her heart. She could be happy, could be intensely happy; but then she did not laugh. Sometimes, when she was full of rage, then she laughed as she did now, instead of shedding tears. A red spot had come on either cheek. Her eyes glittered; all softness had gone from them; they were hard and brilliant.

"Yes, I know," she said, "Zadwiga has told me. Leave me alone, Niko. Go, and do not be afraid. I am an actress, and an actress can take care of herself. Go."

There was nothing more to be said. Niko

kissed her hand, a very fair and delicate hand, and left the room and the house.

Zamojiski's palace stands next to the Church of the Holy Cross. As Niko passed the church and raised his hat in reverence for the figure of the Saviour carrying the crucifix, which is in front, he prayed, like a good Catholic, for the welfare of the woman he loved.

In the room he had left, Wanda was moving about arranging little matters. She seemed determined that everything should stand as straight as its nature would allow; nothing must be even a shade out of place. She did all this with a strange, set look on her face.

Wanda Milovitch had played light comedy since she could speak on the stage at all. She had danced and sung, and had won the hearts of the gay people of Warsaw. She had begun by playing pages; she was now the favourite comédienne. She knew her art well; she could make the house roar with

laughter by her wonderfully expressive face; and her figure was so perfect and her step so light, that the people loved to see her move about the stage. On the boards she was the merriest, gayest madcap in the world. Her public would not have known her at this moment. They had never seen her as she looked now—thoughtful, stern, almost terrible.

At last she went quietly away to her own room. Zadwiga heard her, and leaving her book, came to her door.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

Wanda had already taken off her dress, and thrown a loose white wrapper round her shoulders.

"No," she answered; "I am not going to dress—I want to be alone to think out my part."

Zadwiga looked at her very gravely, and then smiled. It was a lovely smile, that shone from eyes and mouth alike. Zadwiga was one of those sensitive and delicate beings

who can only smile like this upon those they love and trust. She believed in Wanda as she believed in Heaven.

The elder sister was leaning her head on her hand, and her elbow on her dressing-table. There was no answering smile on her face. It was cold, severe, repellant. Zadwiga knew that look well. She closed the door quietly, and went away. She had often seen her sister wear that look when she was going on for the first time in a new part. She had known her maintain that cold sternness to the very wings, and then bound on to the stage, making the house thrill with delight, as though with her came the very spirit of gaiety.

Two hours later Zadwiga returned to her sister's door.

"The Princes Ghyka are in the salon," she said.

"I will come," said Wanda. "I am just ready."

Zadwiga lingered in the passage, to give

her sister a kiss of encouragement. She would not see these princes herself; and her mind was half set upon Goethe and half upon the visitors and their mission.

In a few moments Wanda opened her door, and came out. Zadwiga laughed, and clapped her hands—noiselessly. When Wanda had gone into her room in her little morning dress with her hair on her shoulders, she had looked, in spite of her stern face, like a delicate child. She came out a gracious queen. She had piled her hair high on her head, she had dressed herself perfectly in a trailing black velvet dress with just a touch of rare lace at her throat and wrists; her velvet slippers were high-heeled and raised her half an inch. Above all, she had put on a manner which would have become a queen in her own right.

"Oh, I daren't touch you!" said Zadwiga, in a laughing whisper, and ran away.

Wanda had a slight smile on her lips as she opened the door of the salon and entered,

dragging her long velvet dress behind her. This rich black robe fitted her slender, exquisite figure to perfection, and made her appear tall. Her eyes shone like stars; her head was erect as though it was balanced for a crown.

Demetri was lounging on the *canapé* when she entered; he started to his feet and simply stared at her. This the little comédienne, the daughter of a ballerina!

Prince Sacha was standing; he bowed low, then looked earnestly at her. That gracious, condescending air of hers did not put him at his ease. In a salon of the nobility it would have been charming; here it seemed to him somewhat extraordinary.

Wanda sat down, with dignity, and by a gesture invited the others to sit down also. Then she fixed her brilliant eyes on Prince Sacha.

"I believe," she said, "you are the uncle of Prince Niko Ghyka?"

"Yes," said Prince Sacha—adding, somewhat desperately, "And I have come to talk to you about him."

"No subject could please me better," answered Wanda, quietly.

"He proposes to marry you," said the diplomatist, plunging in the wildest manner into what he had to say. The gaze of those brilliant eyes disconcerted him terribly.

"It is true," answered Wanda, "but I imagine it is not agreeable to his family that he should marry an actress. This is, of course, a subject about which I can say nothing. I consider my profession an honourable one—more, it is an art, and a glorious one. But that is only my opinion. I do not expect it to be that of the Princes Ghyka. Nevertheless I am determined not to marry Prince Niko unless his family receive me with welcome."

She uttered these words majestically. Involuntarily Sacha looked round to his nephew for help. The tables had been turned on

him so immediately, so completely, that he wanted time to think; he did not know where to begin.

Prince Demetri answered the silent summons. So far he had simply been staring at Wanda with his great dark eyes. Demetri was a male beauty, and knew it. He had never met with any woman who could be indifferent to his personal charms. But Wanda had given him one glance and no more. He was determined she should look again. He was three times better-looking than Niko. How could this glorious creature with that wonderful form give herself to a man like Niko? That was Demetri's predominant idea; and possessed by it he came forward into a more visible position before he addressed Wanda.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in his soft voice, which was indeed very beautiful, "you love my cousin?"

"That is a question for him to ask me," she answered, very gently, as if the hand-

some young prince before her had been a child making a mistake.

"Forgive me!" he said. "I am obliged to speak of this because we are here on a delicate mission concerning your marriage."

"I cannot marry Prince Niko unless his family wish it," answered Wanda gravely; "he knows this. I have some self-respect; and I cannot consent to be the cause of any rupture between him and his kinsmen. It would make me unhappy. Therefore it is understood between us that unless the ladies of his family are willing to receive me as one of themselves, the marriage will not take place. Doubtless, when Prince Niko returns to his own home he will forget me very easily."

Prince Sacha was silent, puzzled by the fact that Mademoiselle Wanda made all the dignified speeches. He could make none now, for he had nothing to say to this position which she had taken up. He thought in a bewildered way of the money in his pocket-

book. This woman, whom he came to buy off, absolutely turned the tables on him and expected to be asked to do that which he had come to pay her not to do. Evidently the money was of no use here; he felt ashamed to think of it. Unconsciously he put his hand on his breast pocket; Demetri caught the action and wondered whether his uncle was going to be such an old fool as to bring out that porte-monnaie!

"Mademoiselle," he said hastily, "these ladies do not know you; they have no means of judging of my cousin Niko's taste. You are personally worthy to become a member of any Royal family. Niko, in whose veins there runs the blood of the old kings of Roumania, has not shamed his ancestry by his choice. But, Mademoiselle, you must forgive me for reminding you that the Princes Ghyka have always married in their own rank. Your profession —"

"In a word," interrupted Wanda, "I am an actress, not a princess. Be it so. The

matter is at an end. I will never marry, rather than enter a family which does not want me. The blood in my veins is not that of kings; it comes straight from the mountain peasantry. We mountaineers are proud and honest."

Wanda rose from her seat as she spoke and drew herself up to her full height. Prince Sacha rose, feeling that she intended to end the interview. She turned and addressed herself to him.

"Can you not persuade Prince Niko to return to Roumania with you?" she said. "He has told me that his estates need his attention. It is a pity he should remain here. Take him home," she added, a smile coming to her lips, "and he will forget me."

Prince Sacha murmured something indistinguishable, and bowed low. Demetri followed his example, and the two made their way out.

They reached the street in silence. Then Demetri spoke —

"We must go to the theatre to-night."

"But she acts in Polish," said Prince Sacha.

"Never mind," answered Demetri, "I want to look at her. How pure her French is!"

CHAPTER II.

At their hotel the Princes Sacha and Demetri found Niko. He was half mad with excitement.

"What has happened?" he asked, instantly.

"Oh, she won't marry you," said Demetri with a laugh.

Niko staggered as if Demetri had struck him.

"Has she taken the —"

"The money? Oh, no; we neither of us dared to mention it—hardly to think of it. She played the woman of virtue—and played it well. She is a very fine actress."

"What do you mean?" asked Niko, glaring at his cousin.

"I mean that she wants to become a Princess Ghyka, and is setting about it very cleverly."

"You wrong her," said Prince Sacha, gravely; "that woman is honest."

"It may be," said Demetri, with another laugh. "If so, she is the first of the kind that I have met with. She is a very clever and a very beautiful woman; she is playing high cards, and is determined to win all or lose all."

"I don't want your opinion of her," said Niko, savagely. "Tell me," he said to his uncle, "what is the result—really?"

"She took her position at once, and informed us that she would not marry you unless the ladies of the family invited her to do so, and signified their intention of receiving her. Demetri is a young fool, who judges women by the dozen or so with whom he has been intimate. I do not wonder, for myself, that you wish to marry Mademoiselle Wanda Milovitch. She

is a perfect lady; she looks like a princess born; and her eyes are the eyes of an honest woman. Nevertheless, it is all over; she has herself made the marriage an impossibility."

"Not at all," exclaimed Niko. "You must tell my mother what you have just said to me. She must write to Mademoiselle Wanda."

"You are mad!" said Prince Sacha.

"I am determined," said Niko. "I will go back with you and see my mother. I only ask you to tell her what you think of Mademoiselle Wanda herself."

"I am ready to do that," replied Prince Sacha, "but your mother is proud. I have no hope that she will do what you want."

"There is only my Aunt Miralda besides," said Niko.

He was interrupted by a laugh from Demetri.

"It's no good asking *her*," said Prince Demetri. "My uncle might talk till dooms-

day, and he would not convince her that an actress, the daughter of a common ballerina, could by any possibility be fit to become a Princess Ghyka. My Aunt Miralda has seen something of the world."

Niko paid no attention to him.

"When do you return?" he asked his uncle.

"To-morrow morning," replied Prince Sacha. "It is necessary for me to be at home at present."

"I shall come with you," said Niko.

Nothing more was said, until presently Demetri remarked that he would go and secure seats for the theatre, when Niko replied that he had a box, and asked them to be his guests. He did not say that he always had a box, and that never once this season had Wanda come on to the stage without meeting the gaze of his dark eyes.

"I will come to the theatre and find your box in the course of the evening," said Demetri, lighting a cigarette and taking his

hat. "In the meantime I shall have a look at Warsaw."

So saying he strolled out alone. The others began to talk of Wanda again now that he was gone. Niko found then that his uncle had been completely won over by her distinguished manners, her dignity, and grace.

"She shall be received at my house," said Prince Sacha. "My daughter shall entertain her when she is your wife. I wish all the women of our family had such an air as she has, and could speak as she does! I should like my daughter to know her; she would be a model for any young princess."

"Is she not beautiful, elegant, perfect?" cried Niko, to whom no praise of Wanda was sufficient.

They ate together and talked of Wanda all the while; then they started for the theatre in good time, for Niko was anxious that his uncle should see Wanda's first entrance.

Polish comedy is bright, sparkling, and not

coarse; somewhat French in character, full of repartee. The Poles are naturally witty and gay; there is nothing dull or rough in their temperament. Wanda and her sister were favourite comédiennes in Warsaw, because their comedy was artistic, delicate, elegant; they were incapable of vulgarity. In the piece which was then running the two came on together. Zadwiga's parts were always much less than Wanda's, for she was younger, and had, as yet, less confidence; but she was the second favourite with the public. Together the two were charming, for their dialogue was so brilliant, quick, and natural.

Prince Sacha had prepared himself to see Wanda very different; but he was electrified when she came on. The transformation was complete. This was another woman. She played a poor peasant girl who had come down from the mountains to sing and dance in the streets of the city, and see if she could take some money. She looked the very incarnation of natural gaiety when she ran on,

in her short peasant skirt, and made her curtsey to the audience, who welcomed her enthusiastically. She danced a little—not much—but that little was perfect. And wherever she moved her feet seemed to dance of their own will, her step was so light.

Yet she was carrying an anxious heart within that dainty laced bodice.

When Zadwiga was going off she heard Wanda say under her breath —

"Go to our dressing-room during the wait; I saw someone in the green-room whom I don't want you to speak to."

Zadwiga made no answer, for there was no time to do so; but she quietly picked her way up the dirty stairs, and shut herself in the dressing-room. She could tell from habit how much time she had; so she was indifferent to the attentions of the call-boy. She was not curious about the stranger in the green-room. She was thinking about Goethe and Schiller; thinking of her art, which she loved with enthusiasm, and wondering how

long it would be before she might attempt tragedy. Many a long day she must wait for that, for even Wanda had not touched tragedy as yet. But Zadwiga dreamed of the future, and sat there very happy, thinking of the hour when she might be playing Schiller's "Mary Queen of Scots!"

She went down in time to go on again, her mind full of dreams. She had to pass the door of the green-room. There was a group standing there, laughing and talking—all women, some actresses, some ballerinas. The centre of attraction was a man so handsome that even Zadwiga, who but a moment since was dreaming of herself as Royal Mary, opened her eyes and stared at him. Only for a second—she had no time to lose; but as she ran down on to the stage she wondered who he was, and concluded he must be the stranger Wanda had warned her against.

He looked very nice, she thought; but she soon forgot him, for Zadwiga had not yet

given any serious attention to the other sex. Wanda was all the world to her.

Demetri, the handsome visitor of the green-room, succeeded in learning very soon after he had penetrated that sacred place that Niko never came there. He used to, but after he had declared his love Wanda would not let him come round. Every night he waited at the stage-door, and walked with the sisters to the door of the palace in which they lodged. Under these circumstances Demetri felt safe in staying where he was; Niko would not disturb him. He had two purposes in coming; he wanted to hear all he could about Wanda, and he wished to speak to her on her own familiar ground among her associates of the theatre.

Wanda had come in for a moment. Demetri bowed low, and she acknowledged his salute with her queenly air. She immediately went away again, and then Demetri began to find out what he wanted from the conversational ladies who were quite ready to make acquaintance with him.

He learned that no one came to the theatre to see Wanda except his cousin, Niko ; and there was no scandal which could be related of her. One detail only pleased him. Every night she had guests to supper; but never Niko. This fact delighted Demetri. Was he on the right track ? Was there, after all, at the pretty rooms of Zamojiski's Palace the hidden life which he suspected ? He did not know that Wanda's guests were mostly poor actresses, struggling with the dangers and difficulties of the stage, whom she sought to help and comfort.

By-and-bye the sisters came into the green-room together, and sat down on a bench near the door. They had a " wait " of about ten minutes. Neither of them looked in the direction where Demetri was being petted by a group of gay ladies who all wanted him to ask them to supper. He disentangled himself, and crossed to the two young girls who sat together.

" Mademoiselle Milovitch," he said, " will you not introduce me to your sister ? "

Wanda looked at him gravely.

"Zadwiga," she said, "this is Prince Demetri Ghyka."

Demetri bowed low.

"Will you ladies do me the honour to sup with me to-night?" He saw a look in Wanda's face which he thought he understood, and he answered it quickly. "I am not going to invite the ladies of the ballet; nor will we sup at a public restaurant. It will be quietly, in a private room at the Grand Hotel."

"My sister and I always sup at home," answered Wanda.

"But you often have guests to supper," he said, very gently; and he dropped into the seat next to Wanda. "You might yourself be a guest for once."

"Thank you," answered Wanda. "It is impossible."

"I stake the honour of my family," he said, under his breath, "that Niko shall never know of it."

Wanda drew a little away from him, turned

her head, and looked into his face. She knew now that she had not been mistaken in him. Their distrust had been mutual. She fixed on him a look of horror and disgust. Then without any further words she rose, drew her sister's hand under her arm, and walked out of the green-room.

"She's a grand creature," said Demetri to himself, "but she over-acts."

He was mortified, however, though he tried to laugh it off even with himself. It was annoying that Wanda had never even appeared to observe that he was handsome. His eloquent glances had been utterly wasted on her; she had neither blushed nor giggled at his undisguised admiration of herself. Without taking any further notice of the other ladies in the green-room, he left it, and went round to Niko's box.

"Ah, *droguca!*" exclaimed Niko—using the untranslatable Roumanian term of endearment—"how late you are! Where have you been all this time?"

Demetri said nothing, but sat down and looked at the stage. Wanda was on it; and he was surprised, having only seen her serious, to find her so excellent a comédienne. She made him laugh before he had been two minutes in the box.

"A good actress, certainly," he thought, "both on and off the stage. What lucky fellow sups with her to-night, I wonder? Very likely that brute of a low comedian. Be it so. I hope Niko will like the company she keeps, when he has made her a princess!"

Wanda, not looking at the box, but feeling the eyes directed upon her from it, was returning Demetri's contempt with interest. "Why does that man think himself irresistible?" she said in her heart—"because he is handsome or because he is a prince? Ugly men are often the most lovable—and Roumanian princes are plentiful enough. Thank God," thought Wanda, proudly, "we mountain peasants keep our souls cleaner, and our

blood purer, than do these impoverished and vicious descendants of a worn-out royal race!" Then she softened suddenly, remembering that Niko's eyes were on her. He—he was not a mere pretty prince—he was much more, a man, ugly but delightful, reckless, but full of heart and sentiment, generous, noble in disposition. He was irresistible to her, for—she loved him! It would be heart-breaking if indeed his family made no sign—held out no hand to her!

Niko came to meet her as usual at the stage-door. He began at once to speak eagerly, telling her that he intended to travel home to-morrow morning, to see his mother; telling her how she had won his uncle's heart, and how Prince Sacha had praised her; telling her how wonderfully clever she was, that no other woman in the world could have met these men as she did.

Wanda smiled and clung to him, and felt happy and buoyant because she heard all this from him, the man she loved. But when Niko

had said farewell at the door, and had left her, she sighed wearily. She sighed again when she sat down with her poor stage friends, who were, as usual, the welcome guests at her frugal supper.

CHAPTER III.

NIKO saw no more of Demetri that night. He found his uncle alone at the hotel when he went there after taking Wanda to her own door. Niko was charmed to be alone with Sacha, as it enabled him to talk freely about Mademoiselle Wanda. There was something in Demetri's cold cynicism which made Niko feel it a sacrilege to talk of her in his presence. But Prince Sacha admired her almost as much, in his own way, as did Niko. And in one respect he estimated her more highly and more correctly.

"Is she not a charming actress," asked Niko, "delicate, ladylike?"

"*Droguca!*" said Sacha, "you are in love with Mademoiselle Milovitch, and there-

fore you can't appreciate her as an artist. To you she is above all things a woman. Now I look at her from another point of view, coldly, from the outside. And I tell you that she is a genius. She will blaze out upon the world some day soon in a character no one ever supposed she could touch; and then she will literally carry it by storm. She has great qualities; and she holds a fortune in her hands. I have seen the great actresses of Paris, of Vienna, of St. Petersburg. Mademoiselle Milovitch will be of their number very shortly. But all the same, my dear Niko, you are making a mistake in marrying her."

"And why?" cried Niko, springing to his feet. "If she is all you see, and all you say, she is worthy to be any man's wife, be he prince or king."

"Granted. But artists should not marry. If you take her from the stage she will die. It is easy to see that she lives upon the excitement of her art."

"But I will not take her from the stage. Why should I? Can I ask a brilliant woman like that to bury herself in a Roumanian château?"

"Oh! So you mean to drop out of your own existence, and become the husband of Mademoiselle Milovitch. You will have an active life, certainly; following the prettiest woman in Warsaw about the city like a slave or a gendarme!"

Niko's eyes, which always looked fierce, blazed for a moment with anger. But he took a turn up and down the room and quieted himself.

"I know there seem to be a thousand difficulties in the way of this marriage," he said. "But never mind; when Wanda has consented to it, the greatest of the difficulties will be overcome. Let us keep to one thing at a time. When we are married we will think about these other things. All I say about it is that Wanda shall do as she likes. She is an artist, and her art is part of

her existence. I will not deprive her of it. Perhaps she may give it up of herself—that I can say nothing about."

"No," said Prince Sacha, "a smaller woman would sink the actress in the princess. But I do not expect that of her. I shall offer no further opposition to the marriage, because I admire Mademoiselle Milovitch; but I shall insist that the family makes one condition. She must keep her old name for the stage. It would be an absurdity to see a Princess Ghyka figuring upon a play-bill.

"You are right in that, I think," said Niko. "It would hardly be appropriate."

He lit another cigarette, and sat down to think about this. When he thought he talked. Niko always thought aloud; he was transparent. Demetri was essentially superficial, yet secretive—his cousin just the opposite. Niko was hardly Roumanian in temperament, and he had lived so much in Paris and Warsaw that he had lost the

stamp of his race. The one thing he retained was his own odd, delightful, lovable individuality. Half the night he talked and smoked, smoked and talked. Prince Sacha was a not unwilling listener—he preferred the sound of Niko's voice to silence.

In the morning the rendezvous at the station was an early one. Niko could not take another farewell of Wanda; it would be cruel to arouse her. When Wanda was not acting she would rise at five; but when she was regularly playing she made it a rule not to leave her room until ten. Otherwise the day was too long for her strength. The train the three princes had decided to start by left Warsaw at eight; so Niko determined that instead of speaking once more to the woman he adored, he would only look up at her window and say one prayer for her in front of the church of the Holy Cross.

Earnestly he uttered his brief invocation as he stood a moment uncovered before the figure of the Saviour. Then he passed on to

Zamojiski's palace, and raised his eyes to the window where he had so often watched the light at night. Suddenly it was raised—a wonderful white hand and arm appeared—and at Niko's feet fell a bunch of Russian violets.

"Awake already!" cried Niko. "Thinking of me!—heaven bless her!"

Rapturously he snatched up his flowers and hurried away to the station.

Prince Sacha was there, but no Demetri; so they started without him. Demetri was never in the habit of accounting for his actions, or explaining himself. He would ride off from his home sometimes and go away to Paris without a word to anybody. Neither Niko nor his uncle were surprised that the fascination of the gay Polish capital should keep him there for a time. Niko was glad of his absence, for he was conscious that Demetri's unbelief in Wanda's being anything but a clever actress, would weaken his cause at home. But Sacha, though seeing the

difficulties of the marriage, was convinced that Wanda was honest and upright. This was an invaluable opinion for Niko to carry back to his mother.

Sacha and Niko lived within a half-day's drive of each other; and Niko easily persuaded his uncle to go home with him, and drive on the next day to his own château. Demetri, who had neither mother nor sister, but lived alone with a crowd of retainers and servants about him, was nearly a day's journey off. Even if he returned immediately he would not be likely to come over at once, for he was not very fond of the society of his relations; so Niko calculated on having a very good chance of influencing his mother as he wished. She was a very delicate woman; almost a chronic invalid. For years she had lived in a single suite of rooms in her big château, never even seeing any other part of the house. Sometimes she was carried down to her carriage, and drove out; this was almost her only amusement. She

had the character of a saint, and was greatly respected. She had been, when young, of extraordinary beauty, yet she had never entered into the dissoluteness which colours Roumanian society; she had held herself aloof from it, and been a devoted wife and mother. Consequently, she was the most deeply respected of all the family. Her servants loved her, but even their affection for their mistress would not make them work. They attended on her very well; but the château was neglected, dirty, and miserable. Niko saw plainly enough, on this return after a long absence, the clear signs of an impoverished estate, and Sacha, who attended to his forests and pastures, looked about him sadly as they drove through Niko's grounds. It might sound a very grand thing to make a comédienne of the theatre into a Princess Ghyka; but looked at practically, it was absurd to ask a successful actress to give up her profession and come to live in poverty on a worn-out estate like this.

Prince Sacha, knowing something of the world, was certain that if Wanda once set eyes on her husband's property she would return straightway to her profession. But he did not let this trouble him. He was content, so long as the name of Ghyka was kept from her public life, that Wanda should enter the family, for he was convinced that she had great and estimable qualities. And he saw that Niko would be ruined, wasted, if he were obliged to give her up. So he determined to espouse Niko's cause with the mother.

Through all the evening, and nearly through the night, the three sat talking about it. Innumerable cigarettes were smoked; continually the little tray of confitures was brought in; sweets were eaten and water sipped, all the time these three discussed the matter from every point of view. The mother was not bigoted; but she had something of Demetri's conviction that actresses are all alike, and that peasants are incapable of pride

or self-respect. Then, too, she wanted Niko to make a great match, which would enable him to raise his estates out of their wretched condition. She was bitterly disappointed that Sacha had returned with the bank-notes in his pocket-book which she and he together had put there for Wanda. She was amazed to hear that Sacha had never offered them, and listened in silent wonder to his account of the interview. By degrees his words worked upon her mind; she began to see Wanda as he saw her, a splendid woman, a lady, an artist of genius. Her prejudices and her pride ranged themselves bitterly against all this, but by degrees they yielded. Sacha drew her aside at last, and said, "You must give in; Niko will be lost without her."

"Yes," she answered, "I have been watching his face, and I see it."

And so the battle ended. The next day the mother silenced the prejudices of a lifetime for her son; she wrote a letter to Wanda, asking her to make Niko happy and

become his wife. Sacha wrote also; a courtly epistle, in the character of his daughter's representative. Armed with these precious documents, Niko had his horses out directly and drove off for the railway.

CHAPTER IV.

STRAIGHT from his own château to Zamojiski's Palace Niko went, without staying to rest anywhere. Never did woman have a more ardent, enthusiastic lover. Travel-stained and tired, he arrived at the palace, and made his way up to Wanda's rooms. On the staircase he ran up against Demetri. His cousin was trim, well-dressed, and looked admirably handsome.

"You here!" was Niko's greeting.

"Why not?" answered Demetri. "Are you the only member of our family who may visit Warsaw or enter Zamojiski's Palace?"

Without further remark Niko went on up the stairway, three steps at a time. Wanda

herself opened the door to him, almost before he reached it.

"I heard your voice," she said. "I heard you coming!" She was breathless with delight.

"What does Demetri come here for?" asked Niko.

"He has been paying me great attention," answered Wanda, "and wasting his time."

"And yours also, I should think," said Niko, rather savagely. For the first time in his life he hated Demetri. It was really intolerable that he should be so good-looking! Demetri's was a voluptuous, sensual beauty which Niko had always thought would have been more suitable to a woman. In a man it had seemed to him rather contemptible. Now, suddenly, a spasm of jealousy, so strong that it caused a shudder of the flesh, shot through him. He saw Demetri's good looks from another point of view; they might be effeminate, and yet be admired by women! If he had been capable of fore-

sight and of an extraordinary amount of common sense, he would even then have withdrawn from his engagement with Wanda. A man capable of jealousy so keen and powerful, to marry the prettiest woman in Warsaw—and an actress! Could he but have seen his folly in its true light! But he could not.

All this thought about Demetri passed through his mind like a flash, and the spasm of jealousy was over in an instant. It roused his blood and made it rage furiously for that instant. When it was over he hardly knew whether it had been pleasant or painful. Wanda was gazing at him with her clear, brilliant eyes. She had a peculiarity which was well known to her friends; she looked straight at people she loved, and this regard was so piercing that sometimes it embarrassed its object; if she disliked anyone she gave him sidelong glances out of the corners of those terrible and beautiful eyes.

"What is the matter, Niko?" she asked. "You are over-tired. Have you come straight from the railway that you look so wild?"

"Yes," he answered, "straight. And I have brought you a letter from my mother."

"Ah!" Wanda pounced upon it like a starved creature. She tore it open, read it, and then sank on a chair, trembling, all her spirit gone.

"What is the matter?" cried Niko, in his turn.

"Oh, it is too great a joy! What a reward, dear Niko, to have this letter at last—this beautiful letter! I can hardly breathe, I am so glad. Don't let *him* ever know how glad this has made me."

"Who?" asked Niko, perplexed.

"Why, Demetri, of course," she answered.

Then it dawned upon Niko that she had been acting the queen all this time to Demetri—proud, indifferent, careless of everything but her own self-respect. He fell on his

knees beside her and began kissing her hands.

But these demonstrative races are not secretive in their pleasures; very soon Wanda wanted her sister to share her delight.

"Zadwiga," she said, not loud, yet in a voice that penetrated. A moment later, and from the next room, book in hand, and the marks of a recent dream upon her face, came the younger sister. The dream vanished in presence of her eager anxiety about her sister's fate.

"See!" said Wanda, and held out the letter to her. Quickly, as Zadwiga read it through, her face became alive.

"You are to be married, then?"

Niko sprang to his feet in an ecstacy.

"Directly—of course, as soon as possible!"

Suddenly some blinding tears began to run down Zadwiga's face. She had not known they were coming, but she became aware of them when they fell off her cheeks

on to the papers she held in her hand. She put the letter down and ran from the room.

"Poor Zadwiga!" said Wanda.

"Why?" asked Niko.

"I shall have to leave her alone," said Wanda; "she will have no one to care for her but old Karol. Unless you will let us all live together—oh, Niko!" She saw many mingled expressions pass over his face, and quickly finished with—"Well, we won't talk of it now. When you have eaten, my Niko, let us go out into the sunshine. I am so happy!—oh, so happy!"

Suddenly she seized a pair of castanets which lay on the table, and was transformed, in a breath, to a wild thing fired with genius. Never, even at St. Petersburg, had such dancing been seen as this. And Niko was the sole spectator!

In three weeks from this happy day Mademoiselle Wanda Milovitch became Princess Ghyka.

She was to go with Niko straight to his

own château, and there be received by his connections. During the three weeks she and Zadwiga had been absorbed by the great question of dress. Wanda had never spent much money in this way before; now she was resolved to spend as much as she could. She had never dressed for the stage as she dressed for this remote Roumanian château. She, whose versatility was wonderful on the boards, was determined to show her power off them. She intended to play the *grande dame*, and, being an actress born, she knew well the importance of her accoutrements.

She had an exquisite Polish costume made, copied from a dress worn by the Polish Queen, Zadwiga. The result was a lovely satin robe trimmed with the fur of the blue fox, with a coquettish cap of the same material. When Wanda tried it on she saw at a glance how well it harmonised with her face, which was essentially of the Polish type.

"I shall wear this when I want to look—

not grand, but—nice," said she to her mirror. That truthful friend answered her with warm encouragement.

During this honeymoon visit of Wanda's to Roumania, Zadwiga was to remain alone with Karol, the old man-servant. She had cried herself sick at the thought of losing her sister; but she did not allow this sorrow to master her. She saw that Wanda wanted sympathy, wanted help, wanted a thousand-and-one things that she alone could give. With the heroism of a nature in which devotion was a leading quality, she dried her eyes and gave herself up to criticizing Wanda's dresses, and talking over the immediate future with her.

Niko proposed that no change should be made for the present, and that after the visit to Roumania, if Wanda wished to return to Warsaw, they should take some larger apartments in Zamojiski's Palace, and all live together. He held out to her always, though he never put it into so many words, the

alternative of remaining permanently at his château. Like a wise woman, Wanda refused to make any plans. "Leave it all till after we are married," she said. And he was very ready to do this. He made her understand by his manner that he intended her to be free to do as she chose and live where she liked after she had become his wife. Only she became aware, though he was very certain he never told her so, that his mother would expect her to remain at his château, and to forget her old life. She gathered this from indirect speeches of his without his guessing that she learned it from him at all. She said no word about it, but she thought a great deal. Niko would always be devoted and generous; she knew that when she wearied of Roumania and its society he would bring her to Warsaw, or take her to Paris. She would not be absolutely buried alive. Would it be possible to live always the life of the *grande dame?* She determined to wait and see what that life was like.

Demetri, from a sense of family duty, remained in Warsaw for the wedding ceremonies; but they hardly ever saw him. He called no more on the sisters now that his cousin had returned. Wanda forgot his very existence, and never told Niko how every day he had knocked at her door and endeavoured to obtain admission; nor how he had tried every expedient to get a place at her supper table. He had besieged her with scented notes and deluged her with bouquets; he had attempted—in vain—to bribe old Karol to help him.

Wanda had taken no trouble to correct Demetri's ideas, and he remained under the impression that these "suppers" were delightful little feasts, to which she would invite no one but people of her own sort, and that then, if ever, she unmasked. Demetri's principal desire, as regards Wanda, was to see her with her mask off; he believed that she emerged from this supposititious covering, with just such a style and manner as the

little actresses he was acquainted with in Paris possessed. But Wanda had no mask to take off for him; she always received him with a serene air of indifference, and forgot him as soon as he was gone. His manner of making love had no effect upon her. He thought of himself, and of what he wanted, all the time.

Niko, on the other hand, had the secret which but few men possess, of fascinating women; it lay simply in the fact that he thought of them, not of himself. The first time he saw Wanda off the stage he was standing near a piano with a cup of coffee in his hand. The top of the piano was open. Niko was so completely absorbed in gazing, with his soul in his eyes, at Wanda that he was incapable of giving his attention to anything else; he put the coffee cup down blindly and it fell into the piano among the strings. Wanda liked him from that moment; he was so perfectly easy about the *gaucherie* he had committed; all he wanted was to go

on contemplating her beautiful face. He was indifferent that people smiled at him and at his evident passion. Wanda thought it must, indeed, be real to be so completely absorbing.

The wedding over, Demetri went to Paris. Niko was glad he was not going back to Roumania, and Wanda was glad he left Warsaw; for she had observed a fine impartiality in his admiration for herself and for her sister.

Zadwiga was to take one of Wanda's parts; and the study for it filled her mind. She believed her sister to be perfection, and she felt afraid of occupying her place before the public. And yet there was a pleasure, even at this forlorn moment, in the increase of work; she knew it would be like a friend to her when Wanda had gone.

And now the moment really came for Wanda to leave her old life behind her for ever. As the Princess Ghyka she seemed to Zadwiga's eyes already to look taller and prouder. Zadwiga saw the very last of her lovely sister, and then went into the Church

of the Holy Cross and prayed passionately for her happiness. She had never loved anyone as yet in all her life but Wanda. She had but a dim memory of her gay, beautiful mother; her father had vanished from her sight, when she had been a mere child, into a life-long imprisonment. He was a scholar, a well-known author whose works had breathed a patriotism intolerable to the Russian tyrants. His servant, Karol, a peasant from the mountains and foster brother of his wife, was left to take care of the beautiful ballerina and her children. But he could not always protect her; she was persecuted more than he knew, and in a fit of despair she took her own life. Not long afterwards the father died in prison; and throughout these misfortunes Karol had remained a faithful servant. To Zadwiga he was a friend. She had none other now Wanda had gone. He was growing old and a little infirm; but he still persisted in doing all his old tasks. And in Zadwiga's solitude,

he considered himself as her guardian. He told Wanda, on her departure, that he should never leave her sister; that he would always accompany her to and from the theatre; and that at home he intended to admit none but old friends while Wanda was away. She smiled a little at this sternness; but she was very thankful for such faithful service. She felt safe in leaving Zadwiga with this, her one friend.

Of course the sisters had many admirers, many acquaintances in their profession, and the *entrée*, if they chose, to all the theatrical society. But they formed no friendships among the people they knew. In a sense the old master who had taught them their art was a friend, but he was very infirm, and had never, even in his palmy days, possessed intelligence for anything but his profession. Nevertheless, Zadwiga declared she would not be lonely, and vowed she would not be dull. Had she not her books and her studies, and her new part to think of?

CHAPTER V.

So the new Princess Ghyka went away with her husband, smiling and beautiful. She was, in reality, very anxious to reach his château as soon as possible. And her reason was this —his mother was too delicate to travel to Warsaw, and thus no parental blessing had been given to the newly-married couple. Wanda had wept over the absence of this ceremony; she feared some dim but terrible ill-fortune would result from it. Niko was absurdly happy; but the mood became him well. He seemed to expand under its influence; his eyes were bright, but not fierce, and they were continually fixed upon Wanda with a look which made them positively handsome.

It was a delightful journey; both were very content with the present and the immediate future. The world looks very lovely to people in this mood.

But Wanda was excited, and yet grave, when they drew near to the château. She was excited because she realised for the first time that she was indeed a Princess Ghyka, that she had become one of a noble family. It was true—for here was her home! She was grave because in her heart she feared Niko's mother; and also because the château looked so sad, so neglected and uninviting. Roumanian châteaux are, as a rule, hideous outside; and neglect makes them repulsive. Wanda shrank back for a second on the threshold of her new home—it was so big, so dreary, so dirty! How she wished herself once more in her bright little rooms in Warsaw! But she quickly silenced her inner fear, and entered bravely with Niko the home to which he had brought her. A crowd of servants had gathered to receive them;

some thirty gipsy-like creatures they were, forming an unsavoury throng. In these châteaux there are still the remains of the serf system, and the servants are idle and worthless, as slaves and the children of slaves must be. Wanda shrank from the dark-faced Bohemians, and vowed to herself that if she stayed there she would have a Polish peasant girl for her own maid.

Niko's mother was ready in the large salon to receive her new daughter. She had resolved to give Wanda her due welcome, now that the marriage was over, and she had become one of the Ghykas. She regarded her no longer as an actress, a comédienne, a peasant, but as her son's wife. She had put on the beautiful Roumanian costume, and Wanda uttered a little cry of delight, when she saw how charming Niko's mother looked, and how gentle her face was.

Wanda had a gift which is not common with her sex. She always appeared to be as clean, neat, and fresh at the end of a journey

as at the beginning. She entered the gloomy château like a ray of sunshine; and so she seemed to the old Princess who received her, and who, in the first instant, forgave Niko for his choice.

But before two words had passed Wanda exclaimed, "Give us our blessing, madame! We have waited too long for it already. I am unhappy till that is done."

Immediately the Princess took her hand, and taking Niko's hand also, led the way into a large bedchamber. "This is your room," she said; and Wanda fell on her knees. Niko came and knelt on the other side, and the mother raised her hands in blessing. When the words had been solemnly uttered Wanda rose with tears on her face and a tender smile on her lips.

"Now," she said, "I am indeed happy."

"My child, you are very beautiful!" said the mother, looking at her with wondering eyes.

This Polish girl, with her light, lovely

figure, her fair face and pure speech, was something new to her. It was not what she had expected to see. She had expected a beauty, but not one of so clear and delicate a type.

Wanda began at once to play her new *rôle*. She changed her travelling dress for a handsome toilette; she neglected no detail of her appearance. She wore no jewels, for she had none. This poverty, strange to say, she was proud of.

When she entered the salon even Niko gazed at her in some surprise. He had never seen her in this part before; she was showing him something new. On the journey she had been a bride, a baby, a foolish creature full of laughter and happiness. Before that, he had seen her on the stage or in her own home—an inimitable comédienne, a gentle sister, an industrious worker, an ardent student, a merry girl full of wit and repartee. He had loved her in every mood, but had fancied in his heart that, beautiful though

she was, there might be something which his mother and his friends would have to excuse. But he saw he had mistaken her. She was more versatile than he supposed. She had left the actress at Warsaw, and the bride on the journey. She entered the salon, perfectly dressed, very quiet, almost cold in her manner; and with a dignity about her which silenced criticism. It would have been impossible for the shrewdest man of the world to say, "That woman is not born to the purple; she is putting it on; she is only an actress."

Niko would very much have liked to clap his hands, but he did not. He remembered that he alone was behind the scenes.

But, as the time passed on, he grew bewildered, and began to wonder whether he really was behind the scenes. The character of a *grande dame* appeared to take such a hold upon Wanda, or to be so natural to her, that it was herself. Niko, perplexed, looked in vain for the Wanda he had married. She

was not there; it was as if she had never been. With the new name, the new home, the new dresses, there was a new Wanda. This was not a gay girl with a passion for light, and dancing, and vivid life; it was a lady, a princess, quiet, languid, even idle and indifferent. The representation had nothing artificial about it. But it left Niko in the puzzled position of asking himself, "Is this art or nature?" He could not fathom Wanda's mind, or learn what were her thoughts about her new life; and this was the first hint he had had of her unapproachableness. In truth Wanda was too various in mood for anyone to know her well. It was impossible to discover which was the real Wanda of the different characters she could present. Perhaps she was all, perhaps she was none of them. Niko found, not that now he was beginning to understand her, but that now he was beginning to see how far he was from understanding her. In these first few days of their marriage he realised that

his wife was, to him, a mystery. She played her *rôle* so thoroughly that she did not entirely lay it aside even when alone with him. From the theatre she carried home with her each night the spirit of the part she had played; so now, when enacting the *grande dame* all day, she could not put off her character the moment she passed the door of her own room.

Wanda passed some happy mornings with her mother-in-law, whom she learned to love and to admire. Every afternoon visitors came from adjacent châteaux, to call upon the new princess, and Wanda dressed herself beautifully to receive them. She dressed again for dinner, when there were always guests; and every night there was dancing in the large salon. But there were no great entertainments, for Niko's mother was too ill for any large or formal receptions to be given.

At the end of a week Niko and Wanda left their own home to visit the Château

Roman, which belonged to the Princess Miralda; it was a considerable distance to drive, quite the journey of a day; much more, but for the swiftness of the horses used in Roumania. The Château Roman was within easy access of Jassy, and Niko intended, after a short stay there, to go on to the town, where he would introduce his bride to the aristocratic society of Roumania. So one morning they started off, driving *à la Russe*, with four horses abreast, and at a great speed. In this way they went over the steppes with extraordinary quickness. This journey was all new and full of interest and excitement for Wanda. She had never left Warsaw except for a drive in its immediate neighbourhood. All that she saw now was entirely fresh to her; the country, the people, the customs, everything was strange. But she said little; she suppressed her eager interest and surprise, and listened quietly while Niko talked to her of the country they were passing through. This

subdued and almost indifferent manner was part of her new *rôle*; she lived in the character she was playing—and was too consistent to forget it, even in the bright air of the steppes and alone with her husband. But the day was one long delight to her. Having lived so entirely in the city and in the artificial life of the theatre, this swift driving over the beautiful steppes, rich with tall grass, seemed to her like a lovely dream.

In the evening, Wanda, who was very clear-sighted, saw from a long distance a château standing high upon the side of a hill. "Are we going there?" she asked Niko.

"Yes," he answered, "that is the Château Roman."

As they came nearer Wanda could see that it was surrounded by beautiful park-like grounds, and that the château itself was extremely handsome, built in the French style. It was easy to perceive that here was very different management from that of

Niko. Everything in the neighbourhood of the château gave evidences of taste and civilization and care.

"How beautiful it is!" said Wanda at last.

"My Aunt Miralda keeps it up well," said Niko, "but it was all in this admirable state when it came into her possession. In her father's time, a now celebrated French historian, M. Marcellin, came to Roumania to study the traditions of the people. Her father entertained him hospitably and his stay extended itself over some fifteen years. In return for the kindness he received he devoted his spare hours to improving the château, and arranging the park and gardens. He sent to the various botanical gardens of Europe for plants and seeds, and as the *bojar* willingly gave money to help to carry out the plans, the results produced were very fine. There is not a more beautiful château in all Roumania than this of my Aunt Miralda!"

Now that they came close to the château Wanda could see the lovely flowers in the gardens, and looked with wonder and delight at all the beauty around her.

Here lived, quite alone, the old Princess Miralda, the second wife of a dead brother of Prince Sacha's. She herself had been married three times; divorce is so easy in Roumania that for a great lady to marry several times, and yet never to have been a widow, is quite ordinary. In her day the Princess Miralda had been a famous beauty, and had carried her attractions to foreign courts, for she went everywhere as a *diplomate* and a political spy. She was a thorough woman of the world and at home was a leader of the dissolute society of Roumania. Wanda had heard enough about her to have her curiosity much excited; and she looked with eagerness for the figure of their hostess when they at last arrived at the château.

Miralda received her in the great salon,

with the charming manner of an old courtier. In reality she was prejudiced against Wanda and did not intend to abate one jot of her prejudice, however delightful the Polish actress might prove herself to be. But this did not prevent her from receiving Niko's wife with all the honours due to her. Almost before the greeting was over—almost before Wanda, who was very tired, could sit down—a servant came to her with the *dulcece*, as the sweets are called which all day long the Roumanians love to eat. Wanda had learnt to like these most exquisite confitures, and had also learned the correct way of eating them; so she took some without hesitation. The *sorbets* are delicious sweets of almonds, pistachio, chocolate, or coffee; the proper way is to take off a piece with a spoon, and quickly swallow a sip of water. When the servant has been all round he comes back again and offers the confitures, which are made from apricots, cherries, or strawberries. Again

you take a spoon and dip into the jar. When Wanda was first offered this dainty refreshment, she thought she was to take a plate off the tray and put on it what she wanted; but Niko had instructed her in the correct manner of eating the *dulcece*, and she had come to the conclusion that there could be no such delicious sweets in the world, and she no longer wondered at the continual appearance of the trays, which servants brought about every half-hour. She took her spoonful of *sorbet*, and then looked at Miralda while the old Princess was giving her attention to the sweets. Miralda was still very distinguished in appearance, with a fine figure and majestic carriage, great black eyes and hair still dark and plentiful. Her toilette was evidently French, and very elegant; and her *szterjar*, which is the national Roumanian head-dress, was arranged with great care and even coquetry. All this Wanda observed keenly; she saw that while with Miralda all the grace and

skill which she possessed must be exercised both in dress and style.

There were a great many guests in the house, and they were about to gather in the large salon to dance. So Wanda went away to her room as soon as her luggage was there, and quickly had it opened. She determined to appear to-night in her Polish costume, which she knew suited her style so well. It was soon got out for her; there were abundant servants to wait upon her, and it really seemed but a few moments that she took to put off her travelling dress, comb out her pretty fair hair, and robe herself again in her national costume. When it was done she looked in the glass with a smile in her eyes, though her lips were grave enough. The fair, pure Polish type, with its delicate skin, clear soft eyes, and light hair, was something so different from the Roumanian that she knew well all eyes would be fixed on her when she entered the salon. The Roumanian women are very

beautiful, but their beauty is all of the dark order. They are fierce, proud, and what the French call *passionées*. In temperament, as in appearance, Wanda was a sort of snow-princess among them. She had recognised already that in her difference from the society about her lay her power in it.

When she went down into the salon all the tables had been pushed aside, the Tzigane musicians were playing most exquisite music, and a number of couples were dancing the Vienna waltz upon the polished floor. It was a brilliant scene; but Wanda immediately attracted attention. She, too, was brilliant; and, more than that, she was new. The Roumanians love change, variety, fresh amusements, and fresh charms. A great many pairs of black eyes became fixed upon her in undisguised admiration. Yet Wanda hardly noticed the sensation she caused; directly she entered the room her eyes met those of Prince Demetri, and this made her forget everything else for a brief moment.

He was standing at a little distance from her, speaking to Miralda. He looked very handsome; doubtless he was the handsomest man in the room; but to Wanda's eyes his admirable appearance was spoiled by his insolent consciousness of good looks. As she noticed him now, amid this gathering of his countrymen, it struck her that there was something of the Tzigane in his face. Was he, perhaps, not a pure Ghyka—was there a tinge of the gipsy in his blood? It might be so. Wanda had heard strange stories of the secret history of these princely families. The great ladies, who feed on pride, are not always as honest as the peasant women, whom they regard as mere animals. Wanda thought, for a second, of these things. It made her face colder, and brought upon it a veil of hauteur. The remembrance that she was of peasant blood, yet bore an unstained name, always made her hold herself with double dignity.

Demetri was the Princess Miralda's favourite nephew. He was a man after

her own heart, and pleased her in many ways. She favoured him as she favoured no one else, and he always knew that whenever he might want a champion in the little family differences which sometimes occurred, his Aunt Miralda would be his fast friend. Their views of life and of people were similar; their tastes and habits were akin. They had just been speaking of Wanda when she entered the salon. Both sneered covertly at her for her low birth, and at Niko for making her his wife.

"But," said Demetri, as his eyes met hers, "she is an exquisite creature."

"Surely," answered Miralda, "Niko is not absolutely a fool."

A few minutes later Wanda was flying over the polished floor with Demetri's arm round her. She had not known how to avoid dancing with him unless she refused to dance altogether. And that seemed absurd, impossible. She loved dancing, and she knew that her dancing was one of her gifts.

Demetri was enchanted; he had found a partner such as he had never danced with before. An admirable dancer himself, he knew well how to appreciate Wanda's perfect movements. He was in the seventh heaven; happy as the hashish smoker is happy. This amusement was a positive passion with him, as it is with most Roumanians; it filled his veins with liquid fire, and made him like a man intoxicated. In that close contact Wanda realised what her feeling was about Demetri; she was afraid of him. He inspired her with a strange dread; it felt like some mysterious presentiment.

"But why is this?" she said to herself. "He can do me no harm."

She met Niko's eyes and smiled. Her husband was not dancing; he was watching her every movement. His glance reassured her and brought her courage back. "How foolish I am," she thought; "of course he can do me no harm!"

She was the heroine of that evening;

idolised, admired, continually surrounded by the men, who made no secret of their opinion that she was the most charming woman in the salon. But Wanda was like ice amid it all; she would not be flattered by this attention; she would not forget her *rôle*. Even Miralda was forced into admiration of the unruffled manner which Wanda preserved. She remarked it to Demetri when, in the early morning, the music ceased, and the ladies were gradually bidding their hostess "good-night." But Demetri wore a sullen look which did not make him any handsomer.

"That's what I don't like about her," he answered; "she keeps me at a distance, and gives side-long glances from her eyes, as if some poor wretch of a Tzigane were paying her attention. It's too much; she'll have to alter her style. Who is she, to be so stingy of her smiles? I am confident it is all acting."

So saying, he took his way to the salon,

where, now that the dancing was over, gambling was beginning. Most of the men spent their night over the cards, which are, with them, a sort of infatuation, an excitement without which they cannot live.

CHAPTER VI.

Although Wanda said little even to Niko, she was, in reality, full of wonder at the life about her. She had been accustomed always to severe industry; at no time had she been able to be idle, except upon some rare holiday. Her mother had implanted in her, both by inheritance and exhortation, the earnest conviction that only by absolute toil and unceasing application can an artist win independence. And to these children of an oppressed nation, independence in every form had appeared as one of the most priceless jewels of existence.

Thus Wanda had acquired a habit of utilising every hour of her day; and she

often contrived to use her hands and her brains at the same time. She had so ardently desired to earn and keep her independence, that unceasing industry had appeared to her in the light of a sacred duty. She had often heard that the great ladies of Roumania are accustomed to be idle; and she was prepared to find it so. But when she beheld this idleness with her own eyes, it struck her with amazement. It seemed to her almost incredible, although it was actually before her, that women could pass their lives in sleeping, dancing, eating sweets, and ordering dresses from a milliner. Dancing and driving were the only active occupations of these ladies; gambling and the excitement of intrigues their only vivid interests. Wanda lost her wonder at the immoral lives of many of these *grandes dames* when she saw how aimless their days would be without these amusements which they permitted themselves. They had really nothing to think of half their time but the other sex; and, con-

sequently, in this corrupt society there were men who were the fashion, and with whom every beauty of position desired to have her name associated. Wanda soon discovered from the guests at Miralda's château that Demetri, in Jassy and its neighbourhood, was one of these favourites. His wild character had added just the necessary piquancy to his personal advantages to earn him this position. A year or two ago he was considered irresistible; now he was absolutely courted.

It was in the morning Wanda found her most delightful moments at the Château Roman. She was awake long before any of the other ladies, long before anyone but the Tziganes, who crowded about the house, every group of three or four accomplishing by their united efforts about the work of a single French or English servant.

Wanda soon discovered that the one person of talent in the establishment was the cook; and the one person of authority

the housekeeper, Anuca, whose word was law with the other gipsies, and who was listened to even by the Princess Miralda. One morning when she was tired of her enforced idleness, she coaxed Anuca, who had a liking for her, to take her to see the cook in his own territory in order that she might ask him for the recipe of the delicious *dulcece*. She thought some of her industrious friends in Warsaw would be charmed to produce such delicacies. Anuca told her it was hopeless—the gipsies keep their secrets to themselves; but she took her to the kitchen. This expedition was one that Wanda sincerely regretted, for she found the cook and his workshop so filthy that she could eat no food with pleasure in the château afterwards. It was a timely lesson; she never again proposed to visit the cook of a Roumanian household. These Tziganes are as good as Frenchmen as regards the viands they produce, but they lack one great quality of a French cook—cleanliness. Wanda found

also that her little plan was of no use. The *dulcece* are principally made by old gipsy women in the convents, and they will never give the receipt to any but a Tzigane, as they believe that a malediction would fall upon whoever imparted this precious knowledge to a foreigner. And so the art of making these exquisite sweetmeats is superstitiously preserved in secret, and is guarded by the Tziganes as if it were something sacred. Whether sacred or no, the recipe is very valuable. Paris can produce no such delicate confectionery.

Disappointed in her housewifely project, and shocked by the dirtiness of the *chef* whose acquaintance she had made, Wanda hurried away, that she might not witness any of the preparations for the dinner. It was the second day of their stay, and a dinner of ceremony was to take place that evening in honour of herself. She went back to the gardens, where she found she could spend a very happy morning among the flowers. The

head-gardener was an exiled Pole, who was as industrious as his mistress was idle. Miralda disliked and despised the Poles, but she had found them honest and indefatigable in their work. When one of the unhappy wanderers of that nation came within her domain he was sure to find employment either in the park or the forests. She would not have them in the château, because she personally disliked them. Wanda had been delighted to find a countryman in the head-gardener; and one, too, of far better birth than her own.

In the early morning, while Miralda and her guests slept off the weariness of the night's gambling, Wanda forgot her *rôle* for a little while, and was full of eager delight, and wandered about the château and grounds like a curious child. There was no one but the servants to observe her, for even Niko slept on. The one Roumanian vice which was ineradicably implanted in his nature was that of gamb-

ling. Until the sun was high, and the birds all awake, he sat over the card-table. Wanda observed this with a mingling of fear and disgust. It made her afraid, because she saw it was what always prevented Niko from prospering. He had no luck at cards, yet he always hoped for it with the sanguine spirit of the true gambler. His château and forests might pass from his hands over that table any night, as she saw plainly. Disgust she could not help feeling, because the whole reckless life seemed shocking to her industrious and ardent mind. To accomplish something was to her understanding the foremost aim of existence; it made her feel like one standing on uncertain ground, or on a dizzy height, to see that these people lived with absolutely the one aim of being amused.

But she said nothing to Niko of these feelings of hers; and with the others she held herself at a distance, like a stranger. In their eyes she appeared a cold beauty, indifferent and icy; devoted to changing her magnificent

toilettes constantly, to eating sweets, and to dancing. Every evening there was dancing. All the great rooms had wax-polished floors; Wanda might have held a dance in her bedroom had she liked, for the furniture in it was slight and simple, while the floor was so beautiful it often tempted her light feet.

At this great dinner Wanda saw the life of the château at its gayest. The seven or eight guest-rooms were already full, and more visitors arrived, driving like the wind, some with four, some with six horses abreast. The visitors lounged on the large Turkish divans, which were the principal furniture of the great salons. Everywhere people were talking rapidly in French and laughing gaily. The weather was growing chill, so the rooms were warmed; the heat spreading out evenly from the beautiful great stoves—some made of marble, some of porcelain. These magnificent stoves, which very much resemble some of the smaller monuments of Westminster

Abbey, are the principal ornaments of Roumanian salons.

The dinner was very grand. The table was set *à la Russe*, and innumerable courses were served, commencing with the horrible national soup called *szezy*, which is made of sour cabbage. Many of the dishes were French, and very delicious; but Wanda could not forget the appearance of the cook, and ate but little. Champagne came, according to Roumanian custom, with the sweets; and then the Tzigane band, which had played ravishingly beautiful music during the dinner, was rewarded. A glass of champagne was sent to the leader; but first it was carried round the table, and every guest dropped a ducat into it. Wanda looked on in wonder, but she dropped her ducat in like the rest.

Before they left the table Demetri had extorted a promise from her to dance with him. She did not shrink from this quite as much as at first, for she almost forgot the man in his dancing as soon as the first strains of the

waltz fell on her ears. But still it displeased her that it should be Demetri who danced so well, and who paid so much attention to her, for she disliked and distrusted him thoroughly. It was, perhaps, unreasonable, this strong dislike; but she could not conquer it, any more than she could compel herself to look him straight in the eyes. Those singular, side-long, distrustful glances which she gave him from her clear, penetrating eyes provoked him exceedingly. His theory was that Wanda was aware that he saw through her, as he called it; that she was nothing but a little adventuress, and that her mask of cold impenetrability was her safeguard. Once persuade her to drop that for a moment, and he believed he would be rewarded by a revelation which would have piquancy even for him, familiar though he was with the *coulisses* of the French stage. When he saw how unceasingly Wanda wore her veil of gracious hauteur it gave him an idea, which he found very fascinating. Suppose she succeeded in

maintaining this air of purity and refined indifference before all Roumanian society (inclusive of her husband), admitting but one to a knowledge of her real character—himself? This would, indeed, be very delightful, and Demetri gave himself up to the task of pleasing, amusing, and interesting her. A great many pairs of fierce, jealous black eyes fastened themselves upon her delicate face when Demetri's devotion was observed. Wanda saw that she had many enemies among the women already, and her heart fluttered sometimes when she met their glances of dislike or contempt. But she went quietly through it all—pale, delicate, proud.

On the fourth day the party broke up. The guests drove off one after another; and then Niko and Wanda, accompanied now by Miralda and Demetri, started for Jassy. They had each their own *palais* in the town. Demetri was more often there than in his château, and Miralda was very willing to seize an excuse for a visit to the city, where she found a society which suited her.

Jassy is a little Constantinople; gay, bright, sparkling. The life is the same as in the country, only more exaggerated. There is no middle class whatever. The Tziganes are everywhere the servants, and they alone walk in the streets. The *bojars*, as the Roumanian *seigneurs* are called, and the great ladies, all drive hither and thither behind their fast horses; they are never seen on foot out-of-doors. In the evening they drive upon the Copeau, which is the same thing as the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, the Ladies' Mile in London, or the Pincio at Rome. Only here everybody is acquainted; it is one large aristocratic society. The carriages stand on the Copeau between four and six o'clock, and people receive and pay visits of ceremony from one carriage to another. It is a charmingly gay scene; the white houses gleam among the green trees, and the gilded cupolas of the Greek churches flash and glow in the light. At the fashionable hour the Tzigane band plays delicious

music. This drive was a daily delight to Wanda; it was charming in itself; and then, too, it was always taken alone with Niko. Demetri only paid her a brief visit while her carriage stood on the Copeau; if he stayed long Niko sent him away on some pretence or other. Wanda did not understand at first why Niko paid so much regard to her public appearances in Jassy; but she very soon learned that the society here is one of the most scandal-loving in the world.

Every evening there was a great dinner; every night a great dance. Wanda had to change her dress more often than when she was playing at the theatre. She was never at rest; hardly ever at home; and whatever house she might enter she found Demetri at her side. With whatever coolness she might treat him, he replied to it all by unceasing admiration and a tenderness of manner which in itself appeared to Wanda like an impertinence. But she could say nothing. Was he not her husband's cousin, one of the

Ghykas? It seemed to her that she could not openly resent his attentions without losing dignity even in her own eyes.

There are no Catholic churches in Jassy; all are Greek, except a single Episcopalian chapel. In the midst of the incessant gaiety of the town life Wanda felt homesick and hungry for her own church, her own country, her old life of industry. This feeling came suddenly upon her; she tried to crush it. She made a little altar in her boudoir; here she kept a light always burning, and here she tried to find the comfort which the Greek Church could not give her. Many hours she spent on her knees at this altar; hours of early morning. Very often when she rose from her sleep and went to kneel before her crucifix it was with a sick heart, knowing that Niko had not yet left the cards.

In Jassy there was continually high play. Wanda found that the Princess Miralda often passed her night at a gambling table. Demetri played, of course; all Roumanians

play more or less. But Niko seemed to be possessed by the very spirit of gambling; every night he went to the card-room at one house or another. Wanda dared not ask him what his luck was; she could see it was not good by the look of his eyes. Each day she dreaded to hear that he had lost everything at lansquenet. It seemed to her most terrible, this wild play; she had all her life regarded property as something which should be treated carefully, because acquired with difficulty. To fling it away over a game at lansquenet appeared mad, terrible. She would not say a word to Niko; she felt that she was still only an outsider in this life, and that she had no right to speak. She felt that the whole system was mysterious to her, and must remain so; she could not comprehend an aristocracy which was so lavish, so idle, and so improvident. When the men wanted money, they went to the Jews and paid cent. per cent.; the women placed themselves at

the mercy of their milliners, dressing magnificently and paying absurd sums for long credit. All this was a continual wonder to Wanda; it frightened her. She listened to the scandal-mongers of the gay city, and looked at the reckless conduct of the society in which she found herself, with outward calm and a dispassionate manner. But in reality her heart trembled within her.

One night, or rather morning, when Niko came home he saw through the open door of Wanda's room that she was on her knees before her little altar. She still wore her ball dress; she had not even taken the jewels from her neck. He went in and stood quietly beside her. In a few moments she rose, and then he saw that her face was bathed in tears.

"*Droguca! duduja!*" cried he in despair at this sight, "What is the matter?"

"Will you take me back to Warsaw?" she said, "will you let me go back to the stage?"

"My child, yes. You know I promised that you should do as you chose. But why go?—you have seemed so happy, you are so much admired, you are more beautiful than any wòman in Jassy. I am so proud of you, *duduja!*"

She began to pull off her ornaments and loosen her hair, speaking with a sort of anger as she did so.

"I am sick of wearing dresses for nothing," she said almost fiercely, "I want some work—I must go back to my work! This is like a phantasmagoria. You are all idle, you do nothing but smoke and eat sweets, dance and gamble your very souls away at cards. It is an awful life."

Niko looked rather miserable at this. He began to walk about the room as was his habit when excited. He had had no idea that Wanda was regarding things in this light. He had been immensely delighted at the admiration she received, and with the quiet grace with which she played the *grande*

dame. Her sudden speech, full of emotion, was a revelation to him. Receiving no answer she went on passionately —

"I was afraid of your princesses and great ladies when I came here first," she said, unfastening her dress with angry hands. "Now I despise them. I would rather be a third-rate ballerina at the theatre than one of these lazy, scandal-loving, vicious ladies. The *danseuse* at least does not pretend to be better than she is. And never at the theatre have I heard such wicked tongues as these great ladies have. I overheard two of them talking about me to-night. They said Demetri was my lover. I could have killed them."

"Demetri your lover!" repeated Niko, and suddenly he wondered if he had been blinded? Why had Demetri stayed behind and visited her in Warsaw? He remembered how open and constant Demetri's admiration had been and was. He came quickly to her with his deep-set black eyes all on fire. She

understood the tone of his voice without further explanation. She turned and faced him full with her clear, keen eyes.

"You are all alike," she said. "You aristocrats know no more what it is to be honest than you know what it is to be industrious. Even you are capable of suspecting me, your wife, whom everyone respected when I was only an actress. Bah—it is stifling, this atmosphere. If you have not lost every sou you possess over that hateful lansquenet, take me back to Warsaw!"

"You are very bitter!" said Niko, staggered by this last home-thrust. In truth luck had been very bad with him. He had been twice to the Jews in order to go on playing; he had come home now with empty pockets. But while his forests stood he could go to the Jews again. He knew there was money to be had, but he dared not tell Wanda, in her present mood, where it came from.

"I will take you," he answered; "we will go to-morrow if you choose. You know that

I will not prevent your returning to the stage if you wish to. Wanda, tell me—tell me truly—I suspect you of nothing—but tell me, do you, like the others, think Demetri is fascinating?"

It would be absolutely vain to attempt to describe Niko's manner when he put this question. Three minutes ago he was capable of blazing out into a jealous rage. But Wanda had driven that passion away by her calm eyes and her proud indignation. What he hungered to know now was whether she, in her heart, admired Demetri. He appealed to her like an eager child that thinks by caresses and a coaxing voice to win a sign of affection. Niko was the most transparent creature imaginable; he could not even attempt to disguise his longing to know that his lovely Wanda was still content with his own odd original self.

Wanda burst out into one of her clear peals of laughter which held so little mirth in them. She did not laugh for happiness—

only when something amused her; and there was a sound sometimes, a ghastly sound, as of unreality or mockery, in her voice. This affected Niko terribly now.

"For God's sake do not laugh at me," he almost whispered, as if afraid of his own words.

Wanda suddenly ceased laughing, and a tenderness came upon her face which added a great beauty to it.

"My Niko," she said, "you do not understand me! I might laugh at Demetri if I did not too much dislike him. He is a fop—while you are a man. Do not let us speak of him again—to compare you two together is shameful. Ah, Niko, I feel so sad. Take me from this terrible society which gives us such thoughts as these. I must go back to my work. That is something real."

"And is not my love real?" said Niko, with the same appealing manner.

"Indeed yes; it is more real to me than anything but my religion. But, dear Niko,

I do not think you love me more here than you did at Warsaw. I am hungry for the stage. I am sad for it. Do not keep me from it, or I shall become desperate for it! I have refused to let myself even think of my old life until yesterday and to-day; and now I know what the fever is that burns here, in my head! I have never been so long away from my work before—never. To work again!—to be in earnest!—to earn money, not to waste it! The thought is like a breath of wholesome air! I shall soon be ill, for I am pining to be upon the stage again!"

"My dear, my child, my beautiful Wanda, you shall not pine, you shall not be ill. I will take you to-morrow; I will go with you; I would go with you anywhere you wished. Come, let us go to rest; when we wake I will order the horses."

And so it was settled. Wanda had had more than half a fear that Niko, though she knew he would not compel her to give up the stage, would be very distressed at her desire

to return to it. She was infinitely grateful that the matter was so easily arranged. Now that there was an immediate hope of returning to her accustomed atmosphere, and of taking Niko away from that terrible lansquenet, she went to rest with a light heart and slept like a happy child.

CHAPTER VII.

At the old home in Warsaw Zadwiga was leading a very quiet, a very studious life. She lived absorbed in her books and her work. Her love for the stage was of a different order from Wanda's. It was not so personal, though equally ardent in spirit. She would have regarded the drama with as enthusiastic an interest had she never been allowed to go upon the boards again. To Wanda the work, the ambition, the excitement, were necessary: without them life appeared tame, flat, and colourless. Intrigue, dancing, and dressing failed as substitutes. Placed in Wanda's position at Jassy, Zadwiga would have been ignorant that she was admired or talked about; would have patiently

submitted to go to great parties at night, if she might spend her days in study. She was essentially a student, and could make herself content in any life if she might read, if she might draw, and sing, and study the sky at night, the flowers by day; everything that came within her observation. She was less brilliant than Wanda, and also less sad. Her nature ran in a deeper channel. When first left alone without the sister she adored she wept, and could not read, and spent nearly the whole day on her knees in church. But the next morning she rose in a calmer mood, and went to her work as usual.

Old Karol observed this with gratitude; he had fully felt the responsibility of guarding, in her solitude, this youngest child of his dead master. He had dreaded that Zadwiga would pine and droop; and he was powerless to give her any society which would cheer her. He was thankful to see her go back to her books; to his mind they were her safest companions. He was illiterate; he did not

imagine that in books there could be any danger. For a young and very lovely girl like Zadwiga it seemed to him that they were simply an admirably innocent amusement. Every evening he accompanied her to the theatre, and brought her home again under his charge. Zadwiga was grateful for this guardianship of his, though had she been quite alone she would have walked fearlessly through the streets. The ladies of the theatre laughed at her quaint, quiet ways, and her constant look of absorbed thought. They called her the "Nun." Sometimes they laughed at her to her face, but Zadwiga did not observe it, or, if she did, she suffered it very meekly. Wanda had always played the little mother, and guarded her sister from annoyance. Nevertheless, Zadwiga had learned that to work on and be silent is the best answer to sneers or mocking laughter. When the ballerinas teased her about the old man who waited at the stage door for her like a gendarme, she only

smiled and said, "He is very kind." And she went home to her supper of roast potatoes with real thankfulness that she had still a friend in the old servant. Yet it was a very lonely life for a girl so young; and sometimes as she knelt in church the tears fell down her face at the thought that now she had neither father, mother, nor sister. For it might be that Wanda was Wanda no longer; that she had become a Princess Ghyka so completely as to forget her old life. And Zadwiga's gentle heart would sink within her at the thought of living on in her present solitude.

One day when she returned from her devotions with her lovely face pale and sad, she met old Karol at the door.

"Hurry upstairs," he exclaimed, "she is returned! I am going to get things for dinner." And he went on, leaving Zadwiga transfixed.

But she soon recovered herself, and rushed upstairs.

Wanda and Niko were standing in the little salon; Wanda was crying, apparently without being aware of it; and Niko was making futile efforts to wipe away her tears. Zadwiga flew to her.

"What is the matter! What is the matter!" she cried.

"Only happiness!" said Wanda. "I am so happy to be here again. Oh, my sister, my dear little Zadwiga, how beautiful you are! There is not a great lady in all Roumania to compare with you!"

"Quite true; yes, that is quite true," said Niko. "There is only one woman in the world as beautiful as Zadwiga, and that is her sister."

He stood gazing at the two as they gave way to every expression of joy and affection which suggested itself to them. They cried, they laughed, they kissed each other a thousand times; and at last Wanda seized her sister round the waist, and they waltzed down

the room. When they paused, both had flushed, brilliant faces.

"That was very pretty," said Niko. "Wanda has not once looked so happy while we have been away. I don't think she cares for me at all."

"Niko!" cried Wanda in a tone of amazement, and then smiled, seeing his smile. "He likes to make me continually assure him of my love and admiration; why I don't know," she explained to Zadwiga. "I suppose it is his vanity."

"Oh, entirely!" said Niko. "I am vain enough to account for anything. But, indeed, I am very glad to see you look yourself once more! Why have you been so cold, so indifferent to everything while we have been in Roumania? It is like going back to summer to see your face so gay again."

Wanda did not answer him directly. She sat down in her old chair, where she had sat so many hours busy with her embroidering. She put out her hand to Zadwiga, who came

and knelt at her side like a fair saint at a shrine.

"I can breathe here," said Wanda. "I feel as if life had some meaning once more. My sister, I pray you may never have to live in such a society as that I have been in. Take warning by me," she said, with a happy smile, "don't marry a Roumanian!"

"And why?" asked Zadwiga, in wonder.

"Unless," added Wanda, "he is like my Niko. Imagine it, Zadwiga; I am come back to stay! We will live together, my little sister, and work together, as before."

"What!—at the theatre!"

"Yes, dear child, at the theatre. Ah, I could cry for joy! That idle, reckless life would kill me. Zadwiga, try to picture yourself a princess living in Roumania, with thirty or forty servants to do your work, a steward to look after your household, a steward to look after your forest. You have nothing to do from morning to night but eat *dulcece*, dress, dance, and play cards. Yes, Zadwiga,

cards, and for money; the women play nearly as much as the men. I forget—they have another amusement—lovers. Oh, it is true, Niko! I have heard those women talk, that call themselves great ladies. I felt as if I had lost my way in the town, and wandered into one of the bad quarters. And that is the aristocratic world which condescended in receiving an actress! Never mind; I forgive these people who wanted to patronise me—they cannot help being what they are, I suppose; it is in their blood. I have not forgotten that Roumania has been the Siberia of Rome; these great people have the blood of Roman convicts in their veins, and the vices of Roman convicts in their hearts. Never mind—I, a peasant girl, an actress, a Pole—I have been among them, and they dared not patronise me! No, when I saw what they were I was not afraid, I became proud! I thanked God that I and my sister were Poles, peasant-born! I thank God that we are actresses, with honest work

to do, with hope, ambition, art to live for!"

Wanda sprang to her feet at the end of this long speech, which she had uttered with great excitement, and flung away her travelling hat, and loosened her cloak. Her face was all aflame, her eyes brilliant. Niko gazed at her with the greatest admiration; Zadwiga with much astonishment.

At that moment they heard Karol moving about in the *salle-à-manger*. Wanda flung aside her cloak, and running in, began to lay the table, with little inarticulate cries of delight as she found every article in its old accustomed place. The domestic task which sometimes had bothered her, when her mind was full of her more important work, now appeared to her delightful in its friendliness. Karol stopped in his own work for a minute, to regard her with delight; but he had plenty to do, and hurried away to his cooking-stove, leaving the sisters in loving competition as to which could be the swiftest parlourmaid.

Niko seized his hat, and rushed out. Just as the table was spread and all was ready, he returned, carrying in his hand a great bunch of the sweet white flowers which had been his one permitted gift to Wanda before their marriage. She caught them from him with a cry of joy; and when they were placed upon the table felt that all was perfect and that she was indeed at home again.

Nowhere in all Warsaw was there such a gay supper table as this. Wanda was in the wildest spirits, and Zadwiga was full of delight. As for Niko he was both happy and astonished in observing his wife. Wanda, when in the mood, could be very witty; she was capable, also, of cruelty when she caricatured people who were not beloved by her. She began to describe Niko's friends and relations in this vein; and he was amazed to find how funny they could be made to appear. She brought out the manners and customs of his country into startling relief; her talk was like a chapter out of a racy book of

travel. Niko had never imagined that his own home had so much character. Neither had he supposed for a moment that Wanda had been indulging in such a spirit of lively observation and criticism during her visits. But her gaiety infected him, and he caught her mood, amazing Zadwiga by telling anecdotes about the people whom Wanda described. Peals of laughter rang through the rooms; and old Karol smiled constantly, so glad was he to hear such sounds again. Suddenly, in the midst of it, Zadwiga started up.

"I must go to the theatre," she exclaimed "I am almost late!"

"I shall come," cried Wanda; "I will come and dress you. And oh, my dear, I have never seen you play that part!"

Full of excitement she put on her hat and cloak again, and the whole party walked through the streets to the theatre. As they entered the stage-door and passed into the dirty passage within Wanda gave a sigh of

infinite satisfaction. These walls which bore the grease-marks of ages, and these floors and steps, trodden into a dismal monotone of grey griminess by the many feet of poor "supers" and ballerinas, these were associated in her mind with her happiest hours. That building, of which the dingy little stage-door was the well-guarded portal, was for her a temple of art, in which she had earned an independence, reaped artistic honours, and sometimes won a, to her, glorious triumph. Her step had an elasticity it had lacked during all her absence; she fairly danced up the break-neck stairway to the old familiar, dear, dreary, dressing-room. She played lady's-maid to Zadwiga with a charming, child-like manner. She took an intense interest in her "make-up."

"They all paint and powder, those Roumanians," she observed; "but it is a paltry trick when there's no purpose in it. And, besides, they don't know how to do it. That's lovely—it's a pleasure to see an

artistic make-up again. But one eyebrow is blacker than the other — let *me* alter it."

When Zadwiga was dressed, they went down together, arm-in-arm, as in the old days. But Wanda wore her travelling-dress, and her face was innocent of rouge. She was only a visitor.

At the wings they met a personage of great importance in the theatre; he filled a position which has no exact counterpart in countries where the theatres are private speculations. Here the theatre belonged to the Government, and the President was a Government official, and generally a military man. The actual management of the theatre was entrusted to what is called the "artistic leader;" this was the gentleman whom the two sisters encountered. He quickly glanced from one to the other.

"Returned, Madame?" he said to Wanda. "Welcome, a thousand times. I wish we had never lost you."

"Perhaps I am not quite lost to you," said Wanda, with her speaking smile.

"What?" said M. Rylska.

At that moment Zadwiga left them; she heard her cue, and went on to the stage.

"Come into my room," said M. Rylska, and he led Wanda into a small managerial sanctum, which was close to the stage. "Tell me," he said directly they were inside, "is there any chance of your playing for us again?"

"Every chance," said Wanda. "I am quite ready."

"Then come back to your old position," he said. "I have a new comedy I want to put on; I want you to play lead. Your sister is a very fine actress, but she does not play comedy as you do. When she is strong enough for it she must play tragic *rôles*. This part she could make nothing of by herself. I don't hesitate to say that she would never have played the one she is now in had she not seen you play it. Encourage her to study tragedy; she will be a star some day if she

works properly. Now, if you agree to take the lead in the new play, I will give you the book at once, have the reading to-morrow, and call rehearsal for the next day."

Wanda held out her hand for the book.

"Let me look at it," she said; "and I will give you my answer very soon."

She went to the wings and watched Zadwiga for the rest of the act; then she ran up with her to their dressing-room, and while Zadwiga made another toilette she looked through the new play. Then she went down to Niko, who was hovering about between the wings and the green-room, and told him all about it.

When they went home that night Wanda had formally agreed to return to the theatre and play in the new comedy. She fell asleep perfectly happy, with her play-book under her pillow, and a pleasant consciousness in her mind that she must wake early in order to study her part. The charm was upon her once more; she was living in her work again.

CHAPTER VIII.

WANDA completely outstripped her former reputation on her very first appearance in her new *rôle*. She had developed during this brief interval; during her absence she had acquired a new manner, a quicker intelligence. Then, too, she was so happy; Niko's devotion had come like a light into her existence. The misery and terrors of her early life had left a heavy cloud upon her soul, which, now that she was in her home with Zadwiga, and with her husband, had dispersed itself at last. Nothing, no present happiness, could destroy entirely the traces of the sadness of her childhood; nothing could put real mirth into her laughter, or remove the bitter melancholy which often

darkened her eyes and voice. But these marks of the knife of misery were only visible when she was stirred by some sad memory or moved to anger. At this joyous period of her life such emotions seldom visited her. Life was like one long *fête* day. She was absolutely happy at home.

Niko constituted himself the guardian of the two sisters, and made their lives brighter and easier by a thousand thoughtful arrangements. He entered into a sort of partnership with old Karol for the purpose of making every day delightful. For himself he was entirely contented. True, his mother, his château, his forests were neglected; but so they always had been. Personally he was leading a new life; he was a reformed character. His love for Wanda had stopped him on a downward career which was rapidly carrying him to total ruin. Her influence, now that she had the courage to speak out, kept him from the cards; and he lived a surprisingly innocent and unselfish daily life.

He had no particular occupation; but it never entered his head that he should have one. The Princes Ghyka were not intended for purposes of industry. Making Wanda entirely happy was, after all, a task not to be lightly regarded. One result of it was that she took a quite new position upon the stage. Happiness made her more dazzling than any diamonds could have done. Thus Niko's contented idleness served a highly utilitarian purpose.

Wanda did not forget the advice of M. Rylska about Zadwiga. She made her study tragedy in earnest; and she soon saw that his judgment had been correct. Zadwiga's power was "serious." Meanwhile the younger sister very contentedly returned to a secondary place at the theatre. That Wanda should encourage her with hopes of an attempt at tragedy in the future was enough happiness for her. She studied hard at home, working through the standard "heavy parts." At night she was well

content to play any small character that fell to her share, and to see Wanda rouse the enthusiasm of the audience. Every night Wanda received a sort of ovation. She was pronounced to be the finest comédienne Warsaw had ever seen. She was undoubtedly the prettiest woman (except her sister, who was becoming positively lovely) in the city; and her feet were as light and her movements as graceful as those of any favourite ballerina.

It seemed as if with every passing day the sisters both grew more beautiful. Happiness and successful industry are marvellous magicians. When Niko walked through the streets between these fair sisters he took to himself some of the admiration with which they were regarded. His life was so bound up in Wanda's that he felt the same pride when she was praised as if in his own person he had earned the applause. And Warsaw was really proud of its brilliant young actress; she received smiles from

every side when she went out in the day time.

But Warsaw was destined to lose this favourite. It was a thing which Wanda herself never would have imagined, that her reputation should travel abroad. But it did. Her name became known in Paris. Occasionally notices of her new *rôles* appeared in the papers; she was talked of in literary-theatrical circles. At last a great author, a celebrated writer of plays, wrote to her; he sent her a copy of a new comedy of his own, asking her if she would come to Paris and undertake to play his heroine. "We want fresh blood," he said. "Come!"

When Wanda read this she trembled and turned pale. She had never dreamed of leaving Warsaw; the mere suggestion made her thrill with excitement. Was it possible that another and larger career lay before her? that she was destined to become a European star? Wild thoughts of future triumphs rushed through her brain. But

she said nothing; only laid the letter before Niko.

"Oh, impossible," he said at first; "the French stage is no place for you. You would die among such associations. You would meet with insult you could not bear—insult you would not be able to resent, because it would not be regarded as insult. I know the character of that stage too well. It is not like this."

"You would be with me?" said Wanda, very low.

"Yes, I should be with you. I would be with you always. It might be possible. And it would be a great triumph!"

"Can I speak French well enough?" asked Wanda, her heart beating fast, her eyes brilliant with excitement.

"Ah, my child, your French is perfect!" cried Niko. "Listen: suppose you ask for leave at the theatre; we can at least go to Paris, if only for a holiday; then we can see the author, the manager; we can talk about

it, if no more. There will be no harm in that!"

This appeared to Wanda an admirable suggestion. She had a great desire to see Paris, and in any case the visit would be a pleasure. There was a great deal of discussion about the project; the letter which originated it was read a dozen times; and at last Wanda ran away to her own room and locked herself in with the play. Zadwiga smiled, a smile of delicate mournfulness which sometimes came upon her face.

"I think she will do it," she said to Niko, "and I shall be alone again. But I would rather she went," she added, in answer to a look of Niko's. "I am proud of my sister. She will be great, I am sure of that. And you will always take care of her?"

"You may trust me!" said Niko, in a tone of much meaning.

When M. Rylska heard that Wanda wished for a holiday, he determined, during her absence, to put on a play which would

give an opportunity for testing Zadwiga's powers in tragedy. This decision of his caused great excitement to the sisters; Wanda was almost as absorbed in Zadwiga's studies for her new venture as she was in her own. Whether she was absolutely decided in her own mind to attempt this appearance in Paris her companions could not tell; but certainly she studied the *rôle* as if she was. Niko lived with a playbook in his hands, and one sister or the other was perpetually rehearsing to him. He was continually criticising, advising, playing the part of the dramatic critic in private. The two sisters walked about in a dream; neither was herself. Each lived in her new character, thought of it all day, dreamt of it all night.

At last came the day for the departure of Niko and Wanda, and then the enthusiasts broke down and cried desperately at the idea of parting. They said little, but there was a feeling that this was a real separation, not

one which would quickly be over as the last had been.

Zadwiga hurried away from the station to a rehearsal at the theatre; and when she came on to the stage with her lovely face so pale, and her great, mournful eyes still dewy and dim with tears, even her rivals looked at her with admiration.

CHAPTER IX.

ZADWIGA's first appearance in tragedy was by no means an unqualified success. She was extremely nervous, and a sense of solitude added to this distress. There was no one to help her to dress, to tell her she had "made up" well, to reassure her about her appearance, to encourage her as she went on. A thousand dreadful doubts assailed her, and she had no one who loved her enough to set them at rest. At the last moment she became convinced that she had laced her dress in the wrong holes, so that it was pulled awry; and she walked on to the stage expecting the people to burst out laughing at this sight. But there was no sign made by

the audience that her appearance was funny, and at last she became convinced that they were being kind to her because she had pleased them before. Only when she left the stage, and had time to glance at herself in the long mirror in the green room, did she know that her dress was perfectly in order, and that she looked admirably beautiful. It was this extreme beauty—a gift which has always a great power with the public—and an appealing timidity of manner which won her a hearing. She never knew how nearly she had escaped failure that night. She was not surprised that she had been received so quietly, for she had never yet aroused enthusiasm as Wanda had. Zadwiga was a real artist, anxious above all things to be true to her art. This made her nervous and timid when first appearing in a part so much beyond anything she had attempted before. But when she grew a little accustomed to the work she became more at ease, more capable of effort and of developing her power. With each re-

presentation she gained a little more hold on her audiences.

Suddenly, one evening, Zadwiga really roused her audience. She had come on to the stage in a new mood—a mood in which the grief which she represented appeared to her to be real, and to be the one real thing in the world. Her heart was like lead within her, and the tears and sobs of her mimic sorrow were to her as a language, and she gave them with a meaning which she had been incapable of until now, for she realised for the first time that she was absolutely alone in the world.

Wanda would not return from Paris; she had agreed to play there. She would have a great triumph. Zadwiga felt certain of that, for she knew that every nerve in Wanda's body would be alive with the determination to succeed. And when Wanda was on fire like that she carried her audience with her. Zadwiga had no doubt about her success; she felt, or it seemed to her that she knew,

that Wanda would never return, except, perhaps, for a brief visit. The separation was now completed. Zadwiga knew that henceforth she must live and work and fight on—alone. She was full of gladness that Wanda should have a great career; but her heart seemed to bleed at the thought of standing alone in the world with no one to cling to, no one to love, to admire, to adore!

That night Zadwiga won her position as a tragédienne. After this the play had a long run, and she found herself suddenly regarded as a serious and valuable artist. This was an intense delight to her; to become an artist in the true sense—not a mere drudger for daily bread, a trifler on the verge and skirts of the art—was worth living for, even in solitude! This flame of ardent ambition kept her alive; it gave her a purpose for which to exist. Otherwise she would have shrunk away into a convent to escape from her solitary life.

Now that she was entirely alone Zadwiga gradually acquired the habit of living a life

quite double in character. Although at night she was a favourite actress, standing in the glare of the footlights, and earning enthusiastic applause, in the day-time she was more like a nun than anything else. Early in the morning she went to the Church of the Holy Cross, and spent long hours upon her knees. The rest of the day she lived among her books. Old Karol had resumed his task of watching her like a gendarme. He attended her everywhere, and was always at hand. He only left her when she was in the church or on the stage. His figure was very well known in the town, and it was quite understood that he played the part of a watch dog. Perhaps his task was hardly a necessary one. Zadwiga's sad, sweet face, with its veil of perfect innocence, was in itself enough to silence insult. Her habits were well known to her admirers; and very often men who had adored her from the stalls overnight waited outside the church in the morning for the sake of a look at her exquisite face in the daylight.

She seldom guessed this, though now and then a keener scrutiny than usual would bring a flush to her cheeks.

One result of Zadwiga's peculiar quality of earnestness was that she never saw the house she played to. To her the stage was a magic spot, separated from all other human life. She knew the audience was there, of course, but when she looked towards it she could only see a grey cloud. She moved as if she were really living the story which she enacted; and she was attaining the power now, which only a great actress ever possesses, of cheating those who played with her into a sense of reality. One night Zadwiga felt as if something had happened to her. She had seen a face in the audience. She was startled. For a moment it seemed to her that her brain lost its power, and as if every word of her part had gone out of her mind. She had been fascinated by the gaze of one pair of eyes. She was accustomed to the gaze of hundreds of eyes every night of her life; but

these eyes had by some strange power drawn her own to them, and a look had been interchanged. One face alone in all that crowded house had separated itself from out the mist, and she had seen it clear.

The sensation lasted, in reality, but for a second. She at once recovered herself, her memory returned, and she went on with her words. But she did not dare again to look towards that portion of the house.

Yet she felt that those blue eyes were still fastened on her. Positively she had been able to see that they were blue. More than that, she had seen that they were honest and clear, and had a delightful smile in them. A vibration passed through her sensitive frame when she remembered that this gaze was upon her.

The next evening she experienced the same sensation. The moment she went on to the stage she met the gaze of those blue eyes, and it filled her with a sense of friendliness. This appeared to her to be a different regard from

that of the hundreds who came to stare at her nightly, and to applaud her when she pleased them. There was something human, something which spoke to her, in this look.

The blue eyes which affected her so strongly belonged to a young Englishman. His name was Arthur Dene; he belonged to a family whose long lineage and pure blood made it as great and as proud as any in England. He was fond of travelling, and had recently been through Russia, where he was frequently taken for a royal prince, because his manners were so admirable, because he was so handsome and rich, and because, in spite of all difficulties, he took a bath every day. But Arthur Dene's family would not have changed the simple name he owned for a ducal title; they would not have cared to lose sight of it even under the splendour of royalty. From everything modern they held aloof, as from something vulgar; they lived in a remote, proud atmosphere of ancient dignity.

Arthur Dene was an admirable example of the personal advantages to be derived from a long line of noble-living ancestors. He was of that type which induces the remark that the English is the finest race in the world. He had the air of possessing a perfect physique, of containing within himself all admirable manly qualities. His manners had the negative but permanent charm of extreme repose. His hair, which struggled in vain to be allowed sufficient length to curl, was fair, and so was the thick down which had grown unchecked on his upper lip during his travels. His skin had that delicate appearance underneath the bronze of wind and weather which is peculiar to the healthy Englishman. His shoulders had the sturdy breadth of powerful physical strength; yet his wrists and neck were white as a woman's. The dark-skinned Russian women had made a hero of him; but fortunately he could not understand them when they remarked upon his

beauty in their own language. If he had understood, he would have been very much astonished.

Arthur Dene had thoroughly imbibed the family pride in which he had been born and bred. He appreciated his position, and understood the duties which it entailed on him. When his father died he would be the sole male representative of that branch of the family. On him all hopes were centred. He would have the management of great estates; he must carry on the honourable tradition of the race; he must marry, as his fathers had done before him, a woman whose blood was as blue as his own, whose name was equal in dignity. But in the meantime he found much entertainment in seeing what the rest of the world was like. At different times he had been to most of the great capitals, and had penetrated into the most exclusive society of the various aristocracies. This mingling in Continental life had given to his naturally

subdued manner a singular softness and charm.

At home Arthur Dene was one of the great *partis* of the day; when he stayed so long abroad many mothers dreaded to hear that he was bringing home a wife from some ducal family of France, or perhaps a Russian beauty. But every season he appeared in London, free and heart-whole, and submitted to be courted with an admirable grace.

He was still quite young, and his father was well content to wait awhile.

This was the man who, on his first evening in Warsaw, went into the theatre where Zadwiga was playing. He could not understand Polish, but he was told that it was worth while to go, only to look at Zadwiga. And he went. The next morning he obtained a copy of the play, and then paid a poor teacher of languages to read it to him, translating, as he went on, into bad French. Feeling that he had now some idea of what Zadwiga talked about, he went to see her

again. When the performance was over he went round to the stage door and boldly asked if it was possible to see Mademoiselle Milovitch.

"Quite impossible, sir," said the stage-door keeper, who had learned his lesson from old Karol. "Strangers are never admitted; and Mademoiselle Milovitch receives no visitors."

Arthur Dene took up his post on the opposite side of the way. Someone else was waiting, close to the stage-door—old Karol. When Zadwiga came out, wrapped in her furs and closely veiled, she put her hand on the man-servant's arm, and they walked away together very quickly. But Arthur Dene followed them, and observed the house they entered.

The next day he used one or two of his introductions, and was immediately invited to dine with some of the gilded youth of the city at a certain club that same evening. This was exactly what he wanted. He went,

and took the first opportunity of leading the conversation to the theatre, and thus to Zadwiga.

"Ah, the *Nun*; she is not gay, not *ravissante* like her sister; but she is a very fine actress, and, moreover, the loveliest girl in Warsaw."

"Why do you call her the *Nun?*" asked Arthur Dene.

"Because she lives the life of a nun. She might just as well be in a convent. She exists in absolute seclusion. Everybody knows that she goes to the Church of the Holy Cross to early Mass each morning; and most of us have been there at some time or other for the sake of seeing her beautiful face. But I'll take my oath that no man in Warsaw would accost her. It would be like insulting a woman who had taken the vows of the Church."

"And her sister?" asked Arthur Dene.

"Wanda the gay, the delicious, is in Paris. The sisters were inseparable. But

Wanda married a Prince Ghyka, and her reputation was so perfect that his family had to receive her much against its will. But she was too true an artist to leave the stage."

"And she is in Paris?" repeated Arthur.

"Yes, and the beautiful Zadwiga lives in solitary confinement. It is a pity, but she is so obstinate!"

The next morning Arthur Dene went to early Mass at the Church of the Holy Cross. He waited within sight of the church until he saw the slender figure, accompanied by the sturdy one of the old man-servant, disappear within. Very quietly Arthur entered by another door. Before long Karol rose from his knees, and left the church. During Zadwiga's long stay there he usually did certain necessary marketings, and then returned for her.

Zadwiga knelt, motionless, at the altar of St. Joseph. Every day she laid a few fresh flowers upon it.

A little tablet was let into the wall at the

side of this altar. Upon it were written these words:

> You who read this,
> Pray with faith, as I did,
> And St. Joseph will obtain your request.

This inscription was initialed and dated. None knew its meaning but the priest who had placed it there; but many a hungry heart had leaped up at the sight of the words, and many a passionate prayer was breathed at that altar. Zadwiga came here daily to utter the one request, which would not be suppressed, yet which she told herself was selfish. Yet how burning was her prayer. If Arthur Dene could have seen into her heart!

She was praying for someone to love her; not as the "gilded youth" would understand loving her, but with a sentiment which would equal her ideal of love.

She rose from her knees to go to another altar. Arthur Dene stood motionless before her, his eyes meeting hers.

For a second she felt as if she must fall upon her knees again. But she recovered her self-possession and moved away to the altar of the Virgin. Here she remained kneeling, absolutely motionless, her face hidden, until Karol had returned.

When she rose, afraid, yet calmed by her devotions, she glanced about her quickly. Arthur Dene was not there. He had left the church.

Zadwiga knew when she was on the stage that night, without any need of looking, that Arthur Dene was there again. Resolutely she refused to look; but she was fully conscious that his gaze was on her. Next morning, when she went to church, she dared not lift her veil; but she knew that he was there—that his eyes were on her while she prayed.

She moved in a dream; she was haunted by something which she could not understand. Was it fear?—or hope? She could not tell; but she looked forward with a

strange mingling of emotion to leaving her home at night and morning, for she knew she would meet him.

For days this went on; at last the days counted into weeks. Zadwiga began to wonder, dumbly, what it meant. She had no *confidante*, no friend to guide or advise; she was alone, wrapped close in her modesty and pride.

Arthur Dene was in a strange state. He was immensely perplexed to find himself so absolutely fascinated. Every day he endeavoured to reason himself out of it; every night found him at the theatre, absorbed and charmed as ever. He was obliged to confess to himself at last that his first impression had been absolutely correct. Zadwiga was the loveliest girl he had ever seen. He was never weary of watching her. Nowhere—in London, in St. Petersburg, in Paris, in society, on the stage, among professional beauties of any sort—had he seen a woman whose

charm was so immediate, so admirable, so permanent.

It was possible that all this was but external beauty; that her acting, her style, showed good training rather than intelligence. That might be. Arthur Dene resolved to fix a limit to his madness. He would speak to her, find out what she herself was like, and then—go. But go without knowing her, without having spoken with her, that he found simply impossible. She interested him too deeply.

He would have found it very easy to get into the green-room of the theatre, as Demetri had done, by the introduction of a friend of one of the ballerinas. But that he did not care to do. He did not think it would be of any use.

At last he met the President of the theatre in society; got introduced to him, and after some conversation asked him point blank if he would take him behind the scenes some night. The President, regarding

Arthur in the light of a distinguished visitor to the city, could hardly refuse.

"I shall be at the theatre to-morrow night," he said. "Come to my box, and I will take you round."

CHAPTER X.

Arthur Dene was at the theatre, as usual, the next evening; and he saw with pleasure that the President was in his box. He chose an opportune moment to go to him; Zadwiga had just been called three times. It seemed natural to speak of her.

"Is it not possible to meet her anywhere?" asked Arthur. "I hear she does not associate with the ladies of the theatre, and yet it does not seem that she goes into society."

"She does not," replied the President. "People have not forgotten yet that her mother was a ballerina. But her sister has been received by her husband's family; and Mademoiselle Milovitch is taking a high

position. Madame Lubelski would go and call on her in a moment, if anyone suggested the idea to her. I think I will do so!"

"Who is Madame Lubelski?" asked Arthur.

"Have you not been to their house? They are the great bankers of the city. Oh, you must go. Everyone who visits Warsaw must visit the Lubelskis. They are here to-night in the opposite box. I will take you to them presently."

Arthur Dene glanced across and saw two young ladies in the front of the box, of a pronounced Jewish type. But he did not scrutinise them very closely, for Zadwiga was on the stage, and her presence was sufficient to absorb his whole attention. When the act was over the President rose and said, "Come now, I will take you round to the Lubelskis' box."

Arthur followed him, and the two went round the house, talking as they went, of Zadwiga. Arthur's extreme quiet of manner

entirely deceived the President; it did not occur to him that there was anything in the interest which he showed in Mademoiselle Milovitch beyond admiration for a rising artiste. This pleased the President, for he had the highest opinion of Zadwiga's talent himself, and he thought a great deal of the judgment of a travelled and distinguished Englishman. He took Arthur Dene into the Lubelskis' box and introduced him. Arthur felt himself to be in the midst of a veritable branch of the great family of Abraham. The handsome young Jewesses spoke not only admirable French but very fair English; and Arthur found them very pleasant to talk to. But he could hear, with the keenness of interested ears, that the President and Madame Lubelski, who were at the back of the box, mentioned Zadwiga's name.

Before he left the box Madame Lubelski invited him to a dance at the Lubelski Palace later in the week. He accepted without hesitation, for the President had put it into

his mind that through the Lubelskis' it might be possible to know Zadwiga.

The next day Zadwiga was completely bewildered by receiving a brief visit of ceremony from Madame Lubelski. She was so essentially unworldly in temperament, that it had never occurred to her that as she became more distinguished society would stretch out a hand to her and draw her from her solitude. She could not appreciate Madame Lubelski's kindly visit at its full significance. But old Karol did. He rubbed his hands and chuckled to himself for hours afterwards. He knew very well that Zadwiga's mother would never have been noticed by this great lady. The story of the unhappy, beautiful ballerina was forgotten now, and Zadwiga was accepted as an artiste.

Zadwiga had promised to go to Madame Lubelski's dance. The prospect held no pleasure for her. She was not afraid of the people she would meet; but she fancied them unsympathetic. And it was strange,

too, to remember that her face and voice must be familiar to nearly all of them, while they were unknown to her. But she possessed a settled peace of mind which raised her out of the small fears and nervous apprehensions which would have beset most girls placed as she was. One cause of this quietude was that she was not vain. She believed she could pass unnoticed and unmolested in any social gathering; that she could remain aside, solitary, nun-like, in Madame Lubelski's salon, as in the green-room of the theatre.

But it was not so. The appearance of Zadwiga's sweet, serious face caused a perceptible, though suppressed sensation. Everybody stared at her, either covertly or openly. She was perfectly dressed, and a faint flush which came into her face when she observed that she was an object of attention made her more lovely than usual. All the men wanted to be introduced to her, to dance with her. There was something

piquant in this sudden appearance in their midst of an artiste and a beauty who had hitherto dwelt in such complete seclusion.

Madame Lubelski, whose eyes were very keen, saw by the faint shade of anxiety on Zadwiga's face that she shrank from finding herself the centre of a crowd of her male admirers. So she introduced her to a Polish singer, in whose society she thought the young actress would feel at home. He talked to her about her acting, and about Wanda, whom he had seen in Paris during a recent professional tour of his own. Zadwiga's face flushed with delight when she heard this. To meet someone who had actually seen her dear Wanda in her new part, amid her new glories! It had never occurred to her that at the Lubelskis' house she would meet with so delightful an acquaintance as this artiste who could speak so charmingly of Wanda. She gladly consented to dance the mazurka with this countryman, who had been so happy as to have seen her sister.

Arthur Dene danced this mazurka with one of the Lubelskis' sisters, with whom he carried on a languid conversation in English. All the while his eyes were following Zadwiga, observing her delicate and brilliant face, her light and exquisite movements.

After the mazurka came the great supper, which is something very different from a ball supper in England. To begin with, there is a quaint fashion of separating the old people from the young; all the matrons and middle-aged gentlemen sup at one table together, the younger people at another, and those who are but recently out of the school-room at a third. Arthur Dene took his partner down somewhat disconsolately; he feared that at such a great gathering there would be little chance of seeing even his love's face during the supper, and he knew from the experience he had already had of entertainments in Warsaw that this meal would be a long one. But to his delight he found her almost opposite—near enough to speak to. Miss Lubel-

ski began at once to talk to her, and Arthur, with his admirably quiet manner, succeeded very soon in making himself one in their conversation. How he blessed that gorgeous and prolonged supper—it seemed to him the most delightful repast which mortal could ever hope to have. When at last they rose from the table Arthur quickly got to Zadwiga's side and asked her to dance the Mazur Blanche with him.

To his delight she was not engaged!—to his delight she consented. He knew well what this meant when he asked it. It meant some hours spent in each other's society, for this after-supper dance is called the White Muzurka, because it is kept up till the daylight is broad and clear.

He could not make her talk to him with as much ease and gaiety as she had shown when with her former partner. Her hand, as it lay on his arm, seemed to speak of absolute confidence, yet her manner was intensely shy. But a powerful instinct taught him

how to interest her. He soon discovered that the less frivolous and superficial his talk was the more her face lit and her eyes brightened. Her voice had a greater charm for him here than on the stage. She had a habit when not upon the stage of speaking in a singularly low tone; but she was perfectly audible, because her articulation was so admirable. To Arthur's ears this delicious softness of speech seemed absolute music. Her words were chosen with an unconscious carefulness, the result of much solitary reading. Before he had been half-an-hour with her Arthur knew that she was a highly cultivated woman, who, away from the stage, had nothing of the paint or the spangles about her.

He had deluded himself with the idea that when he knew her he should not care for her; that disenchantment awaited him; that he had only to talk to her and his passion would be cured. That delusion was at an end, and he recognised that it had been merely a subterfuge, an excuse which he had made to

himself for persistently endeavouring to know her. He had believed in her all the time as firmly as he believed in the existence of good.

The White Mazurka came to an end at last —daylight had flooded the world outside. The guests were all cloaking themselves in their furs. Arthur watched his opportunity, and had the delight of putting Zadwiga's wrap around her shoulders. Then, in a moment, she was gone.

Standing aside to let the other guests pass out he overheard a remark murmured in French by one of the Lubelski brothers.

"She is a lovely creature, the Milovitch. But she is doomed to be unhappy, for she has the face of a woman who can only love where she can marry. She will never marry an actor; and it seems hardly likely that another prince will make a *mésalliance* for the sake of a Milovitch!"

Arthur shrank away unseen, the murmured words repeating themselves over and over

again in his ears. At last it seemed to him that he had been saying over one sentence all his life—"She has the face of a woman who can only love where she can marry." He found his way out of the house in a sort of stupor, as regarded other things; but his mind was illumined by these words. He saw his position—he understood what lay before him. He knew clearly, now, that he was in the power of that passion, which in its full force visits men but once in a lifetime, and some men visits not at all.

Arthur had never suspected himself of being capable of such a fierce and sudden growth of feeling. But now he knew he was one of the favoured who can love, and to whom the passion comes like a swift awakening of life. A crowd of new sensations passed through him; he was powerless beneath their strength. Yet it was a rare, an absorbing, delight to know he was no longer in command of himself, to submit to emotions which were greater than any he had dreamt

of, and to have no control over them. It was like becoming a living instrument of music, and feeling the touch of the master hand upon the vibrating chords.

Through the streets, in the clear morning light, he wandered on, with that sentence which had awakened him to his position repeating itself continually in his mind. It was true, so absolutely true! And what was he thinking of? Whither was his madness leading him? Zadwiga was no ordinary woman. Her nature was revealed in her clear, grave face. She would love once and for all, and would only love honestly. Her eyes had a still purity in them which, so far, Arthur had never discovered in those of an English beauty, even in her first season. The man who dared to love Zadwiga must be capable of reverence as well as passion. There could be no question about that to anyone who looked in her face.

And he, Arthur Dene, of Dene Court, felt himself capable of making any conceivable

personal sacrifice in order to marry her. When the words formed themselves seriously in his mind, his heart seemed to leap within him. God did not prevent this union. Who should? No one had the power to prevent such a marriage. Zadwiga was an actress, a girl born of the peasantry; the daughter of a ballet-dancer! He thought of his father, of his mother, of his home and his position. He knew that the thing was an impossibility. What was to be done? His heart had sunk till it seemed a lump of lead within him. A train left Warsaw early in the morning. Should he tear himself away now before it was too late? One thing was still possible—Zadwiga should never know! Zadwiga need not suffer!

He hurried to his hotel, determined to pack up and leave the city. When he got to his room, and actually began to put the things together, his courage deserted him. It was impossible. He could not go without seeing her again. Why should he be more cruel to

himself than he would be to any other man? It was ridiculous to hurry away like a thief. He had stolen nothing yet! Why might he not wait, and grant himself one more sight of her at the door of the church?

He sat down and fell into a profound reverie. Successive pictures passed before his mind. He saw himself here with Zadwiga, who smiled on him; he saw himself at home, without her. Always without her! Impossible! Impossible!

And yet he found another thing impossible also. That was to picture himself with her at home. That could not be! Impossible! It would kill his mother. It would estrange him entirely from his father. And his own pride of family appeared to shudder at the thought, like a creature which was not himself yet was within him. He could not separate himself from it; yet now, for the first time in his life, he wished it were not a part of him. Why had he ever come to this fatal city? But this cry he did not repeat;

he knew that he would rather suffer his present struggle of mind than have lived without seeing Zadwiga. It appeared to him now as if a life unlit by her glance could only be likened to a country without sunshine. He had never desired to be a Greenlander. No, he said to himself fiercely, he would take the sunshine and be thankful. One more day, at least, he would grant to himself—one more look from those gentle eyes.

And then—home!

Dene Court and duty for the first time appeared to him as synonymous terms.

Suddenly, as he sat, a brief sleep overpowered him, and he dreamed that he and Zadwiga were on a gilded barge, sailing down a wide, smooth stream; and in the dream it seemed to him that they had started on a voyage of pleasure, which was to last for ever—for ever! And in his sleep this strange idea of continued happiness did not surprise him; the sunshine of dreamland which lay on the water was not more intoxi-

catingly sweet than the sunshine in his own heart, yet this appeared to him to be quite natural and fit. Ah, delightful dreamland!

The sound of a clock striking woke him from this happy sleep, which had lasted but a few minutes. He started up, for it was close upon the time for early Mass; changing his dress, he went out with a strange sobriety upon him. He understood that he was now being made to share the common lot of man. Misfortune had found him out at last. He had seen the fairest thing in the world, to his eyes; he had entertained an exultant sense that he might make it his own if he would. And simply because he was himself he must go by and leave it.

Well, be it so. A solemnity as of an eternal farewell seemed to separate him from the sunshine and the gay morning life of the streets.

Zadwiga came to this unacknowledged rendezvous in a very different humour. Something was rising and stirring in her;

there was a tremor, as of a creature awaking—she was all quivering with doubtful, uncertain happiness. She did not know what made her feel so strange; she knew still less that her eyes were radiant with the waking life which poured from them. She felt that the morning was completed when her eyes fell on Arthur's form. She no longer classed him, even remotely, with those promiscuous admirers of hers, those knights of the pavement, who filled her with such terror and disgust.

As they met, and the morning greeting was exchanged, her eyes said all this and a thousand more things which were as yet unformulated in her mind, but only stirring in her heart. Old Karol stood aside. He understood that Arthur Dene was an authorised acquaintance. Arthur felt capable of great daring, with the consciousness in his mind that this was to be his last sight of her sweet face. He opened the swinging door for her; he entered the church by her side;

and when she fell on her knees at the altar of St. Joseph, he knelt beside her.

Who knows what silent interchange of sympathy and thought is possible? How much may be said by the heart without spoken words? When these two rose from the altar where they had knelt side by side there were tears in the eyes of each. In the dim silence of that sacred place a deep and solemn vow had been pledged in two faithful hearts.

He followed her to the church door; he would say that heavy and terrible farewell outside, beneath the shelter of the church. As the door swung behind them she raised her tender eyes to his face.

"Are you coming to the skating?" she asked.

"Skating?" he repeated, not understanding her.

"Yes—you know it is Sunday, when people amuse themselves all day. I have promised to go with the Lubelskis to the lake at

Luzienki. You should see it, it is very pretty, and to-day everyone will be there—all Warsaw. For myself, I have never seen it, because I had no one to go with before; I am so glad to go!"

"I will be there, certainly!" said Arthur, entirely forgetting the eternal farewell which he ought to have uttered. It was absurd to leave Warsaw on a Sunday, when everyone was gay!

"Good-bye," said Zadwiga.

Old Karol was waiting for her, and they quickly walked away together.

Good-bye! Why, what a charming, light, and hopeful word it sounded from her lips!

CHAPTER XI.

Loitering away from the church, Arthur met some of his acquaintances. They told him they were going to High Mass, and then to see the pictures, and then to the skating. Arthur detached himself from them as soon as possible, but not without accepting a seat in a sledge for the drive to the lake. In the afternoon his friend called for him; Arthur wrapped himself in a fur coat, and then got in under the great fur rug which covered the sledge.

Everybody appeared to be driving out to the skating. All the world was there, so to speak. Arrived at the lake, Arthur deserted his friends and joined the Lubelski party. He soon found that the ladies all skated

except Zadwiga, who had never had the opportunity of learning. The others were in doubt what to do for her amusement, when Arthur Dene with much humility asked if he might be allowed to push her about in a chair? This arrangement was soon made, and Arthur found himself all at once in a state of wonderful bliss; the gay and brilliant scene was but a fit setting off for his rapturous thoughts.

Many other admirers skated ambitiously round Zadwiga's flying chair, but most of them were a little afraid of her; and, besides, the Englishman seemed determined to have it all his own way.

What a wonderful afternoon that was! Arthur's dream of the gilded barge was hardly more delightful.

There was something in every word which Zadwiga uttered which removed her farther and farther from his idea of an actress, from his experience of actresses—and, indeed, from all ordinary and commonplace womanhood.

Like all real lovers, he believed this woman whom he loved to be unique.

The afternoon grew less bright; the sun was thinking of leaving the world to freeze. People began to take off their skates and summon their sledges. Arthur saw his golden hour vanishing for ever.

He put thought aside; he yielded himself with a fierce delight to impulse, to emotion. In a swift moment that seemed to be born of fate, and to be more pregnant than all other moments of his existence, he told Zadwiga that he loved her; that he wanted her to be his wife.

Zadwiga had loved him unconsciously since first their eyes met. His words gave her consciousness. Her eyes, her trembling lips, told him this, and answered him without speech.

"Are you coming to the concert, Mr. Dene?" asked the voice of one of the Miss Lubelskis. "We are all going; you ought to hear Zaknenski—he sings to-day."

Arthur looked at Zadwiga; he read in her eye that she was going to this concert, and quickly replied that he also intended to be there.

"Come and sit with us, then," said Miss Lubelski; "we have another seat."

He helped the ladies to get into their nests of fur, and saw them carried away by the swift large horses. Then he found another friend to take him back to the city.

At the concert he refused all other offers of hospitality—he said he had promised to sit with the Lubelskis. And when he reached them his reward was rich, for the vacant seat was next Zadwiga.

Possessed of a rare secret known but to themselves, these two sat silently side by side, and to them it seemed that the music which fell upon their ears was but a faint and dim accompaniment to the music in their hearts.

After the concert Zadwiga hurried away; for there was the performance at the theatre

in the evening as usual. A continental Sunday gives the artiste no rest. She wanted a few moments alone in which to recover herself after this day of gaiety, of happiness, of wonderful new life. She was lost in a dream, which made her real existence, her work at the theatre, all appear unreal and trivial.

At home Karol looked at her brilliant face in wonder. Was it only the unusual gaiety which had so lit her eyes? Or had that Englishman, who had so quietly haunted her of late, anything to do with it? Karol thought, suspected, wondered, and was silent while Zadwiga sang aloud unconsciously. Her soft voice reached his ear from her room; he paused in his work and wondered afresh. There was something new, even in her voice.

For five whole days after this happy Sunday, Arthur only saw Zadwiga across the footlights at the theatre. He went to the church every morning—but she did not

come. He was stupified. What could this mean? It did not occur to him that in her shyness and timidity and her ignorance of life, Zadwiga shrank from the very rendezvous which she longed to keep. The first morning she said she was tired and would not go out; the second day she timidly suggested to Karol that they should go to another church. The old man fixed his eyes on her in wonder and inquiry; and then Zadwiga could no longer keep her secret. Karol mistrusted the Englishman, but he would not wound Zadwiga by saying so. Only he applauded her intention of going to another church. And he took occasion during the day to tell her some sad stories of betrayal, of ardent love soon dying away and ending in cruelty and neglect. He threw out hints and suggestions, to which Zadwiga made no answer. She knew his goodwill towards her, and she did not resent his words. But they saddened her inexpressibly. Was it possible that such true love as hers

could be betrayed, that such a face as Arthur's might be false? All sorts of terrible doubts rushed into her trembling heart. She resolved that she would not be too ready to take that which might be snatched away from her again. Karol saw her altered manner with silent approval. He believed that Arthur Dene was only amusing himself here, and that he would choose his wife in England, from his own rank. The young Englishman's quiet manner indicated no absorbing passion to Karol, who knew but little of the undemonstrative races.

On the third day Arthur Dene, who was becoming desperate under this enforced deprivation of his sunshine, went to Zamojiski's Palace and knocked at the door of Zadwiga's flat. Old Karol opened it, and a singular look came into his eyes when he saw who stood there. In answer to Arthur's enquiry whether it was possible to see Zadwiga, he said that as Mademoiselle Milovitch lived alone, she received no visitors.

"Is that the custom in Warsaw?" asked Arthur, hoping it might be possible to make friends with this old servant.

"It is, Monsieur," replied Karol.

"Then I must apologise, for I did not know it," said Arthur. There was evidently nothing more to be said, so he went away.

If he had but known that Zadwiga was leaning against the wall, inside the door, drinking in the sounds of his voice!

"My little Mademoiselle," said old Karol, "he is very good to look at and he is a gentleman. Wait and see."

Arthur had an instinctive feeling that she would not like him to come to the stage door, and so far he had avoided it. But now he felt he must see her under any circumstances. So when the play was over he went and waited within a shadow, for he did not care to stand under Karol's inquiring gaze.

At last she came out, wrapped up and veiled so that her features were indistinguishable. But her slight form and light step

were enough to recognise her by. The old manservant was there, ready for her.

Arthur stepped boldly up to them and spoke to Zadwiga.

"May I walk home with you?" he asked. "I want so much to speak to you."

"I would rather you did not," she answered. "Remember that I am quite alone in the world."

"Oh, but this is dreadful!" he said, in real distress; "I can never see you!"

"We may meet, perhaps," she said timidly, "as we have met before."

She stood a moment with her eyes upon his face, full of love, of questioning, of earnest wonder. Karol spoke to her, very low, in Polish.

"Karol says I shall catch cold if I stand here," she said, in French, to Arthur; "and I am afraid he is right. Good-bye."

She held out her hand to him, and he felt that her heart spoke in its warm pressure. Then she quickly went away over the frozen

snow with Karol at her side. Arthur watched her out of sight and then went back to his hotel. There he fell into one of those fits of thought which had lately become habitual to him.

He saw that though her instincts led her to trust him, she was afraid to yield to them. He saw, too, that her shyness was born of a deep and admirable pride. It was easy to perceive that she realised the position she was in, a young, lovely woman, alone in the world and engaged in a profession where quick tongues blow away a reputation as though it were a feather of no account. Her eyes had told him to-night that not even love would tempt her to put herself in the power of those same slayers of fair fame. It was a horrible thought, that she could be afraid of him! not absolutely, perhaps, but a little. With her heart she confided in him—to that conviction he clung; but undoubtedly with her reason she feared to trust him too completely.

A frenzy seized upon him. Supposing that she would promise to wait for him—and this was all he could hope for—what prospect lay in the future? He must go back to England, to his home where already he knew the old people were longing for his return. If in a year he could return to Warsaw it would be as soon as he could hope for. How soon he could attempt to break to his parents the news of his engagement he did not know; that part of the business he regarded with despair. It appeared at present to be entirely impossible; he tried to believe that time or circumstances might make it easier. But how could they? And while waiting for time and circumstances to accomplish the impossible, he must leave Zadwiga alone here, in Warsaw, upon that terrible stage, where her loveliness was a thing which men might stare at for the mere price of a seat. How would she bear this? How could he make her understand his position, and the necessity which forced him to leave her here

alone? When this thought clearly formed itself, and he saw how heavy a demand he would make upon her, in leaving her with only a promise—worse still, how great a risk he would run of losing her—then he saw that he was indeed standing at the edge of deep water. He must plunge, or he must turn and go back. He must either give up everything to his pride of family, and his sense of the impossibility of such a marriage; or he must scatter the happiness of his home, and create talk too dreadful to contemplate, by making the announcement that he intended to marry an actress of low birth.

One fact he clung to with the full obstinacy of his steady nature. He would not give up Zadwiga. At the same time he felt that some revolution must take place before she could appear at Dene Court as his wife.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT was a sleepless night for Arthur Dene. All through the darkness he paced his room, or sat still staring before him. When the dawn broke he flung open his window and leaned out into the fresh air. The new light in the sky seemed to bring something like itself into his mind.

"I will marry her now!" he said aloud. "If she is my wife, why should she not leave the stage at once? Perhaps it might be so managed that the people at home should never know she had been on it. Surely that is a good idea! I will go to Madame Lubelski, make her my confidant, and ask her how to carry it out. She will be able to suggest something!"

He had determined to make the plunge. He felt suddenly younger, stronger, and happier now that he had resolved, whatever it might cost him, that he would not lose Zadwiga.

All that morning he walked restlessly about the streets, revolving his projects in his mind. His plan filled him with delight. He was feverishly anxious to carry it out. Later in the day he caught sight of the two Misses Lubelski, who were shopping in company with their chaperon. Arthur determined to seize the opportunity—there was just the chance that he might find Madame Lubelski alone. He quickly turned and walked to the Lubelski Palace.

Madame Lubelski received him with the genial smile which gave a charm to her dark handsome face. She liked Arthur Dene very much, and her face wore its pleasantest expression for him. She spoke very fair English, and it was a consolation to Arthur to know that he could state his case in his

own language, for, like most Englishmen, he was decidedly more fluent in that than in any other.

After a little general talk, he began to speak about Zadwiga, and then led Madame Lubelski into telling him all she knew about Wanda's marriage. She could tell him nothing that he had not known before, for she had only heard the general gossip of the town about it. But this subject took the conversation into the channel he wanted it to run in. Suddenly he said, rather bitterly, that he sincerely wished that family pride and distinctions of class were not so strong in his own country. "Our insular life makes us a stubborn race, I suppose," he said, "but with us such a *mésalliance* would be a miserable thing. If a man braved the opinion of his family and married as Prince Ghyka has done, his own and his wife's existence would become a burden to them."

He looked up and met a keen glance of kindly inquiry in Madame Lubelski's eyes.

He resolved to take the plunge at once. He asked her straight out whether she would be his friend, and whether she would keep a secret for him. She pledged herself willingly to both. In truth, she was a little flattered by Arthur's ready apprehension of her generous spirit; and few women, even less good-natured than herself, would have been able to resist his appeal. For Arthur was a very handsome fellow, and he possessed an admirable manner of quiet deference which had an especial charm for women who had seen something of the world.

Encouraged by her earnest promise to do all she could, and to keep his confidence an absolute secret, Arthur poured out his whole story. It was an immense relief to tell it to someone so entirely sympathetic; and all of a sudden it appeared to Arthur that Warsaw, the gay, cold, snow-clad city, was a very pleasant and home-like place.

"As to meeting her," said Madame Lubelski, when he had finished, "that is easily

done. My daughters like her; we all enjoy having artistes in the house; she can come here and go out with them, and thus you will meet her constantly with the greatest ease. No one will be surprised at her appearance in society under my protection, as I have often done just the same thing before. She was quite right in refusing to let you go and see her, or walk home with her. We are very particular about unmarried girls, and alone and unprotected as she is, her reputation would be blown away more easily than the down of a thistle. It was different when the two sisters were together, though even then, if they had had a mother or guardian, they would not have been allowed to go about alone. Placed as Zadwiga is now, she is only ordinarily careful in being so reserved. It does not mean that she wishes to avoid you—I can assure you of that. But that need trouble you no longer. I will persuade her to come here, and you shall have every opportunity to find out

whether she really meant to accept you that day on the ice. And do you really mean to marry her?"

"I do," answered Arthur, quickly replying to the abrupt question. "I want to make her absolutely mine. If you will witness the marriage, and see that all is right according to the customs here, you will confer the last favour upon me."

"I will do that," she replied, "very willingly. But if you intend, as you say, to marry her privately, and then leave her while you go away and try to win over your parents, may I ask what you propose to do with her? You want her to leave the stage. What will people say, if, without explanation, she gives up her profession and lives alone as before? It is well known that she is poor, and needs every penny she earns. How will the gossips imagine that she lives?"

"Something must be arranged," said Arthur uneasily. "I foresaw that difficulty also. But perhaps she will be able to sug-

gest something herself. She may have some friends or connections she could go to."

Madame Lubelski shook her head discouragingly. She knew very well that Zadwiga was alone in the world, save for her sister, who could do nothing for her in this strait.

Suddenly Madame Lubelski started up quite enthusiastically.

"I have an idea," she exclaimed; "she might go to the Ghyka family—perhaps to Prince Niko's mother. I have heard she is charming. And surely we can devise some reason for her leaving the stage? Come, this looks more promising."

"I believe that is a happy thought," said Arthur; "at all events, it is encouraging. Some plan can certainly be devised. The first step is to get the marriage accomplished. I ought to be at home; I ought to have returned a month ago; I must go as soon as I can. But I will not go till Zadwiga is my wife."

"Spoken bravely," said Madame Lubelski, who entered into this romance with all her heart, now that she saw some chance of a happy ending to it. "I am going to drive out to our country house to-morrow. I should like to show it to you, and the drive will be pretty. Will you come? I shall persuade Mademoiselle Milovitch to come also; I am sure she lives indoors too much, and a sledge-drive will be good for her, especially in pleasant company."

Needless to say that Arthur accepted this invitation.

The days passed now like lightning. Arthur was miserly over his moments, and tried to make the very utmost of them, for he knew how soon he must go away. And when he looked back upon this time it appeared like a long dream of delight, half a lifetime of enjoyment. But in the hour of his happiness it was all too short, and it seemed to slip unobserved and be gone before it was fully appreciated. To Madame Lubelski

it was perfectly easy to throw the lovers constantly together; there were always visitors in the palace, and she was known to be the friend of artistes. Therefore no one was surprised to find Zadwiga constantly at the house; and Zadwiga was very willing to come. For she had given her promise to become Arthur's wife before he left Warsaw; and to her, as to him, with that separation before them, every moment that fell into the past was like a lost diamond.

In the midst of her new happiness the dim shadow of coming loneliness stood before Zadwiga, ready to grow large and distinct when its opportunity should arrive. When Arthur told her that she must leave the stage for his sake, and even forget that she had ever been on it, she made no objection, though her heart sank at the thought of no longer having the work she loved so much, the work which enabled her to forget her solitude. And her dear dream, her favourite hope, of one day playing Royal Mary—that

was taken from her. She would not let herself utter that thought, for she felt that the love which Arthur gave her was so great, that no sacrifice which she could make would be too much in return for it. Moreover, her temperament was one which made love and absolute devotion synonymous terms.

The difference in the character and temperament of the two sisters was shown very strongly now. Wanda had been much less timid in admitting Niko to her society than was Zadwiga with her lover; but she had shown all her stubborn native pride when it came to the question of the marriage. Nothing would have induced her, suffer how she might in the denial, to become Niko's wife without the invitation from his family. Zadwiga had not this kind of pride in her composition. When Arthur attempted to make her understand the difficulties of his position, she accepted everything without a query. England was so far away (to her mind) that she could not guess its customs.

She only tried to comprehend Arthur's descriptions of his home and family, in order that she might have a picture of it in her mind when he had left her. Obedience was natural to her where she loved. She used to obey Wanda; now she obeyed Arthur (having once accepted him as the idol of her heart) without a question or a murmur. It was a glorious pleasure to her when she could gratify any wish of her lover's. Only one thing troubled her much. How was she to account to Wanda for leaving the stage and giving up her career and her means of livelihood? Without explanation the thing would seem incredible to her sister. Permission to tell Wanda of her marriage was the one thing which she did beg very earnestly of Arthur. But he was inexorable.

"Not yet," he said; "I do not want you to put it on paper at present. You do not know who she has about her now. I am known in Parisian society, and if this private marriage should become a piece of society

gossip, it would be a miserable affair at home. At least let me tell the story myself. A secret is only safe when no one knows it. We have confided in Madame Lubelski, and I trust her; but I will trust no one else."

"As you will," said Zadwiga, "but when Wanda and I meet again, you must be there to explain my silence. I could not bear to tell her I had not trusted her."

"I will do better than that," said Arthur. "I will go and see her in Paris, and when I can talk to her alone I will tell her perhaps. If you like to write a little letter for me to give her then, you shall."

That little letter was pages long, and made quite a substantial packet when it was ready for Arthur. Zadwiga had spent half her nights pouring out her heart on this paper, telling Wanda all her love-story, which, to another might seem brief and simple, yet was to Zadwiga long and wonderful. Arthur put this precious document in a very safe place. He did not mean to give it to

Wanda unless he felt he could trust her; but he saw that the writing of it had been a real relief to Zadwiga.

Now that the marriage was a settled thing, it was absolutely necessary for Zadwiga to have somewhere to go when Arthur left Warsaw. It would be impossible for her to remain there living in comfort, yet not playing at the theatre. Already some beautiful furs which Arthur had given her had caused smiles among the ladies of the company. He was so delighted with Zadwiga's beauty in her rich wraps that she wore them to please him. But the almost audible comments which were made upon them showed what she had to expect. She felt that while her marriage was kept secret it would be impossible to remain in Warsaw. And Arthur was most anxious for her to go from that city, for he wanted her very reputation as an actress to be entirely forgotten. If she could live for a time in some aristocratic family, it would be exactly what he wished. Zadwiga

had no friends or relations, either plebeian or aristocratic; she had no one but Wanda and old Karol. She considered Madame Lubelski's idea the only feasible one; she must ask protection from the Ghyka family. She determined to write to Prince Sacha, whose kindness had been so great to her sister, and ask him whether she might come as a visitor to Niko's mother. A dozen times Zadwiga, and Arthur, and Madame Lubelski endeavoured to write this letter, but they always left it unwritten, because it was so difficult to offer any credible reason for her leaving the stage.

At last Zadwiga said decidedly —

"There is only one way. I will not say anything about leaving the stage. I will simply ask if I may pay a visit. And Wanda told me they are very hospitable in Roumania; I shall have no difficulty in remaining among them, I have no doubt. Arthur does not want me to stay there all my life, I suppose?"

"If the kind fates will only favour me, I will fetch you home to Dene Court very soon, my Zadwiga. No one there has ever seen a woman half so beautiful as you. What a sensation you will create! And your dancing will electrify London ball-rooms."

"This is idle talk!" said Madame Lubelski, with mock severity. "Now that Zadwiga has decided what to say, she must write to Prince Sacha at once."

This was done. Zadwiga wrote a letter in pure, if somewhat stiff, French, and in the most delicate hand imaginable. Arthur admired her writing immensely; he said it was as pretty as her dancing. But then he admired everything she did.

When Prince Sacha received this letter, he thought some time before he could determine what to do. Niko's mother was recently dead; this news had reached Niko and Wanda in Paris. It had been a grief to Wanda as well as to her husband, the loss of the gentle princess who had been so kind

to her; but in the hurry of her life Wanda had not written to Zadwiga about it. She did not think of the subject as one to interest her sister; and busy women do not write or talk about all that happens, as those idle ones do who win for the sex the reputation of gossip-lovers.

Prince Sacha would have liked to entertain Zadwiga himself; he had much admired her thoughtful and gentle face when he saw her in Warsaw. But his daughter was away in the convent, where she was being educated, for the greater part of the year. In his house Zadwiga would have neither chaperon nor companion. There was no one else nearly related to Niko but Princess Miralda. He was not fond of Miralda, and would hardly have chosen her to chaperon his own daughter; but still she had now outlived most of her bad habits, and her château was delightful. The result of these thoughts of Prince Sacha's was that he ordered out his horses and drove over to the Château Roman.

He did not arrive there until quite late at night, for he had not started very early, and it was a full day's journey. He was taken into the large *salon*, which was brilliantly lighted, but empty. Miralda's embroidery lay beside her chair, but she was not there. The servant told him that he believed she was downstairs in her private writing-room, or in the library, and then went to fetch her. Prince Sacha looked at the embroidery, which was very splendid; evidently it was intended for an altar-cloth. He smiled as he contemplated it.

"She is very religious now!" he said to himself.

Presently he heard the rustling of her silks over the polished floor; she welcomed him very cordially. Miralda hated to be alone, and just now she had no visitors. Immediately after her entrance came the servant with the inevitable *dulcece*, and then Miralda ordered a supper to be served.

"After supper you must play a game of

cards with me," she exclaimed; "I am sick of being here alone; you cannot tell what a pleasure it is to me to see a friendly face. What ill luck it is that a woman must grow old and then drop out of the world!"

Finding her in this mood, Prince Sacha immediately told her of Zadwiga's desire to visit Roumania.

"Oh, let her come and stay here," said Miralda, indifferently. "I am glad to have anyone that is agreeable in the house. And Niko's wife was bright enough. Is the sister as pretty? And does she dance as well?"

"I think so. She is very charming," said Prince Sacha. "Will you write and ask her to come to you? I really think you will find her a delightful companion."

"And Heaven knows I need one!" said Miralda. "Sometimes I think I shall die of *ennui;* and then I go to look at some of my old letters and papers, just to remind myself that I was once a person of importance. But

it is dull work at the best, living in the past. The Milovitch can sing and make herself amusing, I suppose; it is her business. Let her come and amuse me. She can stay here as long as she likes. I'll write to her in the morning. Now, there is some supper ready. I will give a great supper and dance next week; will you come? This house is too big when it is empty."

There was supper, and then the inevitable bezique. Prince Sacha had not the common love of gambling; he cared little for cards. But he played amiably with Miralda. Then, when the night was well advanced, he was escorted by some half-a-dozen lazy servants to one of the guest-rooms, which always stood ready for visitors.

In the morning Miralda rose a little earlier than was usually her habit, in order to show Prince Sacha over the gardens. Here he was in his element; at home his chief occupation was that of attending to his gardens and forests. Château Roman was a model in

these respects. Admirably laid out and planned by the French *savant*, who received so great a hospitality from its proprietor, it had been kept up to its standard of perfection by Miralda and her Polish steward. Sacha was much interested in seeing all that was going on, and in comparing the progress and results of Miralda's gardening operations with those on his own grounds. But he did not forget to remind her of the note of invitation she was to send to Zadwiga. It was written and despatched.

In Warsaw the three conspirators were awaiting its arrival very anxiously. When it came Zadwiga was delighted. She could not grieve much for the death of Niko's mother, having never seen her; and she had not forgotten Wanda's account of the beauty of the Château Roman. She had hoped to see it while in the country; to make a stay there would be charming indeed. Arthur was glad that her exile had any promise of pleasure in it, and he carried the news to

Madame Lubelski as being something very good indeed. She received it rather coldly.

"I am very sorry Prince Niko's mother is dead," she said; "she was a good woman."

"Do you know Miralda?" asked Arthur.

"I have heard of her. I believe she is very handsome and very clever."

Some time afterwards she said to Arthur—

"Will you take a piece of advice from me?"

"From such a friend!" said Arthur, and he kissed her hand in a manner almost worthy of a Frenchman or a Russian.

"Well, then, take Zadwiga's old man-servant into your confidence, and send him with her with injunctions to watch over her."

"Oh, he would never leave her; he will go with her wherever she goes. He is too good a friend for her to part with him."

"Well, then, trust him."

"But surely that is not necessary?"

"It may be very necessary. Remember

how beautiful Zadwiga is. She wants a protector who knows her position, and knows you. Let him also witness the ceremony."

"You may be right," said Arthur; and after a little thought he decided to take the advice.

Old Karol had proved himself faithful for a lifetime. An ardent patriot, and accustomed to the tyranny of a powerful foreign government, he had learned the value of secrecy. The secret societies which naturally arise among an oppressed people educate them into a capacity for silence. Thinking of all this, Arthur determined himself to tell old Karol of the intended marriage, to enjoin him to keep it secret, and to ask him to remain always Zadwiga's faithful protector. He easily found him, for Karol always came to the stage door a little too soon in the evening and awaited Zadwiga's coming. Arthur met him there, and walking with him up and down the cold street told him in low tones all there was to tell. That was not

much, for Karol evidently knew that he was Zadwiga's avowed lover. But when he heard that the marriage was to take place immediately he uttered an exclamation, which made Arthur very glad that he had adopted Madame Lubelski's advice. Evidently Karol had entertained the deepest disbelief in him, and had been his enemy in secret. It would have been cruel to Zadwiga to leave her in such a misunderstanding with this faithful friend; and, moreover, if Arthur's return were long delayed, the suggestions which Karol would certainly have made would have depressed and saddened her.

Arthur was very glad to have taken the right course with the old servant. He knew well that Zadwiga, with her radiant beauty, needed such a guardian. But he did not suspect that Madame Lubelski suggested confiding in Karol because she considered Miralda the last person in the world to take care of a lovely girl. But she would not say so, because, as she reflected, Miralda was now

old, and had probably reformed. Moreover, there really seemed nowhere else for Zadwiga to go, and the protection of the Ghyka family was so exactly what she needed. Madame Lubelski considered Zadwiga's innate virtue to be her greatest protection, but at the same time she felt more at ease about her new favourite when she found that Arthur had followed her advice, and made Karol fully aware of Zadwiga's position.

The plans were all made now. Zadwiga had given notice at the theatre that she wished to terminate her engagement, and had written to accept Miralda's invitation. She now consented to let the marriage take place. Arthur was very impatient, for he felt he could not delay his return home much longer. His father was ailing and unfit to attend to his affairs, and demanded his presence.

When Zadwiga saw that she must indeed soon lose her lover, who in so short a time had absorbed her life, her love, her devotion, she asked for no more delay.

Early one cold, but sunny morning, these two were married. There was no one in the church but the priest and the two witnesses, Madame Lubelski and old Karol.

When the ceremony was over Zadwiga went to the altar of St. Joseph, and, kneeling there with uplifted face, breathed a passionate thanksgiving for her answered prayer.

Observing that rapt expression, Madame Lubelski said to herself that Zadwiga had a face which might belong to a martyred saint. But she checked such a gloomy thought before it could fully form itself, and hurried away, fearful lest some one at home should wonder at her absence. For she was not, like Zadwiga, accustomed to attend the early mass. Old Karol, with tears in his honest blue eyes, went away, as usual, to the market. He intended to get a beautiful dinner ready at home, and to smuggle Arthur Dene in to partake thereof, without, if it might be possible, any prying eyes discovering that the

rich Englishman was admitted into the quiet second floor of Zamojiski's Palace.

When the two lovers, idle with happiness, loitered out of the church, the street was still empty; there seemed nothing in it but sunshine. But Arthur caught sight of a sledge which was looking for someone to hire it.

"Let us drive out into the country," he exclaimed, "out where we shall meet no one who will know us. The man will be able to take us to some place where we can get breakfast."

He called him and told him to drive them out of the town, and to keep away from all fashionable or frequented places.

What a wonderful day that was!

CHAPTER XIII.

Two days later there was a terrible separation. It was arranged that on the same evening Zadwiga and Karol were to start for Lemberg, thence to travel to Jassy; and that Arthur Dene, half-an-hour later, was to take the express for Paris.

To Zadwiga it appeared that now for the first time she realised the meaning of the word separation. Arthur was going so far away!—back to his own people, to his own country. But she never thought of his forgetting her, or of any distance affecting the bond which united them. Her own absolute and faithful devotion saw itself reflected in his eyes, those clear and honest eyes which

made all women like and trust him. She knew that his was a love given once and for all, and separation brought to her heart none of the nameless fears which it brings to many women when their lovers leave them. To her the words only meant a heavy cloud and a darkness. But she had perfect faith that she had only to wait and the cloud would lift and the darkness be lightened by the return of the man she loved.

The separation wore a very different aspect to Arthur Dene. He was full of hope and happiness. He had accomplished the utmost of his dream; Zadwiga was his wife, his faithful love; she had sacrificed her career, everything to please him. He threw a blessing back upon Warsaw when the train carried him away, and he saw the last glimpse of it. In that city he had found something beyond his wildest hopes; a woman whom it was impossible not to admire and to love, yet who had vowed herself to him alone. He went away, dreaming of

the happy moment when he should come for her and take her home to Dene Court as his acknowledged wife.

Zadwiga's thoughts were far more sad. With the last sight of her husband, a heavy melancholy, like the presentiment of misfortune, had fallen on her spirits. For Karol looked after all the details of the journey, and Zadwiga had only to sit still, wrapped in her beautiful furs, and gaze at the dim outlines of the snowy landscape through which they were flying, and afterwards, when the darkness fell completely, to close her eyes and look at her own thoughts. They were sad, but beautiful. Her love glorified everything. Her mind dwelt upon Arthur with the lingering fondness of a passionate and faithful nature. And under the heavy sense of melancholy which had fallen on her was a deep sense of happiness; a consciousness that she had met with the greatest joy which life can give to any woman.

There was one undertaking which Zad-

wiga resolved should be her chief business during what she called her exile. She was determined to learn English, and to learn to speak it with ease. She had heard that the Château Roman was within easy reach of Jassy; it would be possible in this town to obtain a teacher. She had plenty of money with which to carry out any project she might entertain; Arthur had entrusted to Karol's safe keeping what seemed to Zadwiga quite a fortune. And Wanda had told her that the Château Roman possessed a fine library—surely there would be English books there. She resolved to devote herself to study. When she met her husband again she would be able to express her love in his own language.

At Jassy, Miralda's sledge, drawn by four rapid Russian horses, was in waiting for Zadwiga. Now that she had arrived in Roumania a new interest made itself felt in Zadwiga's heart. Wanda had probably been drawn by these very horses. Wanda had been

in this city; the palace which was Niko's, and therefore hers, was in one of these fine streets. There was something pleasant in the thought that Wanda had driven about here, and been at home in this pretty town.

The Château Roman is visible in the distance when one leaves Jassy, and the Tzigane coachman pointed it out with pride. It is indeed a lovely place; its situation, its architecture, its surroundings are all most admirable. Zadwiga looked with great interest at the distant building which was to be her temporary home. For she knew that if she could please her hostess, and make her presence agreeable to her, she was to stay under her protection until Arthur came for her. It would please him best if she remained here, and made herself as a member of the Ghyka family; so she determined to do her best to make Miralda like her. And would this old princess be easy to please? She did not know; she trembled a little at the thought. Niko was the only aristocrat she

had known; and Wanda had assured her that he was very unlike Miralda. The old princess, she said, was more like Demetri; and Zadwiga had no very clear idea of this cousin of Niko's except that he was exceedingly handsome and that his manner was very soft. If Miralda were equally gentle she would not be afraid of her.

With Miralda's swift horses it did not take long to reach the château. Zadwiga admired it more and more as she approached. Was Dene Court more beautiful than this?—or was it, as she, in her ignorance, had to suppose, entirely different? It might be; but from the first moment that her city-bred eyes fell on this splendid country house, she built her imaginings of Dene Court upon it. Until now she had never realised how beautiful a country house could be. To live in a place like this—and with Arthur! What a future! Zadwiga, as she stepped from the sledge, uttered a sigh of deep contentment at the picture in her mind.

The Princess Miralda was in the *salon;* and the servants took Zadwiga to her, while Karol, looking round with an infinite contempt at the dirty gipsy servants, busied himself with the luggage.

When Zadwiga entered the *salon* the old princess rose to greet her with a haughty graciousness of manner which told Zadwiga, even with her ignorance of the world, a great deal. She knew at once that Miralda regarded her and her race as of an inferior order. She knew that she was received with courtesy because a Ghyka had chosen to make a *mésalliance* with her family; but she was not received with the cordiality which is extended to an equal. At the same time Miralda's manner was soft and caressing, like Demetri's, and her handsome features and beautiful toilette made her very pleasant to look at.

On her part, Miralda was simply amazed at the beauty of the girl.

"Positively," she said, holding Zadwiga's

hands and looking close into her face, "you are more lovely than your sister. I did not think that possible, but it is. I am glad you have come, child; you are very nice to look at. Demetri would admire you; he knows what a fine woman is. Now, my child, you must go to your room and rest a little; dinner will soon be ready, and then you must sing to me after dinner. I know you can sing—I see it in your eyes."

Zadwiga laughed gently as she went away to her room. She saw that she would have to amuse Miralda. She did not mind that while Miralda's wishes chimed so well with hers.

When she entered the *salon* in her dinner dress the old princess gave another exclamation of delight at her appearance. They were alone at dinner, and Zadwiga saw that solitude was a horror to Miralda. She told Zadwiga that she hated to dine without a companion, and that she would rather have her bitterest enemy at table

with her than no one at all. She liked scandal and gossip; these Zadwiga could not supply, for she heard very little gossip in Warsaw. The princess was interested in hearing anything about the Lubelskis and the visitors who frequented their palace. Zadwiga hunted in her memory for incidents which she could relate. Miralda listened greedily to everything; she evidently knew many of the people Zadwiga spoke of, if not personally, yet by name. One thing Zadwiga soon discovered, Miralda liked to talk of social life, and still more of political life, suggesting continually her inner knowledge of men and affairs. It was easy enough to humour her in this; Zadwiga had in her all the materials for an excellent listener.

After the delicious sweets and the champagne had been disposed of, Miralda led the way back to the *salon*, and there sat down to her embroidery. The gorgeous altar cloth filled Zadwiga with admiration; and

the sight of it gave her a new idea of Miralda's character. She had never heard that the old princess was religious.

Presently Zadwiga sat down to the grand piano, and sang some pretty Polish airs. Her soft voice pleased Miralda greatly.

"Do you sing any French songs?" she asked.

Zadwiga knew one or two gay little French *chansons*, and gave them with the delicate spirit of comedy, which, though not inborn in her, she had acquired from Wanda, and learned to use upon the stage. Miralda applauded these heartily.

"Admirable!" she cried. "Why, you are a treasure, my child, in this desert. Now come, we must have a game of bezique, and then we will go to bed. To-morrow night we shall have visitors to dinner, and dancing afterwards; and you musn't be tired, for I shall want you to sing. And in the morning you may go over the château, and see what rooms you would like to have for yourself."

"May I? Oh, delightful! And may I," she added, with earnestness, "have my old servant near me? He has always lived with us, and is like a second father to me."

"Oh, certainly," said the princess. "We will find three or four rooms together, so that you can have one for a boudoir and one for him. To-night he has gone to the servants' quarter, but to-morrow you shall arrange everything to please yourself."

This hospitality was natural enough, for the château was very large, and when there were not a number of guests in it very empty. But it seemed wonderfully kind to Zadwiga, who was accustomed to the narrow city life, and the limitations of a flat in Zamojiski's Palace.

When she went to her rest that night Zadwiga had a pleasant feeling that Miralda liked her. If so, then all could be as Arthur wished; she would stay safely here till he

could fetch her to her real home; and with a blessing for Arthur on her lips, she fell happily asleep.

The next morning she was out of her room and singing softly to herself as she wandered about the château, long before Miralda was awake. The house seemed to her glorious; and the views from the windows filled her with wonder and delight. She soon discovered from the maids who waited on her, and who understood French well enough, though they could only speak it a little, where Miralda's own suite of rooms lay. They occupied one corridor, on a level with the *salon*. Zadwiga's room was very near; a few of the guest chambers being also on this floor. There were a great number on a higher floor, and some also on the ground floor, where, indeed, there seemed quite a wilderness of rooms. Here was the large dining-room, the library, the Princess Miralda's private writing-room, and a number of servants' offices. The servants slept in out-buildings,

which were screened by clumps of trees. It seemed to Zadwiga that a dozen families might comfortably reside in this château, and yet leave room for plenty of guests. She wandered from floor to floor, undecided where to pitch her tent. To her town-bred eyes it was all a wonder and a delight; it seemed like a glimpse of fairyland to have the choice of living in any of these delightful rooms, and to have such a country for ever before her eyes.

When in the course of her explorations she reached the ground floor, she remembered the library, and asked one of the servants to guide her there. It was situated under Miralda's suite of rooms, in a wing which was a little removed from the busy part of the house. A heavy baize door closed off the corridor from the great entrance-hall, the dining-room, and kitchens. Thus it was perfectly quiet, and a studious atmosphere fell upon you directly you were within the doorway. The corridor had three doors in

it; the one on the left locked—that, the servant explained, belonged to the Princess Miralda's writing-room, and she alone had the key of it. At one time, when she was much younger, she had made constant use of this room, but now, the servant said, she never entered it, or perhaps entered it twice in the year. The door on the right admitted to an empty guest chamber; and the one opposite opened into the library.

It was a magnificent room, with that peculiar colour about it which can only be given by walls heavily lined with books; it was lit by French windows at each end, opening on to broad terraces. These windows were shaded by verandahs, and upon the dry gravelled space beneath stood great tubs holding plants, evidently precious, for they were shrouded in winter jackets of matting. It was an ideal library, and Zadwiga clasped her hands in delight when she looked round it. How she would study here! And the walls were teeming with

riches. There were crowds of French and Russian novels; but also, Zadwiga could see in a hasty glance, there was a fine classical and scientific library. And then her quick eye detected a shelf of English books. Here and there the lines of dull-toned volumes were broken by heavy hangings of tapestry. In the wall, opposite to the door by which Zadwiga had entered, were two other doorways.

"Where do they lead?" she asked the servant.

"To the rooms M. Marcellin always had; no one has used them since."

Zadwiga remembered the story Wanda had told her of how a great French scholar and historian had been hospitably entertained here for many years; and how in return he had used his skill to make the Château Roman the most beautiful place in all that country. This magnificent library, evidently formed by a scholar, was his legacy, then! And he had worked in this room, and thought

out his writings under that verandah. The association pleased Zadwiga very much.

"I must see the rooms he lived in," she said, and went to one of the doors on her voyage of discovery.

She found herself in a beautiful little bedroom. It appeared to her beautiful, though it was simple to a degree. There was a writing table with a chair standing before it, as if the author had just risen from his work; beside the bed was a reading-stand. Evidently M. Marcellin lived with his books and papers night and day. Another door opened into a second small room, furnished with wide Turkish divans, plainly meant for luxurious reading. The two rooms had both originally been intended as reading-rooms, for the library itself being lined throughout with books, there was no place in it for divans. To please M. Marcellin, who could not bear to be separated from his beloved volumes, and who was given to midnight researches, one of these pleasant

chambers had been fitted up in simple fashion as a bedroom.

To Zadwiga's sensitive imagination, the presence of the great scholar still lingered about the surroundings that had been his. No place in the house pleased her so well as this.

"I wonder if the princess would let me have these rooms," she thought, longingly; "I could be at home, I could be happy here. And the books would be such friends, such companions, always at hand! I can but ask her."

As she went slowly back through the library into the corridor, she looked into the empty guest-chamber and wondered if Karol might have that; if he might, then it would be perfectly delightful.

It was now about mid-day, and Miralda had left her own rooms; Zadwiga heard her speaking to the servants about the preparations for the supper in the evening. Zadwiga went to meet her, and, in reply to the Princess's in-

quiry if she had found any rooms she fancied, she answered, somewhat timidly, that she liked none so well as those which M. Marcellin had lived in.

"What, through the library?" said Miralda. "Oh, you can have those if you like; but they are very isolated. Still, you will not mind that, perhaps, if you have your servant near you. I don't think I have been into those rooms for a year. Why do you fancy them?"

"Because of the library," said Zadwiga. "I am exceedingly fond of reading; I can read German and French, and I am anxious to learn English. It would be very delightful to be so near all those books!"

"Oh, you are a student! That is a strange taste for an actress, and such a pretty young woman! Well, you will have it all your own way, then. I used to read a great deal when I had more to do in the world; but now I only read my book of devotions. The reading-room next M. Marcellin's bedroom shall

be your boudoir; and I think there is a room in the corridor which will do for your servant."

So it was settled, much to Zadwiga's delight. She danced with pleasure when she saw the rooms prepared for her.

"Oh, Karol," she cried, "you don't know how glad I am. There are so many English books. If I could only find a dictionary! Well, never mind, I will get a teacher in Jassy, and I will work so hard, and then when we meet again I can speak to him in his own language—"

"Hush! mademoiselle," said Karol.

"Why?" asked Zadwiga, gazing in momentary alarm round the great room. "No one can hear us."

"I don't know," said the old man, "but be careful!"

She said no more; but later on, in the seclusion of her own room, separated by the width of the library from all the rest of the house, she thought she might permit herself to write a long, long letter to Arthur, telling

him of the charms of the Château Roman. He had told her to write to an hotel in Paris, and later on to an hotel in London. She was not to send any letters to Dene Court as yet.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Princess gave orders to her housekeeper Anuca to have the rooms which Zadwiga had chosen prepared for her, and in the course of the day that sacred air, as if the memory of a dead man were cherished there, was banished from them, and they took on a charming and cheerful appearance. The Roumanians indulge in one especial luxury in their bedrooms—exquisite linen. The large bath towels are so richly embroidered at the ends with gold and colours, that if one of them is carried away into another country it becomes a drawing-room ornament, or is converted into an article of dress. The fresh fine linen gave to the simple bedroom a pleasant aspect

of real comfort. Zadwiga would not part with the writing-table or the reading-stand; upon the latter she placed an English Bible, which she discovered in the library. When her eyes first opened in the morning she wanted them to rest on Arthur's language. Karol unfastened her large trunks now that her room was decided upon; and the first things she sought for were two pictures, one of the Virgin and one of St. Joseph. Karol placed them on the walls for her, the Virgin in her bedroom, opposite her bed, and St. Joseph in her boudoir. Beneath each was placed a bracket to hold a tiny lamp, which it was to be Zadwiga's care to keep for ever burning. When she got out the Polish colours, and Karol spread them out with pride in the boudoir, to those two patriots the sight of the familiar pink and white brought a sense as of home, and more still, a feeling of enthusiasm. The Poles love their country so ardently that they think they owe it to her to keep their lives honourable for her sake,

and there is something akin to religion in their patriotism.

By degrees Zadwiga's new rooms began to look really like her home. She brought her embroidery and put it ready to work upon in the boudoir; and she got out her own favourite books, which seemed to bring with them some of the air of Warsaw. While she was moving about, with a light step that was like a dance, a servant brought her some pots of blooming flowers for her table, saying that they were specially sent her by the head gardener.

"Why, Karol, what can this mean?" said she in wonder.

"I think I heard Ma'mselle Wanda say he was a Pole," suggested the old servant.

"So she did!—Oh, I must go and find him, and thank him!" and she ran away with quick feet, her face all bright with pleasure.

"She's bearing up very well," said Karol to himself, when she had gone. "Change of

air and a little excitement go a long way with a young creature like that."

Zadwiga asked her way to the conservatories, and there found her compatriot looking after some men at work. He welcomed her with as much cheerfulness as is natural to a political exile who would like to be organising a secret society, and is reduced, instead, to growing exotics and superintending gardening operations. He was fond of his work, however, and took a great interest in Zadwiga when he found she had a superficial smattering of botany, such as may be acquired by a little city reading, and that she was eager to increase it. Her brief talk with Yanotha, in her own dear language, and the sight and smell of the sweet growth in the conservatories did her good. When she returned to the house she looked as brilliant and happy a creature as it is possible to imagine. It occurred to her, then, that perhaps she ought to see if her hostess, who so hated solitude, was in need of society. She ran up to the

large *salon*, where she found Miralda busy embroidering the gorgeous altar-cloth. And near her sat someone whom Zadwiga did not know. The visitor was a handsome man, past middle age, yet erect and active, and with a face full of intelligence. Zadwiga, who had come very swiftly into the room, hesitated whether to go away again, not knowing but what she might have interrupted some private talk. For one second Prince Sacha looked steadily at her, and then quickly rose to greet her.

"Do you know Prince Sacha?" said Miralda.

"No," said Zadwiga, "but I have heard from my sister, Prince, that you are very kind."

She held out her hand to him, and Sacha, in the courtly fashion of the country, raised it to his lips.

"Positively," he said, "for a moment I could have sworn it was the Princess Wanda herself. You have grown more like her

since I saw you on the stage; the likeness is really wonderful now. You are just alike in figure and movement, and in colouring. Forgive me for saying all this, but indeed I was startled at first!"

"I did not know we were so much alike."

"Yes," said Miralda, "it is true. It would be difficult to tell you apart without seeing the faces clearly. In figure and hair you are just the same. And I too have noticed that your movements are alike."

"How strange!" Zadwiga said, thoughtfully, "for I do not think we are the same in character."

"Nor in expression," said Miralda; "that is where the difference shows itself. Your faces are very different."

"And I should be very sorry to have to decide which is the more beautiful," said Prince Sacha, whose eyes rested on Zadwiga in admiration that was almost wonder. "My child, I do not know how Warsaw

consented to let you go, even for a time."

"It could not keep me," said Zadwiga smiling. "There is no law to make one stay on the stage against one's will."

"Do you not like the life then?" asked Sacha.

Zadwiga blushed very deeply. In reality, though she left it with the unmurmuring submissiveness of her nature, she loved her art.

"I hardly know how to answer you," she said, with a happy instinct seizing upon a way of telling the truth. "Indeed, I have always enjoyed my work upon the stage, but—well, I wanted to leave it—for a while."

The last words, which she knew to be untrue, came with hesitation and effort from her lips. Zadwiga was but a poor deceiver; she realised then that she must keep her secret only by silence, not by any attempts at misstatement. For her blush deepened as she

spoke until it crimsoned her very neck. Sacha guessed that there must be something which had prompted her to make this visit, and which she did not wish to speak of. He turned away, and made a mental note not to refer to the subject again. Miralda looked up at Zadwiga and smiled; it was a strange smile, that came only at one side of her mouth. Afterwards Zadwiga learned that that was not a pleasant smile to see.

"Caprice, my dear Sacha," she said; "you must always allow for a woman's caprices, especially when she is beautiful. A plain woman has to beg her way through life, but a handsome one takes it without asking."

No more was said for a moment, and then Sacha changed the conversation.

"Demetri has not returned from Paris," he said; "he is making a long stay."

"Demetri goes where there are the greatest attractions," said Miralda, with another glance at Zadwiga, the smile still hovering

at the side of her mouth. "We shall have him here before long, I daresay. I miss him, I can assure you. He amuses me."

"Yes?" said Prince Sacha in the tone which implies, "That is more than I can say about him." Demetri was not one of his favourites, although they were always excellent friends. Demetri kept on good terms with his family because he liked to lead a pleasant life.

"Imagine, cousin," said Miralda, "that this child is a student. She is going to have old Marcellin's rooms in order that she may be close to the library. Is it not a quaint idea, when one looks at her?—above all, when one hears her sing, as you shall to-night."

"I have seen her dance," said Sacha, quietly, "and yet it does not surprise me that Mademoiselle Zadwiga is a reader. Do you not see that little perpendicular line between her eyebrows? That, I have ob-

served, is a mark of the student. You will have the run, Mademoiselle, of a magnificent library here. Marcellin was a rare collector, and as he was commissioned to form a worthy library for the Château Roman, he spared no expense; and the trouble must have been a great delight to him, for he was a true scholar. But for him, I fancy there would have been little on those shelves but Alexandri's verses, Gaboriau, and Paul de Kock."

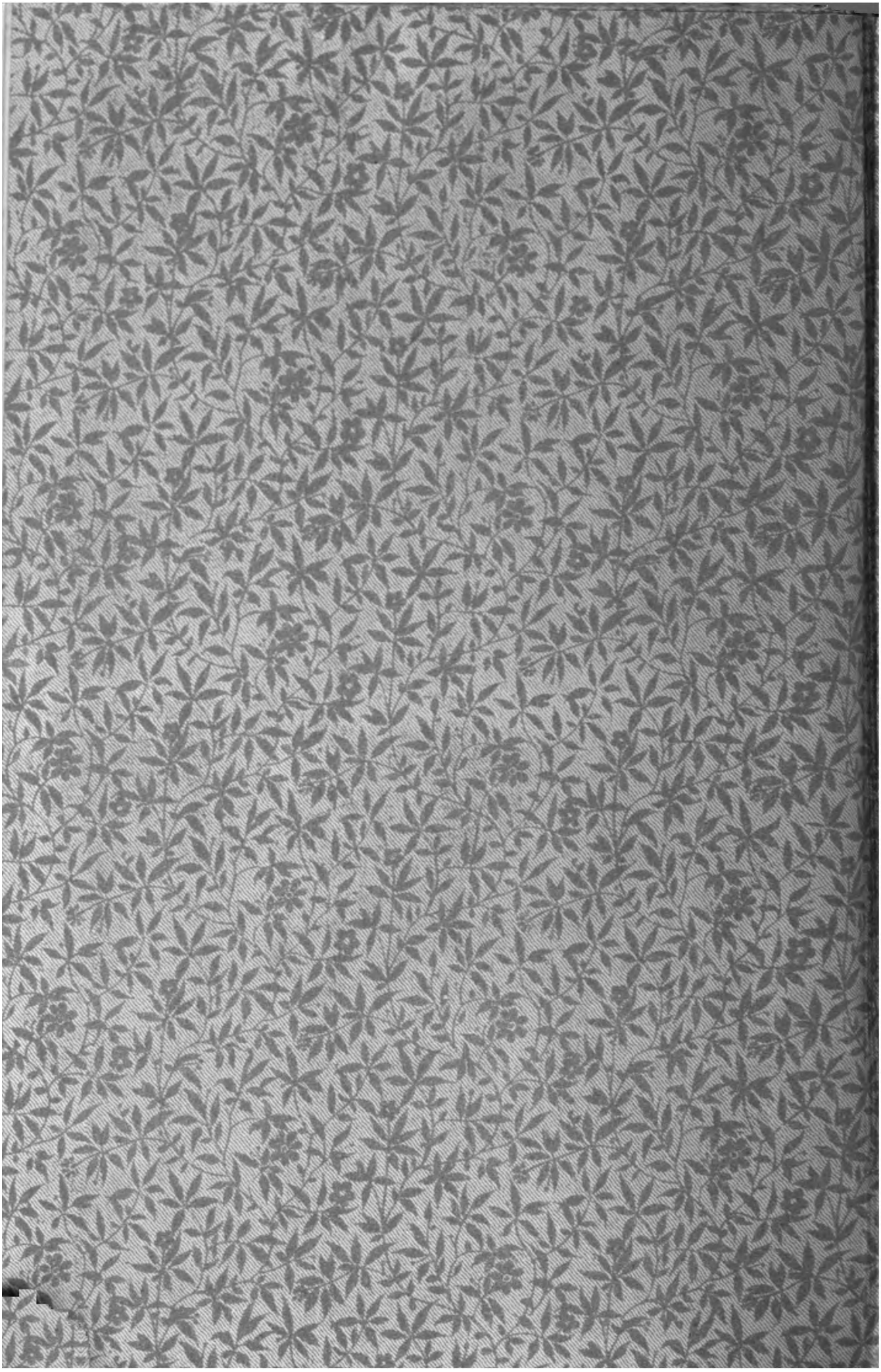
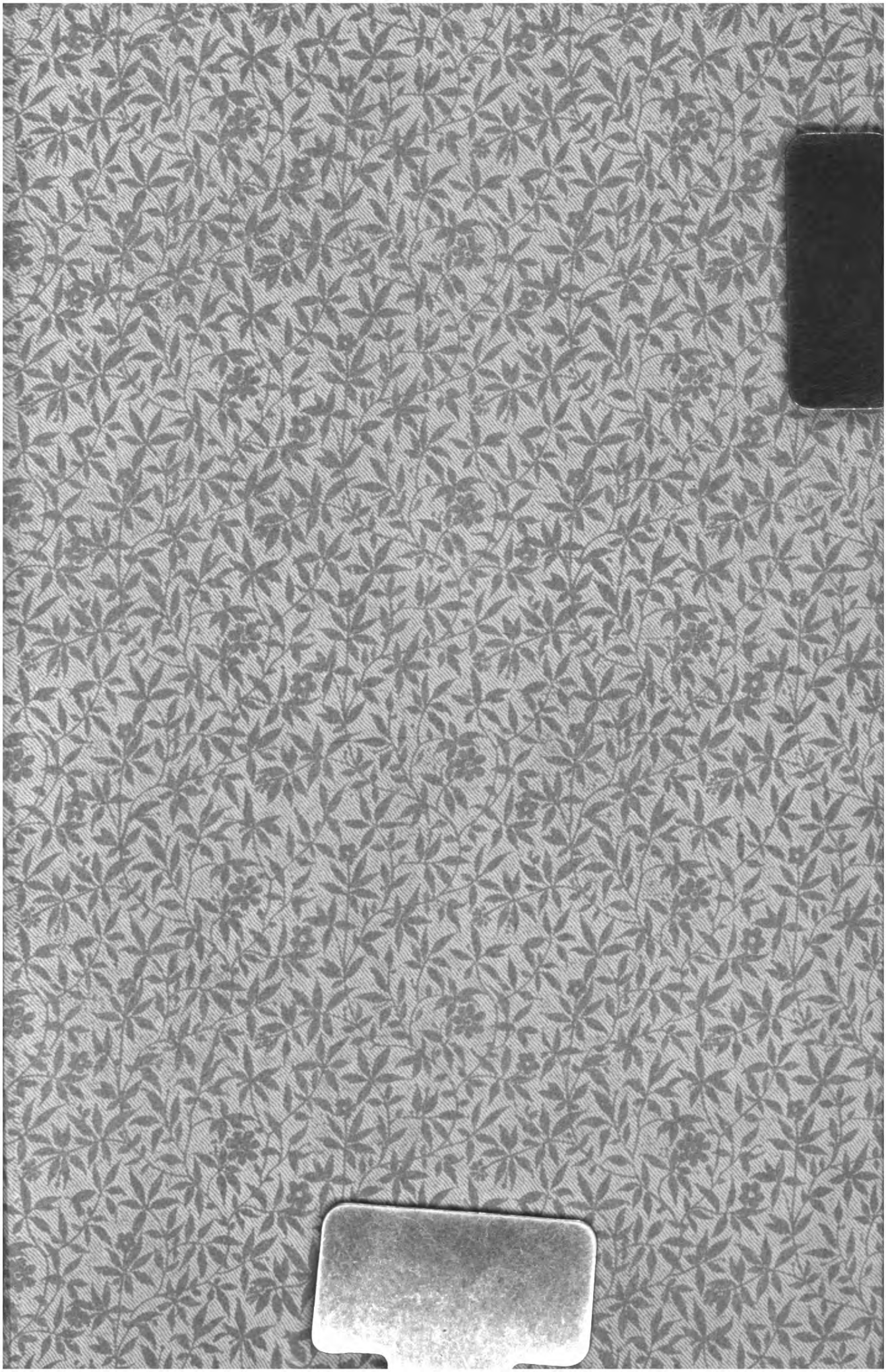
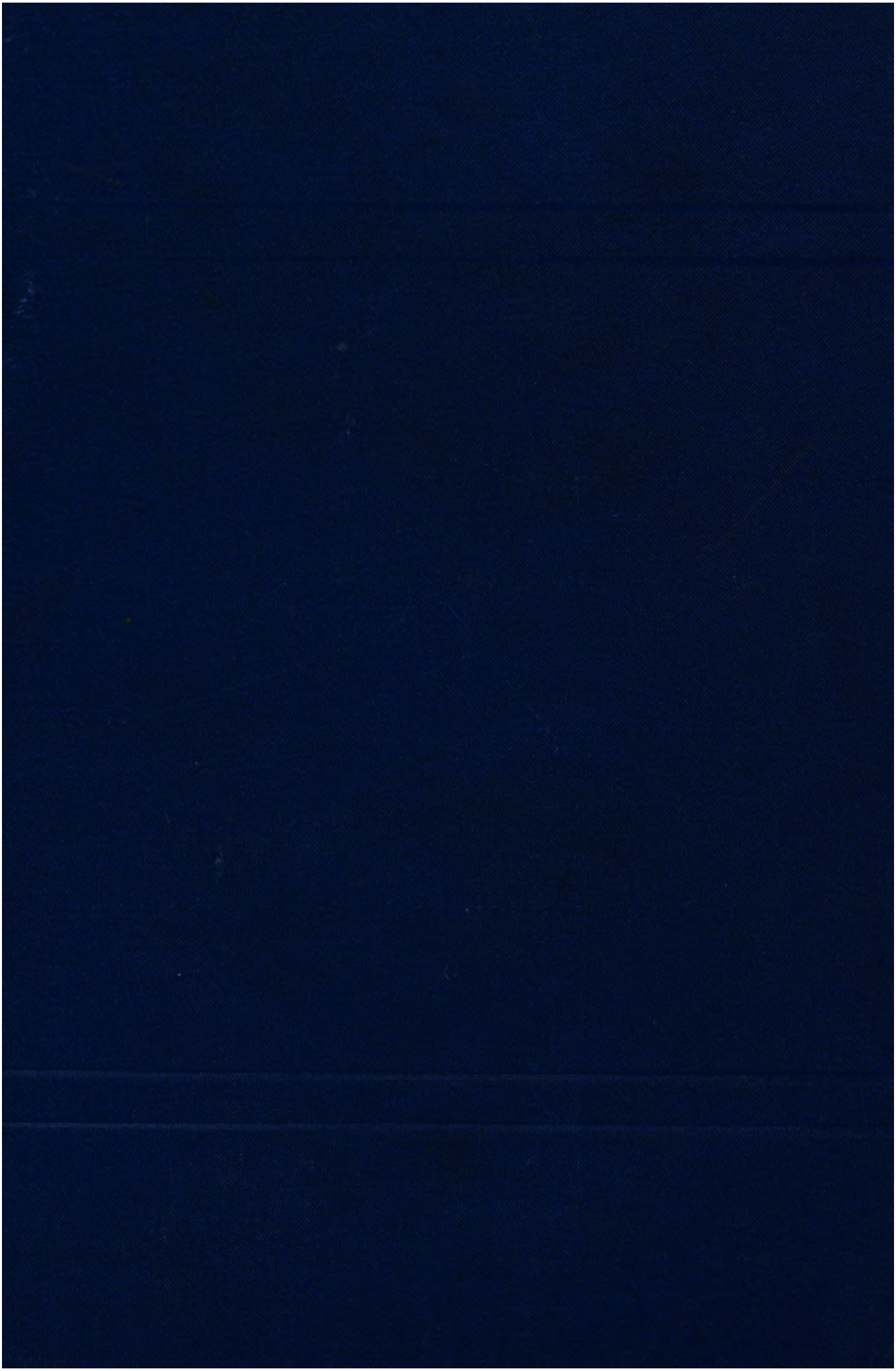
"Nay, cousin," said Miralda; "my father read Balzac and Alfred de Musset; and I—"

"You," interrupted Sacha with a laugh, "do not keep your favourite reading in the library."

"No," said Miralda, with a sigh of intense regret; "nor do I read much now!"

Miralda, when she was young and beautiful, had been known and valued in most of the courts of Europe. She possessed an extraordinary gift for intrigue, and had proved

herself trustworthy as a secret diplomate and a political spy. She had been in the confidence of great ministers, and even of crowned heads; and she regretted that past life of excitement most passionately. Her secret papers, her private letters from the great people of her time, were her greatest treasures. In them she held secrets of State which gave her still a consciousness of power. No one knew where she kept these, except that it was probably in her private writing-room; though the servants who, once a year, were admitted to dust and clean it, saw nothing but an empty writing table and some shelves of French books. She had made this her private room in the old days when her life was an active one, because, like the library, its window opened upon the garden. She had received many a secret messenger here, unknown even to her servants. All this was over now, and, as the servants told Zadwiga, Miralda went to her writing-room perhaps but once or

twice in the year. But Sacha knew very well that no volumes interested her so much as the records of her past importance.

END OF VOL. I.