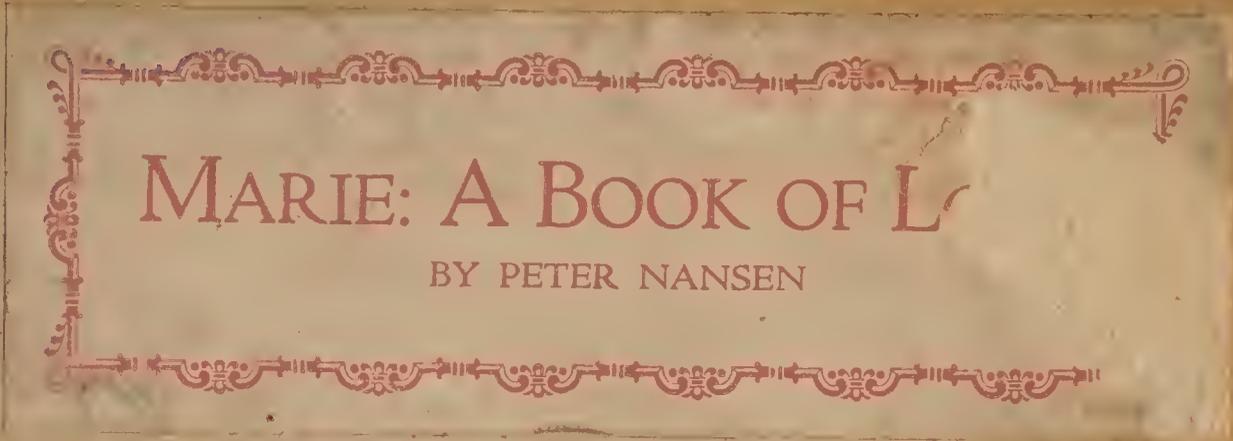


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MARIE: A BOOK OF L

BY PETER NANSEN

RESERVE STORAGE











MARIE:

A BOOK OF LOVE



MARIE:  
A BOOK OF LOVE

*BY*  
PETER NANSEN

*TRANSLATED BY*  
JULIA LE GALLIENNE



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## ORCHIDS AND ICICLES

OF the capitals of Europe, Copenhagen is unique in that it is not only the political and social center of Denmark but the intellectual metropolis of all Scandinavia. To it flows the literary product of Norway and Sweden quite as regularly as that of its own authors, the mysticism of the north countries mingling freely with the naturally lighter native strain.

Long accustomed to regard itself as the custodian of Scandinavian tradition in philosophy, theology and the classics, Copenhagen bears its responsibilities with a solemnity that reflects the powerful if narrowing influence of its Lutheran state religion. No witch doctor of Central Africa has a more congenial atmosphere in which to ferret out a heresy, no Puritan New England town of 1630 or thereabouts, a keener nose for the taint of brimstone in the air, or the savory odors of forbidden fleshpots. The Danish capital even suspected Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales.

Yet Copenhagen has not escaped the natural consequences incident to its position as the home of a royal court, the capital of an ancient state, a university city and the metropolis of a prosperous coun-

try. The undercurrent of life is as full blooded, as effervescent, as reckless as in any of the northern capitals, notwithstanding its professional attitude of censorship.

In 1861, with no prevision that the orthodox respectability of Denmark's intellectual attitude was destined, in future years, to experience at his hands one of those unpleasant shocks which self-righteousness invites, Peter Nansen was ushered into the world, the son of a worthy Lutheran pastor whose parish was in the provincial town of Olburgh, some fifty miles from the capital.

As a boy, Nansen attended a preparatory school, Herlufsholm, and in 1879 matriculated as a student at Copenhagen where he quickly acquired an enviable reputation for scholarship.

It was at this time that one of the great transition periods of European literature set in. France, Belgium, England, Germany—each became conspicuous in the movement which was to culminate in the brilliant if somewhat illusive glories of the eightennineties. Quite independently of each other these national groups sought to free themselves from the current standards of literary values which had long since lost all touch with the classic, epic, romantic or for that matter any school of expression save in the form of some attenuated derivative.

In Denmark the influence of the German, rather than the English or French movements, appealed to the oncoming generation and Nansen at once adhered to it, winning thereby the disapproval of the guardians of tradition, who, to this day, refer bitterly to his having allied himself with the radicals in his student days.

This German renaissance which is so delightfully recorded by that brilliant critic, the late Percival Pollard, in his "Masks and Minstrels of New Germany," became by its friends and foes alike known as the Green-German movement of the eighteenthies, although as early as 1878 Heinrich Hart, one of the foremost figures in the revolt, had sounded the first challenge.

In view of the fact that the conditions which induced this movement in Germany were substantially the same in England and every continental country at that period, it is well worth while to quote Mr. Pollard's views, not only as a background for the author of "Marie," but for an understanding of the wider significance and history of the foundations on which our contemporary literature has reared itself.

"German writing, especially in lyric forms, was for something like fifty years after 1832 'mere literature' and nothing more. It had nothing to do

the lugubrious features of the half dozen sable-garbed pastors who file into the invalid's room to exorcise the unorthodox, a fair idea may be had of the reception accorded Nansen's maiden effort by the elect of Denmark.

During the remaining years of the eighties a number of short romances, stories and plays came from Nansen's pen, which was also employed on the staff of the famous Danish journal, *Politiken*.

In the early nineties appeared "Marie: A Book of Love" which at home merely added fuel to the pyre on which Nansen's moribund detractors imagined they were destroying the author, but which, as is so often the case, proved a beacon light that drew the attention and quickly the admiration of a discriminating public throughout Germany and Austria where Nansen's previous work had already begun to be recognized.

The great publishing house of Gyldendalske attached Nansen to its staff in 1896 as its managing director, and with that connection the creative work of the artist practically ceased. Henceforth his splendid talents, energy and imagination were devoted to the wearisome routine of commercializing the safe and well-known classics. After nearly twenty years of service, broken in health, Nansen's firm dispensed with his services and in 1918 he died,

beloved by every artist of Scandinavia and honored wherever his work is known by those to whom it is given to recognize beauty in the truth of life.

Consistent to the last the keepers of the Scandinavian tradition burden their literary organs with obituaries solemnly calling the world to witness that they disown Nansen and all his works save in so far as the drudge of Gyldendalske succeeded in popularizing cheap reprints of the classics. They recall the shock to their delicate susceptibilities occasioned by his youthful creations and thank God that Nansen's most appreciative audience is beyond the confines of his native country.

To that wider audience Peter Nansen is not only the outstanding figure of Danish literature in the days of the modern renaissance, but an integral part of the movement as a whole, which losing sight of its universality, English readers are too apt to think centered about the "Savoy" and the "Yellow Book." Nansen is one of the few in that brave company of the eighteen nineties whose work realizes in accomplishment the artistic aspirations of their enthusiasm.

In writing "Marie," Peter Nansen composed an idyll and called it A Book of Love. A great musician, had there sprung from his mind the theme and a power of execution capable of rivalling the harmony, the rhythm, the development of motif commanded by

Nansen would have called it a symphony. And that, indeed, it is, line for line transposable into the notation of the symphonic composer, its exotic beauty gliding in faultless rhythm through an impelling harmony. An idyll, a symphony, an exotic, is this book of love—not the conventional exotic that suggests the flesh-textured petals of mauve orchids motionless in the half light of over-scented, humid air, but an exotic of the north where, with fantastic imagery, Beauty brings forth her blossoms as pure, sparkling frost crystals in a clear, bracing air, vibrant with health, physical and spiritual alike.

H. H. S.

MARIE:

A BOOK OF LOVE



## MARIE: A BOOK OF LOVE

MY beloved is the most desirable of all women. Many women have given me their love. They came and they went—loves of a day, a week, or a year. I am grateful to every one of them; but I fear I forgot them the moment they were outside my door. There was only one whom I always remembered, even when these others were with me; for she was the radiant ideal with whom they were all compared, near whom every one else faded. There was only one I always wished to enter my door, for she alone seemed ever fresh and new. There is only one with whom I would wish to live, for with her life takes on a golden meaning, a sunbright reality; there is only one I would wish to die with, for with her I know no fear. The name of my beloved is Marie. She is fairer than all other women.

I THINK nothing of the praise a poet offers the woman who is his first and only love. For what is his judgment worth? The judgment of an ignora-

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mus, a country clown! and more than likely his beloved is not worth all the fine words he steals from the language to bedeck her. It were as if a man knew only one colour and said: This colour, this blue or this red or this yellow, is the most glorious of all colours. We could hardly indeed say that he talked like a blind man, though he would really be little better. Thus, had I a mistress who was satisfied when I said, You are the first and only one, you are the first in the world—I would put her from me with disdain. But if she were sure of herself, if she valued my adoration, she would say: Take ten, take twenty other mistresses, choose amongst those whom men most desire, and if you, after having possessed them, still call me the best in the world, I will be proud and happy.

When I say to Marie, You are lovelier than all others, her heart can beat in proud joy. I was not true to her before I knew I spoke the truth.

I DID not know I spoke the truth, before I thought her lost.

It is the trial I would wish every man for his love. A bitter trial it is, but it is an ordeal of cleansing fire as well.

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Sorrow purifies, and sorrow fertilises. The love sown in carelessness through sorrow grows strong and pure.

Blessed be the sorrow which hallowed my love for Marie.

SHE came to me an ignorant child. I can see her still, as she was at that time. So superior, so sure of herself as only the innocent are. You would have taken her for a matron of grave experience. She talked of life as though she knew it inside and out, as if she had tried and tasted it all, and was already disappointed and tired. She assured me, with wondering baby-eyes, that she was seriously thinking of taking the veil. What could she hope from life? She knew that there was nothing for her but tranquil resignation for the rest of her days. "For," as she said convincingly, "happiness can only be found in love, and I and love have done with each other. The student—to whom I was engaged—I have learned to despise. His caresses grew hateful to me, his love-sick words filled me with loathing. No, I am not mad for love."

She said it with tired voice, she said it, too, with burning cheeks and shining eyes. A woman

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wedded to chastity, who was fit for but one thing—love.

It was then as she stood before me, a tall, slender girl confiding to me her baby-sorrows, that I fell in love with her. How charming she was with her simple-hearted sadness. How sweet she looked in her pretty frock!

MARIE'S pretty frock! The frock she wore that first day of our acquaintance. Never shall I forget it.

The time came when Marie had many beautiful and expensive dresses, but in none of them had she ever looked so lovely as in the simple frock which at that time was her only splendour. It was a frock with a light flower-sprinkled blouse, which without being silk looked as though it were. It was pleated over the bosom and fastened closely round the throat with a tiny silver-gilt baby-brooch.

A dear little "Sunday-girl" she looked in her humble finery, which betrayed her own ladylike ambition as well as a mother's economy. How afraid she was lest she should spill a drop of wine on her dear flower-sprinkled blouse, and when the sad accident happened, how eager she was to rub out the ugly stain, though all the time she tried to behave

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as if she had plenty more such precious garments at home.

Funny little lady, dear little "Sunday-girl"! you dear transparent hypocrite, who, while you rubbed and rubbed the spots, assured me that it did not matter in the least with that old frock.

That old frock, your only pretty one—my eyes grow moist as I think of it. Through that thin flowered blouse it was that I first breathed the fragrance of your virgin body, through that little blouse I first felt the anxious beating of your heart.

MY heart was touched by this little girl in the flower-sprinkled blouse, this little lady with the grave experience. I think it was this blouse that made me so gentle to Marie. That flowered blouse which was her only finery, and which it was so hard to see spoiled.

As a rule men are great fools with women. They are too cautious. Women don't want to be wooed, they love best to be conquered. Nearly all of them have an inherited instinct which makes them feel that they are born to be the weak and the yielding. They like to feel themselves under a man's strong and masterful will. Quite involuntarily they despise

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the men who meekly sue for their favours. How often in their hearts must they have cried "Fool," after the man who has been frightened away by those barricades of virtue, behind which they entrench themselves, only because they love to be taken by force of arms.

But with Marie there was no need for extreme measures. I knew that the day would come when of her own free will she would seek my arms, as the home to which she naturally belonged. I knew it by the melting way in which she met my glance and pressed my hand. I knew it the first day — when she had neither seen nor heard me — as I stood behind her and noticed her body quiver and tremble from her head to the tips of her long nervous fingers.

The strategy of an impetuous warrior was not needed here — besides, the flower-sprinkled blouse softened my heart. I did not even wish that too soon she should be mine. As the gardener loves to watch a rare flower grow and develop, and, without touching the bud, will carefully remove a sprig or softly uncover a leaf, taking care that it has enough light and warmth and water, so did I love to see Marie develop into full-grown womanhood, into full-grown love.

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ALMOST too patiently did the gardener wait. For the moment came, when Marie — blushing deeply, but like a true daughter of Eve, with mocking in her eyes — pulled my sleeve and said, “Are you stupid?”

Some women imagine that men like them to put on pretty, terrified airs of being betrayed, to play the prude and pretend hysterical fears and tears. Such affectations may impress boys, or those green young men who think themselves criminals when a woman is lying in their arms. Men of the world, however, find no attraction in these airs and graces, which are seldom sincere, and are never original. The hypocrisy makes them angry, ruffling their tenderness as well, and it mars the beauty and solemnity of an hour which should be the sweetest memory in a woman's life.

Not so Marie! Marie, most refined of women, I praise you and thank you for that.

MY virgin bride, my Marie. Holy night, when Marie became mine!

Peace without and within. Only a single candle is burning.

I enter the room, and lo! on the bed there lies my

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bride, white and sweet and smiling. In devotion I kneel down and kiss her hand the giver, her mouth the promise, and her bosom which trembles in sweet expectation.

I am in her arms, the arms she has so trustfully opened for me. I am looking into her eyes. Their changing expression shows me her anxiety, her amazement, her thankfulness, her exultation at suddenly understanding life's hitherto undreamt-of wonders.

The room is filled with glorious music. Space seems to open out higher above us, to spread wider around us, and closely embraced, mouth to mouth, we float together away from all earthly trouble and sorrow.

Holy night!

MARIE was mine! But I was not hers, or thought I was not. Neither did she think me hers. She had no faith in my love, but I knew what she did believe. She told me often, and I never denied it, for she used to look so charming as she said it. Jealous to her finger-tips, and yet so full of common-sense, so willing to "understand." She actually believed I had ten mistresses a day — no less! Dear innocent little girl,

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what wonderful ideas you must have of the strength of man. Surely you cannot have learned your multiplication table. Your imagination runs away with you; and on that point Marie was as innocent as the rest. She came to me at least six days out of the seven, and never once did she find my love asleep. All the same she assured me with the most flattering gravity, that — as all the town knew — I had mistresses by the score.

It is true I deceived Marie.

Yet, I was hers much more than she thought, more than I thought myself.

Not to speak of “all the town.”

“ALL the town!” How I loathe the vermin of slander, which through the keyholes and the chinks of the doors come crawling into our homes, dragging with them a train of their own dirt. You may guard your private life behind double windows and shutters, all the town will none the less have been standing outside with its own filthy thoughts. And the filth sticks to your windows and to your doors.

Every morning I see on my bedroom window an old fat fly. He is quite grey with age and seems too lazy to move.

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But as soon as I come near him, whip! he has gone. I hear him buzz amongst the bed-curtains. I hear him smack heavily against the walls or the ceiling. I open all the windows and go hunting him with a towel. Suddenly he disappears. He hides himself in the rug, behind the mirror, or on the frame of a picture. There he sits perfectly quiet, until I am tired of searching. But every morning I find him again on my window-pane. He never leaves me. With black specks he soils my sheets, and night after night he sings his foul gossiping song over my bed.

When one evening as Marie stood in front of the mirror there was the loathsome beast on her white neck.

MARIE is as white and pure as any girl in the whole world. She has a fragrance sweeter than any flower. Her breath is pure, her whole body is without a fault. From head to foot she is sheer delight. She is one of those women who without shame can step before Nature's tribunal. She dare even show her feet.

The poets have many lies on their consciences. But on no subject do they romance so shamelessly as on the feet of their beloved. A traditional gallantry

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constrains the poets to praise the feet of women. Yet a well-formed foot in our high-heeled Chinese days is as seldom seen as the blue flower of poetry itself.

The first time I saw Marie's toilet, I watched her with fear and misgiving. I know some of the loveliest women, who never, except perhaps when they are alone, take off their stockings. Like the peacocks and the mermaids, they are shy of revealing their lower parts.

When Marie sat down on the edge of the bed, she stretched out her feet, and said, "Pull my stockings off, please."

I knew then that she was perfect! And kneeling before her, I kissed with delight a foot as beautiful, as chubby and sweet, as any that your lying poets have pretended for their loves.

WITH many clothes, with few clothes, with no clothes at all — Marie is always beautiful. Yet, that is not the reason why Marie is more precious to me than all other women, of whom many no doubt possess beauty just as great. No, the secret is — that God made Marie especially for me, for my taste, for my delight. That Marie knows quite well. First notice her when she is with strangers. She always seems

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uneasy and restless, she is not sure of herself, her manners are forced; sometimes she is too gay, sometimes too silent and taciturn. She is like a bird in a strange cage. But the moment she enters my room she looks natural and at ease. She is neither flapping her wings nor hanging her head. She feels that here is her home. Here she becomes just herself, that is, she forgets herself in frank joy or fearless grief. Here is nothing to upset her. From the very day we first met she understood that it was to me she belonged, and of that there has never since been a moment's doubt in her soul.

This simple conviction that she was mine — especially the fact that she never pretended it was otherwise — imperceptibly, but the more surely, bound my heart to Marie.

There are women who believe they can best win men by a coquettish game of hide-and-seek, now approaching, now fleeing, meanwhile dispersing smiles to right and left, and pretending that there are arms stretched out ready to catch them on every hand, if only they could make up their mind whose arms to prefer. For such poor make-believe Marie thought herself too good, and she was wise. Only weak men care to tread that foolish dance. Marie

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loved me — nothing more. She was mine as much as I wanted. The day dawned when I wanted her all in all. The happiest day for us both.

MARIE was mine as much as I wanted.

Among the many mean and cunning arts of love which are taught to our young women, the ugliest is that which says that woman ought always to make a favour of herself. Love thus becomes a transaction in which woman sells herself to the highest bidder. This is degrading to love, and still more to woman. *He* loves her, *she* loves him. Both have the same longing, the same desire. How mean then to deny her lover his natural right, and only to give it to him as a charity for which he must humbly pray.

If a woman told me she loved me and yet looked demure or took offence at my passion, I would turn from her with impatience and let her go as unworthy of love. Marie never said me nay. She followed my call as patiently as the lamb follows the shepherd's gentle whistle. I have called Marie at all times, when she was tired, and when she slept — but she came to me ever with smiling face, and never did she feel anything but joy in answering her lover's call, only too proud that he should call her so often.

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If Solomon, the kingly poet, had known you, Marie, he would have written to you like this:

“The shepherd is down in the valley playing on his reed. He is longing for his beloved, who has followed her sisters to the mountains. But see on the mountain top she stands, staff in hand, watching for the shepherd, who plays the well-known tune. When she sees him, she springs like a gazelle down the mountain, over the sharp stones, through the thistle and the cactus thick with thorns. To move faster she throws away her staff. Thorns tear her gown and pierce her ankles. Stones cut her sandals to pieces and gash her feet. The maiden’s way down the mountain is red with blood. But never does she rest, for she hears her lover’s flute. She throws herself at the shepherd’s feet, she kisses his mantle, saying: ‘Be not angry, my lord, that I did not come before.’”

“My beloved,” says the shepherd, “is swift and generous as the forest spring. She will not let me languish.”

MARIE, my ever generous spring, I know what envious people will say of you, men who turn the treadmill of a joyless marriage, women who

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bear their children in marriage beds void of beauty.

They will lift horrified eyes to a heaven which laughs at their prudish folly, they will call you a wanton.

Marie a wanton! One might as well call the rose a stink-pot or the nightingale a squeaking toy. Never one moment has Marie's pure bosom found lodging for a wanton thought. She is an innocent young girl, to whom love seems as natural as fragrance to the rose, as song to the nightingale. But though so deeply in love, she is none the less a very wise and clever little girl. She can sew and knit and embroider. She knows several languages and is rich in knowledge. She is even a good cook.

Therefore, you see, dear proper men and matrons, to call Marie a pattern of a well-bred young lady is but to do her justice. Neither must you believe that when we were together we had nothing to think of but kisses and caresses. Indeed between-whiles we would often discuss the deepest and most serious matters.

Amongst others we one day discussed the reason why most women are so irritating.

On this my wise Marie said:

“In my opinion it is because women, as a rule, think too much of themselves, just because they are

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women. Thanks to you silly men, with your servile adoration of women, merely because they are female, they have really come to think that they are the special favourites of nature, miraculously endowed with beauty, wit, and charm. They are nearly bursting with conceit. Take for example my cousin Amalia. She is ugly as a toad, sour as a crab-apple, ignorant as an old shoe. Yet as a representation of 'the sex beautiful' she considers herself far more important than the nicest and most charming man. On account of this supposed beauty of her sex she exacts the adoration and, on account of its weakness, the gallant attention of all mankind. Of course she is a monster, but she is hardly an exception; there are indeed many just as bad; for as a general rule women are really more stupid and plainer than men. It must be clear to any one who will open his eyes and ears. If you only knew how ashamed a woman who thinks differently feels when men at dinner-parties propose their high-falutin toasts to a lot of fat, tight-laced females or well-padded broomsticks, who without the faintest blush swallow all the nonsense and seem to enjoy it. Yes, even the most charming women become intolerable when they are possessed by this demon of conceit. As soon as a woman, young or

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old, pretty or plain, begins to reflect upon the wonderfulness of being a woman, she ought to be whipped.”

When Marie, flushed and eager, had finished this lecture, I asked her: “And are you not just the very least bit conceited, Marie?”

“Yes,” she answered, and came closer to me. “I am conceited because you love me.”

So wisely would Marie think and speak. Who will dare call her wanton after this?

YET there were some points on which even my wise Marie was foolish. On these I had to enlighten her. Recognising that I completely lacked the power of falling seriously in love, we always believed that our relationship would last but a short time, and it happened therefore one day that we discussed Marie's possible marriage to another. Most impressively did I beg Marie to be a good and loving wife to her future husband, and never to be untrue to him except when I was concerned. For this was the one certain fact, the unshakable basis of Marie's life, that her Creator had made her for me, and that at all times mine was the first right — a right which no one could ever dispute or annul.

This Marie understood, and in this we were at

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one. She knew that it could never be otherwise. But she was not quite sure whether or not she ought to tell her husband about our relationship. Was it not her duty to let him know that she was not the pure girl he might perhaps imagine her to be?

I felt sure that Marie had asked this question in all good faith. Like many another weak soul, she had been led astray by those quack moralists who are flourishing nowadays. The greater the necessity to have a serious talk with her.

“You silly little child,” I said. “Can’t you see what foolishness you talk? Of course, Marie, if you marry a man who is hard and who treats you badly, then — as a revenge — tell him that you have had a real lover, a lover who spoiled you in every possible way, and who taught you the joy of love. But to tell this to a brave and good fellow, who has done his utmost to make you happy, imagining himself the first and only one in your life — how could you have the heart to do that? You would wound him more cruelly than his bitterest foe. I am assuming that he loves you — assuming, too, that you would tell him the entertaining story before the wedding. Well, then, he would either bid you good-bye and his unhappiness would come that way, because he loved

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you; or he would — what is most probable — still make you his wife, and at the same time make a hell of his own life; a hell of gnawing doubts and suspicions. You might treat him ever so sweetly, and be ever so faithful, you might even give me up — it would be all in vain. Your wicked confession would be for ever laughing at him from some corner of his heart, freezing his happiness with its icy mockery. ‘She has had a lover before, has she forgotten him? Is she still longing for him? Or if she has given him up, is she longing for another?’ No, Marie, you are talking nonsense, and I warn you to beware of the false prophets who are crying ‘Truth’ in the market-places. Truth is a two-edged sword which it is wisest to keep in its scabbard, and which, left in careless hands, causes more mischief than all the thundering lies ever told. I don’t say lie, but I do say keep silent, and I would add that if you are forced to speak, then consider bravely and lovingly which will do the most good, the plain truth or some trifling invention.”

Thus I preached the true law of love to Marie. She listened attentively, and did not fall asleep till quite a long time after I had finished.

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SOMETIMES we helped each other to an understanding in some such way as this.

One evening, after I had helped her off with her stockings, Marie said: "I have often wondered how it is that I have never felt ashamed before you."

"Why should you be ashamed? You love me, don't you?"

"Yes, of course, that is the first and important reason. But it is not all. No, you — yourself, have helped me a good deal. Much more than I think you know of."

"How?"

"Because you have always treated me with such sweet respect. You have never looked at me with greedy eyes or touched me with insolent hands. You have never made me think of you as a male. And yet — thank Heaven — a man you are."

"What you are saying, Marie, is perhaps true enough. But if we are quite to understand why you have never been ashamed with me, there is another point to be considered. Tell me honestly: had you not been so sure of your own loveliness; if, for example, you had suffered from any hidden defect, would you in that case have been equally frank? Of course you wouldn't. If your body

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from top to toe, inside and out, had not been so fair, so sweet and shining, then you would have been ashamed. First of all you loved me; then I was not exactly a ruffian, and in addition you were in every way the most beautiful little Sunday-girl — even on week days — and that is why you were not ashamed.”

Of which the sad moral is that to be safe, virtue should go hunch-backed.

NOTHING in Marie was ugly, and everything she did fulfilled the law of beauty. She was a great comfort to irritated nerves. After all, how little real attention women pay to beauty. One woman has no control over her voice, but lets it out like a trumpet. Another neglects her walk and wears boots with crooked heels. One bites her nails, another scratches her head with her crochet-needle.

I could not live a month with such a woman without hurting her. A lady, of whom I was very fond, once killed an insect with her coffee-spoon. By Heaven! I needed all my self-control not to slap her in the face.

With Marie I am safe. She is like a quiet summer evening, soothing and exciting at the same time.

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Sweet harmonies of peace fill one's soul, everything seems bright and lightsome, worries vanish from the brains like clearing mists, courage and hope expand the heart. When Marie laid her hand on my brow she swept away all my troubles, and life lay before me as on some quiet summer evening, rich in beauty and peace. Never has she set a nerve shrieking with pain or anger or disgust. Like heavenly manna did she refresh me. Like God's own blessing did she come to me.

Yes, Marie, you pleased me so entirely that I always thought you beautiful. Yes, even that time when you suffered so terribly with a bad cold, that you scarcely dared show yourself.

Perhaps you were not very pretty. If so, I never noticed it. I only knew that it was all my earthly joy to hold you in my arms and to kiss you — then, as at all times.

Fancy! even then I did not understand how it was with me. Now I can say from a wider experience: that when a man's love is proof against a bad cold, he can be sure of his love.

I UNDERSTOOD nothing. I am one of those calculating natures that know exactly how far they will

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go, and who say “ stop ” as soon as they have reached the limit, but who, after having made the make-believe offering to prudence, do not mind beginning all over again, this time to continue — beyond all bounds.

There were no lack of omens and signs, which might have told me my fate. But I said to myself: You are not superstitious, what do you care about the rubbish the finger of fate is writing on your wall?

And as yet the night was far away when Babylon was to be destroyed.

I HAVE reached the boundary! I am looking backwards; my eyes are wandering over a spring landscape steeped in soft and tender colours. In the gardens the dazzling white and pale pink flower domes of the fruit-trees are arched against the blue sky. Slim green shoots are peeping forth from the black mould, and the fields and the meadows are glistening with soft silk grass, amongst which white and yellow flowers sip the rays of the sun. At the gate stands a slender young girl in a blouse shining like silk, over which the fruit-trees sprinkle their blossoms. She bows and smiles to me, she calls me, waving her hand.

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I am sure it is Sunday, for the air seems filled with the song of church bells. Or is it nature awakened and uplifting a morning hymn to Heaven?

I cover my eyes with my hand. I can no longer bear to look over that wonderful spring landscape, which I am going to leave behind.

When again I gaze over the country it is wrapped in a grey mist. The shivering fruit-trees bend their flower arches to the ground and a black shadow steals the brightness from the meadow.

My eyes wander to the young girl in the flowered blouse. She stands with drooping arms; she does not feel the rain which is falling, nor the wind which sweeps through her thin dress. She looks at me with big eyes. She is crying.

Yet my heart was hardened. Marie's tears did not stop me. I had reached the boundary and I went.

MARIE cried.

I have seen women cry before. As a rule their tears leave me cold and indifferent, sometimes they make me hard. They flow too easily and their source is seldom deep and pure. There are women who weep only with their eyes, weep only because their lachrymal glands have become inflamed. And there

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are other women whose tears mean only obstinacy and vanity, bad temper and bad manners.

But Marie's tears came from the heart, and never have I seen a woman cry so beautifully. Her weeping was not marred by anger or lamentation, it was unaccompanied by whine or complaint. At first her tears fell sparingly, they forced their way in heavy drops, for Marie — with an effort which shook her whole body — fought to keep them back. But when at last she had to give up the struggle, they came rich and powerful as from a newly-opened spring.

From Marie I learned to understand that in tears there may be blissful healing for all wounds. Like a soft rain Marie's tears flowed soothingly over her burning despair and turned it into a gentle sorrow.

A sorrow so gentle that it even forgave the sinner whose hard heart was its cruel cause.

Forgave me? yes, even more than forgave.

STERN readers! I can see you frown. Forgive, well that might pass. But even more! Impossible! Surely Marie could not stoop so low as that.

Marie, gracious one, step forth and teach these poor ignoramuses the gospel of love. Teach them that true love is set high above pride and honour,

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and that it cannot stoop at all. Love makes no question of thine and mine, it knows no difference between good and evil, between worthiness and unworthiness.

When Marie lay crying in my arms she knew only that she loved me, that she saw me perhaps for the last time and that not a moment was to be lost. Marie has never given me more passionate kisses than those which burned through her tears. These kisses were like the farewell of the sun before he vanished into the night.

THEN we said good-bye to each other, quiet and self-controlled.

Again I preached the gospel of love to Marie, and again she admitted that I was right.

I said that as we must part some day it was better to do so before we grew tired of each other. "Before you are tired of me," she suggested. "No, not that only," I continued. "For the day will come when your love will fade, too." She smiled incredulously, but with a little nod she said, "Perhaps so."

I spoke like a merchant to his thoughtless partner. I took out the day-book and ledger. I proved clearly and logically that we had started out on a

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dangerous enterprise, and that it would end with failure if we continued. Better to stop before the play became serious, for we had never meant to hurt each other. Life is far from finished for either of us. Each in our own way will seek the haven in which to rest. Our love has been a pleasant trip; it was only meant for a holiday. It has left us a store of bright and pleasant memories; memories which both of us will cherish. We do not really part. These memories will still bind us to each other. In them we shall go on meeting still.

I was convinced by my own eloquence. When the door had closed upon Marie, I hadn't the least doubt that all was over between us.

ALL over.

I have always loved these words. They have always sounded to me like a triumphant fanfare. Something is finished, something new is beginning.

Over! There is no anxiety any longer, no more hesitation. Over — that's all! Order once more, all one's affairs straight again, and the chance to start afresh. Away with the old scruples and worries; away with all these doubts and difficulties which hung like a heavy knapsack on one's shoulders. Oh, what

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a relief! what a blessing it is to be able to stretch one's limbs free from all burden.

Over — do you hear? Over! Blow it gaily to the four winds. Over, over, over!

The fanfare had sounded, and it was evening. I sat alone in the autumn twilight, gazing into the stove. The fire was nearly dying, but the evening being warm, there was no need to put more coals on. Quietly I watched the flames dying away. Like leaves in the wood the pieces of coal fell rustling together, black death forced his way deeper and deeper into the fire, methodically he marched from piece to piece, until the last embers were buried in the collapse of the entire heap.

All over! The words sounded again in my ears, no longer gaily, but sadly and sorrowfully. I went on sitting there, while the darkness gathered round me and I thought.

The fire in my room is put out, the fire which never caused me pain, but only brought me comfort and joy. My willing fire, which blazed hotly, crackled merrily or smouldered gently, just as I wanted it; my sweet, my beautiful fire is no more. It is dead, and I myself have put it out. And am I sure that I shall ever find a better? Dare I hope that another

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fire is burning for me somewhere in the world? Ah, call the fire back again! Throw open the gates for it, and you need not doubt but that your faithful fire will return; it only needs your breath to call it back to life.

I jumped up. I lit candles and lamps. Again I heard the triumphant fanfare! You are not made to long and to mourn. What has happened was bound to happen. You are free, free!

It is all over!

I WAS free!

Marie was no longer part of my life. Only a few days ago, and yet how far away it all seemed. Her name had a strange sound, her face was a vague memory.

I was free, and many other lovely girls were alive in the world. What was this folly which had taken hold of me? Marie — a pretty little girl like a thousand others. A good, bright little girl, nothing more. Yes, of course, she was very much in love. But every young girl is in love with the man who awakens her senses. I am not yet *passé*. Other sweet good girls will fall in love with me, if it is love I want.

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Thank goodness the bond was broken, and only just in time. For the first time I fully realised what danger we had been in. In spite of all my prudence we had become perilously sentimental. When a little girl has stolen her hand round a man's heart, then let him have a care. The hand is so soft and warm, it feels as though a tiny child were nestling there.

How easily it all happens! Bless my soul, had not my weakness grown out of nothing more important than the trifling accident of Marie wearing a simple flowered blouse at our first meeting, a blouse on which she had spilt some drops of wine. Of course she had looked sweet in her vexation, which she had tried in vain to hide. She was not far off crying, just as though she had been a little girl who did not dare go home to her angry mother because she had broken the plate on the top of her father's dinner. Yes, you were in a sad scrape, Marie, you lovely child in the flowered ——

Enough with flowers and sentimental nonsense. Have I not forgotten Marie?

YES, and I enjoyed my liberty.

Politeness bids me be considerate to women and prudence counsels me to be careful. Yet there is a

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question burning on the tip of my tongue, and out it must, whatever terrible consequences it may bring upon my sinful head.

What, may I ask — what is the truth about woman's virtue, that famous woman's virtue? I know — or I was taught — that there are few women who step aside from the narrow path of virtue; the only path which leads to heaven and matrimony. But I know also that men, however much they may be in want of money, need never be in want of love. God, and every one else, knows, that in this morganatic town there are to be found men who are masters of harems, which even the Grand Turk would not be ashamed to own. I have sought for an explanation in my historical reading. I had thought that perhaps the ladies' light cavalry might use the same stratagem as the soldiers of the famous hero, whose tiny regiment seemed to be a mighty army, because each soldier quickly moved from post to post. But I had to abandon this explanation, which sprang from true reverence for the virtue of women. For if such were the case, then the great body of the masculine troop would be left to themselves on these great days of battle, when every regiment is under fire at once. But I have never heard that this has happened. The

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riddle remains unsolved. I have asked again and again, but I have never received an answer.

I enjoyed my liberty, as well as a man can in a virtuous town. I have no reason to complain.

There was no need to advertise my liberty. The rumour was soon abroad. For a long time my staircase had been quiet. Now there was a pitter-patter of old friends and new, all coming affectionately to ask how the man with the newly-won liberty was getting on. And there were rejoicings day and night — in honour of my freedom.

I DON'T mention these rejoicings out of conceit, but because they are an important factor in this legend of Marie.

An author less honest and less conscientious would draw the curtain over the events of this period. I know some dear comrades who in a like case have not hesitated to pretend that their infidelities were but desperate attempts at finding forgetfulness in dissipation.

I did not wish to forget — I had forgotten.

Where was Marie? How should I know? Weeks had gone and I had neither seen nor heard of her. I confess I had expected a letter. Experience has

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taught me that one's lost loves, even when they have said the last definite good-bye, always discover that there is still one thing or another on their minds, which they must let out in letters. But round Marie there was the silence of the tomb. From her at all events a little postscript would have been welcome; but, after all, it was best so. Evidently she had forgotten me, as I had forgotten her. Indeed, I had hardly time to think of her, so taken up was I with gaiety and — work. For sometimes even I work, too. On what?

My work is to build lovely dream castles, to create beautiful women, to make colours out of words, and poems of the colours.

But first and foremost I enjoyed myself — just because I had forgotten Marie!

FORGETFULNESS! dear bird with the soft black wings, shadow the couch where Marie has rested. Keep watch over my dreams lest they call her up again in all her stark loveliness. Soothe my longing with your song, lest it should once more awake.

Marie is no more, do you hear me — spirit of forgetfulness? She must no longer exist. But your

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hollow eyes are glaring mockingly at me. Do you doubt me? Are you forsaking me?

Faithless bird! You must not betray me, my forgetfulness! at least not now when night is here, with her seductive thoughts and painful imaginings, flickering above my sleepless rest. In the day-time I need you not — for the sunshine keeps all phantoms at bay — but do not leave me now that it is night.

Forgetfulness! No, you shall not escape me. Though I tear my hands on your sharp claws, I will force your cool wings down on my burning head.

I had no idea it was so difficult to forget!

I AM at my window looking out into the white evening. The first snow has fallen. There is snow on the pointed gables of the old houses, and the bridge stretching across the black water in the canal is white. The ships in the harbour look fantastic with their thick masts of cotton-wool and their crystallised rigging glittering with a million points of light. The streets are still and solemn, not a soul to be seen. But the old houses with the white pointed gables are lit up. In some of the windows the lights are softened by crimson curtains, while through others I can see straight into the rooms. There, a family is gathered

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for supper; here, a young girl is seated at the piano.

I am resting my head on my hand, and my thoughts are wandering hither and thither. I know not what I am thinking, but my heart is hammering away in uneven measure, hammering so loud that I can hear the throb of its beating right up in my head.

Then some one starts playing on a concertina. The music comes from one of the ships. I catch a glimpse of a dark figure on a white deck, a figure which leans forward, slowly moving its arms out and in.

The first notes are false and harsh, but after a little while the music improves. A concertina never sounds so well as on the water in the open air, with the skies above and the deep stillness of nature around. Then no other instrument can so faithfully express the sigh of the lonely heart for the home that is far away, for the father, the mother, and the sweetheart. The concertina should be played by strong, tanned hands. It holds no more subtle poetry than that of a seafarer's heart, throbbing with the simplest joys and sorrows.

The music trembles through the quiet evening. It confides its troubles as openly as a child, and every one can understand the unhappiness it sings. The tune comes to me like a song with the simplest words:

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“ I was alone in a foreign land, where they speak a language strange to me. I walked the big city amid thronging people, who had no care for me. I knew no place where I could feel at home, so I went to the public-house with the other fellows. There were lots of girls who smiled on me and wanted to get hold of me, because I had money in my pocket, and was big and strong. They drank with me, and one of them sat on my knee and called me her dearest friend. I got drunk and went with her; she took all my money, but gave me no joy. There is only one in this world who makes me happy, and she is many, many miles away. I betrayed my own little girl, and I am returning poor to her. I am amongst strangers who don't care for me, and I am crying because my own girl is far away, and perhaps has taken another sweetheart, while I have been betraying her.”

No, I won't listen any more to that stupid music. What on earth has this sailor and his lamentations to do with me? Let him cry over his concertina, but spare me from translating his ding-dongs into words. I don't want to be melancholy. My purse and my heart are still safe; women cannot take more from me than I want to give them.

I went out to the square, where beneath the electric

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lights the girls promenade around the old stiff-legged statue, like the horses in a merry-go-round. I chose the prettiest and took her with me. She was a good soul, eager to please me, and grateful to be in a warm, comfortable room with a man who treated her gently.

But she gave me no joy, and while caressingly she leant against me and begged me to say that I loved her a little, my heart was crying, because — because I had foolishly listened to a sailor who played on his concertina!

EVERY morning a curiously restless feeling hunts me out. I go roaming about town without any object whatever, street up, street down. I favour most the streets where the young women go shopping.

Though quite without reason I am always in a hurry, as if I feared to be too late. The fact is, I don't want to be stopped by friends — don't want to speak to any one. I want to be alone. I keep watching the passers-by, but I recognise no one. Often I find myself glaring rudely at ladies I know, without bowing to them. I am like a dog who has lost his master. Now, thinking he is on the right track, he hurries on gladly, and now he is fussing helplessly about with nose to the ground.

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Whenever in the distance I see a tall, slender girl with a boa twined round her neck, I am off like a shot. I rush along, pushing people right and left, until breathless I reach her and discover my mistake. Once I ran after a cab all the way to a remote suburb, only to see a withered old maid step out. It was a blue waterproof which had deceived me.

Every day, when tired and disappointed I return home, I resolve afresh that this game must come to an end.

But the following morning the restlessness is upon me again, and I hasten out once more as though afraid to be too late.

WHY am I seeking Marie? What do I want with her? Take her back? Commence it all over again?

No, certainly not. That story is told, and there is no sequel.

I only want to see her, to know that she is alive. As soon as I have exchanged two words with her, my wish will be satisfied and my soul will be at peace. But this death-like silence that has grown up between us disturbs and worries me.

Why has she never written, the cruel, wicked girl? If she has done it out of calculation, then woe to her.

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She shall not die in sin. I will have my revenge; I will invent the most dreadful torture. How delightful to see her slender body tremble in terror — to see her pleading eyes, yet know no pity.

Yes, to make you suffer, Marie! But afterwards to cover you with kisses, fold you shivering in my arms, and with tenderest kisses sweep away all sorrow from your soul. Or can it be that she has forgotten me? Impossible! No affectionate young girl could forget so soon. No, Marie will never forget. Has she not given herself into my bondage? Have I not taken oath of her every sense, her every thought, that she would be mine, mine to my last hour, mine when and where I would?

Then, why not write to her? Let her hear her master's call and she will come back!

No, and no again! What should I do with her when she came? I don't want her! No, I don't want her!

But why then all these dreams? Away with them. Let the dead be dead. Plant a rose-tree on its grave — and forget.

I AM sitting here forgetting. All around me come the sounds of laughter, the shouts of merriment, silly

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words and fine words of women feasting. My eyes fall on white arms, red lips, and heaving bosoms. There is feasting at my house, madder and more magnificent than ever before. I look on smiling, while the noise grows ever louder. Gaily passing before me comes a dancing chain of women, who laughingly form their lips for kisses and drink my health, as they whisper in my ear that they love me.

The dancing chain has gone dancing by. I am left alone, forgetting. Forgetting all the gaiety, forgetting all the fair faces, forgetting everything except that Marie was not there.

Forgetting that also, as the days go by.

AND new grass was beginning to grow on the grave.

Then it happened that one morning I crossed the square. It was terrible weather. The storm swept round the statue, where in the evenings the girls take their places in the merry-go-round, the wet snow drifted through the dense dark air. I forced my way through the storm, when suddenly a gleam of spring brightened the way before me. A pink flower in a hat. The hat on a tall, slender girl. Marie! Yes, Marie! We stood in front of each other in the middle of the square, where the weather raged its worst. We stood

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face to face, wet and burning with rain and wind — stood and laughed.

What did we care about the weather? Was it cold? Was it stormy? Did it still go on snowing? All I knew was that we had the big square all to ourselves, that there in front of me was the sun shining out of the loveliest of all eyes, and spring bringing back the roses to the bonniest cheeks in the world. We laughed as if we should never stop, so heartily, so merrily, so absolutely without reason. What am I saying! without reason? Ah, no! never has laughter had a better reason. We laughed and we asked all at once! “Where have you been? I thought you were dead.” “And what about you? I thought you had left town.” “But why did you not write?” “Because you had forbidden it.” “I had quite forgotten that.” Then we laughed again.

Now I can hear my stern censor ask: And when you grinning idiots had finished laughing, I hope you went each your own way!

My gracious, no! we went home together!

MARIE was with me once more. But not exactly as before. To begin our old relationship all over again was impossible — on that we were agreed.

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Those days when Marie was in very truth my little girl had passed for ever, and of course Marie was perfectly right when she said that, quite apart from all common sense had to say, it would be silly to expose herself over again to the chance of misery, now that she had gone through all the wretchedness of parting, and after an heroic struggle, had conquered her own heart. She finished up with my own pretty words, "that we must never harm each other for the world."

That we would never do, that we promised each other most solemnly.

Now whenever we met we were no longer bound to each other. We did not make engagements long beforehand. If we did not meet we took it for granted, and when we did it was like two old friends who by chance spend a jolly evening together. We would realise the golden idea of liberty and irresponsibility.

In this new rôle Marie charmed me completely. She talked like a book — so logical, so incontrovertible. It was just so I wanted her to be, now, when in reality I had done with her, and yet valued her too much to quite lose sight of her.

Other women, women for whom love is not a nat-

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ural gift, women in whom the love-instinct is blunt and merely made up of a lot of silly sentimental theories, would not have acted so cleverly. They would have thought: Now that he is once more dangling on the hook, is the time to advance one's claims. Wrapped in their precious cloak of female dignity, they would have forced me to purchase every concession by a new charter — and I would have told such mercenary creatures to go to Jericho.

Marie was neither dignified nor mercenary. She held out to me a basket filled with rich fruits and fragrant flowers, begging me to choose freely, and she was happy when I wanted to be refreshed. Her basket was more beautiful and more tempting than ever it was before.

MARIE had grown more subtle. When I left her, she was as she came to me, a lovely blossom from Nature's hand. A flower is beautiful, it cannot help being beautiful, but it does not know its own charm. Joyfully it unfolds its petals when the sun smiles upon it, but at any touch of the cold wind it shrinks up frightened and makes itself as tiny as it can. Marie was a girl who loved without knowing the art of love.

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What is the wonderful magic wand which changes the wild rose into a gorgeous La France? Marie, found again, had developed into a clever woman, who fully understood her own beauty, who knew how to express her personality in many a subtle variation. Was it really you, my shy little ignorant girl, who now entered my room radiant and triumphant, like a princess clothed in rustling silks, bringing with you a heavy hothouse perfume?

Marie, you were lovely in all this splendour. But loveliest because behind all the subtle and piquant manners gleamed the one simple tint of my wild rose, through the scented hothouse atmosphere waved the sweet cool fragrance of your own nature.

MY gorgeous Marie! Forgive me, but I cannot help smiling when I think of what a gorgeous lady you were, and how sure you were of yourself. You were even, I think, just a little bit overawed by your own splendour. I smile now as I have often smiled before, when you came in silken froth and foam and settled down in my old easy-chair. With your nose in the air, you started a spiritual conversation, and called me, protectingly, "your friend." With pious mien your friend enjoyed your charming pose, until

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suddenly he would cut matters short, and regardless of her fears for her finery, carry the magnificent lady in his arms and set her in front of the mirror. There he would pluck all her feathers, nor rest content before the splendid Marie was in nowise different from the little Sunday-girl in the flowered blouse.

MARIE'S splendour! Where did it come from?

Due partly from anxiety, partly to ill-concealed jealousy, I behold this question written full in the face of the reader.

I could very easily answer these inquisitive questions with some fine fairy tale. I could, for example, say that Marie had come into a legacy from some rich uncle in Australia, or that she had won a big prize in some lottery.

I could say that she had received an annuity from the Government, an annuity which she had indeed earned far more than the women who dabble in literature, and who are supported by the State though they have never served poetry half so well as Marie.

However, in regard to Marie's money matters I prefer to leave the readers in ignorance after all; it is her own affair. As far as I am concerned they can think what they please, think, if they like, that

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she stole, or that she earned her living in any other criminal way. Or they can — if they are magnanimous — think that Marie, now she had grown to womanhood, received more pin-money from her parents — parents who though they had been rather stingy to her of old time, were indeed very well off.

I THINK that according to good literary usage, I ought to have introduced Marie's parents to the reader, told him all their faults and their general characteristics. But it is rather late now; besides, why should I give offence to these most respectable people, who, after all, have very little to do with the story.

There is, however, some one else, whom I am bound to introduce. That is Marie's admirer.

I knew Marie's admirer, and could therefore easily give a minute description of him. Indeed, I am going to tell you something about him, though I must commence with the remark that most of it is, of course, sheer invention. For how could I possibly mention the man by his right name and profession, give the address of his tailors, or the number of his freckles? But one of my good friends, a refined arbiter of taste and a well-known critic, assures me

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that authors ought not to be allowed to cheat their readers out of such information concerning the position *et cetera* of the people who figure in their stories.

I would inform you then that Marie's admirer was a much respected manufacturer. I choose this description for him because he will then at once have the sympathy of all novel readers; and I want to treat this poor fellow nicely, for he is in my power, and I might, without running any risk, turn him into a scamp or a devil; but I choose manufacturer, for this reason also, that of all others this is the most elastic way of making money. One can manufacture sun-blinds and cheese, margarine and oil paintings, sandals and newspapers, torpedoes and nurses.

Marie's admirer then was a manufacturer; he was neither old nor young, but a man in his prime, with a promising past, a secure present, and a future rich in possibilities. Altogether a man whose offer was well worth consideration.

AFTER seriously thinking the matter over, we came to the conclusion that Marie ought to accept the offer on the condition that the engagement should be kept a secret, and that for the present there should be no talk of marriage.

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This arrangement we sealed with many kisses, after which I proposed the toast of the engaged couple and made the following speech to Marie: “When at length you are married, Marie, then remember that next to me you owe your good husband faith and obedience. Be faithful as long as you possibly can, even though your husband should keep mistresses by the dozen. And if fidelity prove too heavy a burden for you, then remember that you are the guardian of your husband’s honour, and I beg of you take care that this is not publicly injured.

“For there is this enormous difference between a wife’s and a husband’s infidelity — that the faithless husband does not harm the wife, while her adultery, should it become known, makes her husband ridiculous. No doubt it is stupid and unjust, but it cannot be helped; it has been so through all the ages and will go on being so as long as marriage exists, and perhaps it is not so stupid after all, for the wife’s infidelity bears fruit within the home, the husband’s outside.

“Shame on the women who thus make their husbands the laughing-stock of the town!

“But not a whit better, Marie, are those, who, without being actually faithless, show themselves in

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society, at theatres, in public thoroughfares, surrounded by a troupe of admirers, while the husband walks behind like a molly-coddle.

“There is no excuse for them whatever. Even the silliest fool is too good to be made ridiculous by the woman whose children bear his name.

“Such women ought to be tied to the whipping-post, every one of them.”

So severely did I lecture Marie on behalf of her future husband.

AT first I had only the kindest feelings for Marie's *fiancé*. He did not trouble me. Of course the day would come when Marie would be his. Yes, but now she was mine, and when I had done with her — why! then I would even give him my blessing into the bargain!

But it happened that the manufacturer became possessed by a high and mighty demon, and that he wanted to show his power over Marie. He, who ought to have stood modestly in the background, began to domineer, as if he were already her lawful master. He watched her jealously, he even dared to spy on her, and he would come to her with mysterious hints and threats, which she understood to refer to me.

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In fact he succeeded so well as to frighten Marie. One day she declared that she dared not come and see me any longer. She was afraid of her manufacturer, who was known to be of a brutal disposition.

Then my patience was at an end, and I spoke to Marie as an angry and sorrowful prophet might speak to a renegade disciple: "Who," I asked, "is your master, he or I? Who has made you happier than any other girl on earth? Who has led you into the promised land of love? Marie! Marie! would you turn from me, forgetting all I have done for you? But let me warn you, that if you break the oath that you have sworn to me, me, your master, to whom you belong, and from whom you cannot escape, then I will curse you and drive you out of my house. The scourge of my curse will be over your head for ever. Now choose as you think best. Choose between the manufacturer and me."

Marie wept bitterly as she faced my just wrath, she blamed her own weakness and implored me not to send her away.

I forgave Marie. But in my heart I swore merciless revenge on her audacious suitor.

IN my meadow runs a white hind. She is tame and

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more lovely than any other hind in the woods. She eats out of my hand, and the moment she hears my voice she comes to me.

There are many hinds wandering near my meadow. I coax them to enter and invite them to grass. But as soon as they scent the trace of the white hind they grow timid, and when, at the edge of the wood, I catch a glimpse of my white hind standing with listening ears, and an inquiring look in her eyes, then I hunt all the others away.

My meadow belongs to the white hind, and she belongs to me. She is my love, my joy. She watches eagerly for me; she eats out of my hand.

My white hind is free to play in the woods and over strange meadows, but should it ever happen that a huntsman would try to catch you, should it happen that a huntsman would tempt you from my meadow and set you in his own, and teach you to eat out of his hand — then, my white hind, would I prove that you are mine, I would tear you from his grasp at the very moment he made sure of his prey.

MARIE, my white hind, I am grateful to you for keeping a brave heart during these days of trial. Quite indifferent to danger, you played between your

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suitor's snares and my meadow. He threatened and he tempted, but just as he thought that at last you were caught in his toils, you would hurry away to eat out of my hand.

Did you feel any remorse or anxiety, I wonder, over your double-dealing? I am sure you did, when you were away from me. Indeed your letters told me so. You bade me set you free. Or you bade me command you to let him go. But once you were safe in my home, with your head resting on my knee, all trouble and terror were banished from your soul. Here was peace, here you felt with a blessed certitude was the only happiness on earth. We two alone. We missed nobody, cared for nought else. What mattered the rest to us. Let them fight and struggle in the world, let them laugh or cry, let them wear themselves out with hatred and despair.

Here was a holy place, an hour of bliss, shining through this vale of tears.

But I remember, too, Marie, how you would shiver and tremble as you left me in the dark night. I remember the lingering glance of mute despair with which you used to say good-bye to my rooms.

Why did I never ask you to stay?

Ah! I did not know the wonderful secret which

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was hidden like a miser's treasure in my heart, the secret you had guessed, and which comforted you in those days of trial.

I ONLY knew that like a king I sat with my most precious treasure in my hand. The treasure was in my hand, and I was king. I could use it or give it away, just as my royal mood prompted me.

Proud and haughty I kept my treasure, held it up triumphantly before my eyes and said: "Truly this treasure is rare, and woe to him who dare rob me of it. It belongs to me by the grace of God, and I need not make account for it to any one. I delight in this treasure, and it pleases me to enjoy it. But perhaps to-morrow it shall please me to throw it away, for I am king, and rich is my treasury."

Thus, like a haughty king, I held Marie in the hollow of my hand. Confident in my right as her master, I amused myself with her, insolently I would set her free to delight all the more in winning her back again. I knew that when I said, Come, she came, and when I said, Go, she went. But I did not know that the day should dawn when in fear and distress I would forget all pride and cry, Stay with me, my rarest, my only treasure.

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I HELD the treasure in my hand!

It happened late one evening that I passed by a big restaurant. The rooms on the first floor were brilliantly lighted, and through the open windows came the sound of dance music.

Suddenly I remembered that Marie had been invited to a ball for this evening, and that the ball was to take place in these rooms. So now, at this moment, she was dancing there! dancing with the manufacturer, who, I was sure, looked proud and pompous, because every one could see that Marie was his.

Ah, don't be too sure, my good friends; at this very moment my revenge shall strike you — you who dare to dispute my right to Marie.

I enter the restaurant, ask for pen and paper, and write: "I will not allow you to be with him any longer. Say that you are ill, and come to me. I am sick with longing for you. If you love me you will come."

A footman promises for love and money to carry the letter safely to Marie, while I return home. I make the rooms look pretty. I am not in the least restless, for I know she will not fail me, and indeed, scarcely have I finished my preparations, before a carriage drives up to my door, from which steps a lady dressed in white.

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She stands in my room with heaving bosom, and hand pressed against her throbbing heart. A lovely vision! A lovely foam-clad Naiad! Her dress made of layer upon layer of white gossamer, thin as a spider's web, falls round her in froth-like waves, looking as if it would fade away at the softest touch. Yes, a dream-vision she is, and Marie, herself, thinks she is dreaming. She looks around her in smiling bewilderment, and says she cannot understand that she is really here, she has not the faintest idea how she got away from the ball and her suitor — she only knows that she had my letter, and could not stay.

But when the carriage has taken Marie away, I open the window and inhale the cold, rippling night-air. In the sky all the stars are lit up, and with royal arrogance I laugh up to the heavenly ball-room: “Even if Marie were dancing there with the angels, I could force her to come to me with a word.”

AGAIN I see the inquisitive moralists arriving with spectacles on nose and text-books in their pockets, and I hear them, after a serious consultation, give Marie an exceedingly bad character.

How could she treat that excellent manufacturer in such a wicked fashion; he, who had none but the best

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intentions? If she could not behave herself, it was at least her clear duty (see text-book VII., section B, paragraph 3) to break her engagement.

Poor logical moles, you should keep to your underground realm — there to your heart's content you can pass your votes of censure against the too vivid colouring of the flowers, against the too frivolous song of the birds, which must hurt all decent and peace-loving moles. But please leave Marie alone, and don't criticise her youthful wanderings in life's labyrinth.

Marie is like a butterfly rioting in a garden. Every flower is tempting her and whispering, "Come to me, beautiful butterfly!" Only the flower with whom the butterfly cares most to stay says, "Don't trust me, very soon I will drive you away."

Now I know the secret hope which Marie, in spite of all, nursed in a corner of her heart. But I know, too, that she did not dare to reckon on a hope which she feared even to confess to herself. Therefore our relationship seemed to her a happiness lent for but a little moment, a windfall of happiness quite outside life's bargain, and for which she need not make account. Afterwards she would have a long life before her in which to be an honest man's honest wife.

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So without remorse, nay, with a proud sense of doing the right thing, she gave herself to me in beautiful serenity.

SOME profane authors say, "beautiful as Sin"! I am not profane, and I don't think they are right. Sin is hideous. Her face is distorted, her lips are white, her hands are palsied, and like a coward she prowls the world in the owl-dark night. Her evil breath poisons all the joy of life.

I know Sin; I have feasted with her. Doleful feasts where the wine was bitter as wormwood, where horror froze one's smile, and one's blood turned to ice under the foul kisses of her corpse-cold mouth.

Yes, hideousness is the form and character of Sin.

Make Sin beautiful as Marie was beautiful, and she is no longer Sin.

NOW I will set the spectacles of the moralist on my own nose and look at Marie's suitor.

He was an honourable fellow. That was clear, but even had I seen the reverse, I should not have admitted it. For I have made it my duty to speak well of him.

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He was an honourable fellow, and I sing his praises, because his intentions toward Marie were most proper and respectable. Yet surely, they could hardly have been anything else. I allow him every good quality except one — he was not a man.

My proof?

He clung to a woman who did not love him.

But perhaps she lied to him? Who has heard the words those two spoke to each other? Not I, of course. But I know that every true lover can distinguish between false and true love-words as easily as the diamond-merchant can distinguish real stones from imitation. Love weighs everything on the most delicate scales, never a letter, never a stroke too much.

Marie's suitor knew that Marie did not love him as surely as he knew that he loved her. Yet he did not release her. He was content with the crumbs that fell from her lover's table.

But the man who is "content" is not a man.

Marie is the most fascinating woman in the world, and I love her, but were I to suspect that she dreamed of any greater happiness than to be mine, then I would leave her on the instant.

I would bite off my tongue rather than beg for

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her love. One may go a-begging for orders and titles, for favours and wealth, but never for love.

I REVIEW those days in my memory, and they pass before me one unbroken triumphal procession.

As in his eyrie, near the sky, the eagle will rest awhile, so sit I aloft in my fortified castle, but the stir and excitement of battle is tempting me afield. I sail away for foreign coasts.

I swoop down and ravage the towns of the enemy. When I return with my viking ship full of splendid spoil, the torches blaze in my castle.

Hy and halloo! The dance is merry! It is a war without fear of defeat, a feast without thought of the morrow.

It is said that the old vikings were worshipped most blindly, and most truly adored by those women whom they had stolen from foreign coasts; and I think it very likely. Every true woman dreams of a brigand who would wildly desire her and carry her away by force in his strong arms. Don't tell me those cloister legends about young virgins who preferred prison and torture, yea, even death by their own hand; rather than endure a brigand's passionate embrace. These are tales for the nursery, not for my lady's

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bower, where the birds are impatient for flight. The more rudely I carried off Marie, the more intense grew her love. When she saw my ship nearing the coast she pretended to flee. It was so much more wonderful to be taken on board by force than, docile and willing, to trip up the gangway.

THE torches are lit, I am expecting Marie.

I am leaning against the wall nearest the staircase; there I can hear the instant her foot touches the first step. My thoughts grow so gentle while I thus wait for Marie, whose little foot in another moment or two will be on my stairs. How many times I have sat like this, listening for the first sound of Marie's arrival, and yet my heart is beating as passionately as of old.

My sweet little girl! Ah, if you knew how I am longing for you! But you don't know it, because you always see me so self-controlled. It never dawns on you that in lonely hours your lover knows too well that vague terror which makes the heart tremble.

You dearest of all dear ones, I am a vain and obstinate fool, that I don't draw you close into my arms, lay your hand on my heart and say, "Do you feel how restless it is here? Yes, your lover, who pretends to be so sure of you, is in fact so little sure

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after all, that he is ill of anxiety every time he expects you and every time you leave him." Marie, my blessed one, in a few moments you will enter my door, and my foolish heart will hide all its trouble. I give you many beautiful words and many true kisses, but all the anxiety in my heart I cannot confess. If only I could! How sweet it would be just once to set free all that is pent up in my heart. How sweet to tear open my bosom and without any reservation let all my longing, all my trouble, stream forth like rippling blood. I cannot do it, Marie! I am a cynic at the bottom of my heart. A vain fool! I cannot do it, I dare not do it.

The great door bangs. I start up listening. No, it is a heavy dragging footstep, not Marie's light tread.

And again I wait. But I have lost the thread of my thoughts, and now I have only one thought: Why does she not come?

If you have a lover, young maidens, take my advice, let him wait once for you in vain, but if you love him truly, don't do it more than once. If he stands this severe test, you may be sure he loves you very dearly. But if you twice make him endure the hell of waiting in vain, then he will know that you are not worthy of his love.

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I am waiting, while the minutes fly like seconds. Oh, that I were able to stop the flight of time! But never has he gone so fast as now, when every passing minute robs me of hope. My heart is struggling not to give in. With untiring eagerness it invents new explanations, new excuses. Don't worry, she will come. She has been delayed, she has forgotten the exact time, she has been detained on her way.

My heart struggles in vain. While the clock ticks on, my hope is bleeding to death, and doubt and mockery are triumphant. I curse Marie and call her a wicked false girl. The most hideous suspicion awakens in my heart, and my revengeful thoughts invent the cruelest tortures.

At last I find myself on the edge of the bed, staring in dull hopelessness through the open door into the dining-room, where the table is arranged with delicate dishes, wines, and many lights.

I rouse myself, move to the window and open it. A soft spring rain is falling through the warm and misty air. I rest my forehead against the wet window-frame. The cruel pain has gone; I am only tired, so tired, and my heart seems withered. The soft moist air brings relief. The tired withered feeling changes again into a gentle sadness, a patient longing. If you

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came in this moment, Marie, surely I would not harm you.

I would lay my cheek against yours, and in the mild spring night, which softens everything that is hard and frozen, I would confess to you my heart's wonderful secret even now whispering in my soul. . . . I turn round and watch, with a smile, the candles still burning on the table. Slowly I blow them out, one after the other. For a long time I remain in the dark without thinking and without suffering, without desire, without regret, feeling only a meek longing, a tender desire to be good to Marie.

THE morning came and with it a message of explanation, then Marie herself; and all the bewildering shadows of the night had disappeared. The explanation was as simple as could be, and it was only by mere accident that it had not reached me the evening before.

What a fool I had been, to fear that Marie would desert me. No! she was mine more than ever before. My heart swelled with joy — away with such weakness. Still I can ride, unscathed, through the battle, still victory follows my banner.

Marie, if you had seen me last night! Now you

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only see me as before, confident, and smiling most graciously, taking it all just for what it was — an annoying mistake. Did I play my part well? or did you suspect there was something behind, something I wanted to hide from you? Did you feel, when I held you in my arms, that my happiness was greater than I would admit? Did you see through all my cunning, I wonder, when you discovered the burnt-down candles on the daintily-laid table, and with a reproachful smile said, “You have been sitting up late again!” And when I answered, “Yes, I had important work to finish,” was it quite ingeniously, quite without a spice of malice that you rejoined, “Yes, what else should have kept you up?”

AT last, as the reader may have noticed, a little excitement has found its way into this account of mine and of Marie’s love. The story is fast approaching its end, and from an artistic point of view parentheses are scarcely any longer advisable.

But I am forced to stop on the road once more, for I see a great many sneering and mocking faces, which I must clear out of the way.

They are the up-to-date saints, poetry’s philosophical puppies, and downy-chinned ascetics, who

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with indescribable scorn regard the fellow-artist who in this old-fashioned way writes about women and love.

They understand far better how to fulfill the mission of modern poetry. On high-sounding adjectives they climb the stars to chat with the Almighty and dish up their celestial interview with all that obscure profundity which fills their confused head.

True poetry is that which tells every one that poetry is something much finer than ordinary human words, and these only are poets, poets with truly noble ideas, who stoop to nothing so common as to sing of two who love each other.

These young poets have made the remarkable discovery that they are moulded of too fine a clay for love. Passion is degrading for them, it distracts their minds from their high calling, and soils the virgin soul of which they seem to think heaven has such desperate need.

Let them stay among the stars, poor devils. The fair women on earth will never miss them. But should they some day come sneaking along with their lust — so love is called in the stars — the plainest women in the slums might teach them that there is

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more poetry to be found in a pair of maiden eyes than in all the stars put together.

After which I continue my story about Marie.

I AM anxiously feeling my pulse. Whatever is the matter? What strange fluid has poisoned my blood? Fire burns in my veins, fever rages in my head. A perpetual terror has taken hold of me. During the day it robs me of all strength, so that for hours I sit idly staring in front of me. But during the night, when at last I have fallen asleep, it seems to lurk just at the back of my ears. Suddenly it will leap out and terrify me, and with a shriek I am awake.

I am ashamed of my weakness, and least of all would I confess it to Marie.

Besides, just now Marie needs to be comforted. She is not happy. In a few months' time she is going to be married. She cried the other day she was with me. I forced myself to speak encouragingly to her. Of course there was nothing new in that, we had known she was going to be married for ever so long. With such simple comforting words I dried Marie's tears. Of course I am right, she says, and she laughs with me and admits that she is a foolish child. But the moment I see Marie smile, I bring down the glass

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I hold in my hand so hard on the table that it breaks into a thousand pieces. Marie looks at me amazed, but does not speak, and I laugh and laugh again. I dread that she has discovered my madness and force myself to be gay as I have never been before. Marie looks still more amazed, and when she leaves me says — I dare not ask her if she is ironical — “How merry you have been to-day!”

Yes, I am mad! Physically nothing is wrong. I have tested my pulse again and again, its beat is normal. I eat and drink, I call on my friends and they notice nothing. My face betrays no worry, my eyes are bright. But my veins are filled with fire, and scarlet flames dance before my eyes. I am in a perpetual state of terror, and when the fear has strongest hold of my heart, I feel a terrible desire to kill. Do you know, Marie, why I jumped out of bed so suddenly last night and lit all the lights? You had murmured his name, and in the darkness my hand had sought your throat.

If only I had *him* in my hands, how it would delight me to hear the rattle in his throat, to watch his eyes turning white in death.

I AM mad with jealousy. Yet why go on screening

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myself behind trivial words? I was mad before when in cold blood I saw Marie prepare herself to be his. My eyes, which I imagined to be clear and clever, were blinded with conceit. I was like a god who deals out fates after his own pleasure. Like Zeus, who well knowing Alcimena's beauty, yet with Olympic serenity lays her in Amphitryon's arms and blesses their embrace with a smile.

Poor Zeus, never to have known the greed of jealousy, your divine blood always running lukewarm and equable. You have attained your heaven; your happiness was devoured long ago, and now you are merely digesting.

But for us there is only one way that leads to happiness: intoxication. And only by storming heaven's gates can we gain admittance. For the first time in my life I am wise. Now I understand that happiness is not to be found first here and then there; it does not lie in the sipping and tasting of many cups. Happiness is a cup we empty to the last drop.

You may place a hundred goblets in a row before me and fill them with the most generous wine. I will leave them one and all untouched, for my cup is Marie. Her love is my wine of which I cannot spare a single drop.

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AND she was to be his! All the beauty I had carefully cultured was to bloom for him. Her smile would brighten his table, and make every day of his week a holy day; her kisses would weave into his sleep the loveliest dreams, her young ardour would strengthen him in his work, and all the sweetness and charm of her being would bring eternal summer to his home.

His it shall be to hear her laugh or weep; in his ears she shall pour all her joys and sorrows. What is the good of deceiving oneself? I know how it will be as soon as she is his. Of course she denies it now; she says that never, never can anything come between us. She believes for certain that she speaks the truth. But she is young, and she does not hate him. She will never deny him his rights as her husband, and the man to whom a woman gives herself must indeed be a poor creature if he cannot soon set the fire alight. After that everything will come smoothly enough. Once she is happy in his arms, she will soon hand over to him her whole individuality, her gratitude, her trustfulness, her confidence. They will sit together in the twilight, she on his knee; he will ask her about me and she will betray me: because when a woman is sitting thus lovingly on a

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man's knee, she will never admit that she has loved another man still more passionately. She will tell him all the bad and hateful things about me he wants to hear. His kisses will tempt her to talk, and if he doesn't seem quite contented, she will entertain him with heaps of lies.

In fancy I pass out into the street, and see the lights in their rooms. I can follow them from hour to hour; I know that now they are dining, that now she is sitting on his knee in the drawing-room, that now at last the lights are blown out . . . that now she is standing in front of the mirror with her bare arms around his neck.

And this is really to happen? She is to be his? He, who has no right in her, except what I have given him. Now that I feel how necessary she is to me, am I meekly to carry her to his home? Rob my home to adorn his?

No — and yet. Dare I keep her back?

To-day, yes. But to-morrow — who knows what one's heart may whisper to-morrow?

FOR who knows but that one's dream-castle may be all fallen into ruins by to-morrow. To-day this woman is everything to you — life seems valueless

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without her. You are ready to fight and slay for her sake, if only you may keep her. All brightness, all joy and beauty seem concentrated in her personality. She is your sun, and with her setting all the world grows dark.

But yesterday. Think of yesterday! What was she then? A pretty toy. A sweet mistress, dearer and sweeter perhaps than any other, yet only a toy, a moment's pleasure, a fleeting summer day.

If any one had said to you then, "Some day you will give your life for this woman," you would have laughed in his face, and sworn your biggest oath that nothing was further from your mind.

But was she not even then as beautiful and attractive, just as good and just as much in love with you as now? Yes, certainly. She was just the same. It is your way of looking at her which has changed. Gold is gold — and through all the ages it has been beautiful to look upon. But it was not till gold was stamped into coins that it gained its high value, and if some day another metal is chosen for coinage, then gold will be reduced once again to mere glitter.

To-day you have stamped Marie as the one woman of your life — but dare you be sure that you won't value her once more to-morrow as you valued her but

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yesterday: a pretty toy, a moment's pleasure, a passing summer day?

What is there to prove that you won't?

IT is the last night, our last night. In a few hours' time Marie will go abroad to visit an aunt, and when she returns it will be to get married. I shall not see her again — she is another man's wife. If everything had been as in the old days, in the beginning of our friendship, I am sure her marriage would not have parted us. It would only have inflamed the more my passion for conquest. But now neither conquest nor booty from foreign coasts tempts me any longer. I have no wish to disturb another man's happiness and peace. My faith in happiness and all my pride are broken. Even were I again to hold happiness in my hand, I would not dare to believe in it, would not dare to hold it fast.

—— It was night. All round us was solemn quiet. We lay hand in hand, each filled with our own thoughts, and staring open-eyed into the darkness. Your little warm hand, Marie, rested so cautiously in mine, it did not move at all, as if it feared to break the silence. It seemed to me as though we flew on great silent wings through space, far away from sor-

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row and pain, to a sphere where time is not, where reign the dreamless sleep and the darkness that knows no fears.

For a long while we lay like this. I knew it was long, because I heard the church clock strike several times. I heard the stroke, but did not realise that they announced the passing of precious time. Then from far away I heard Marie's voice. It came to me as if carried on the soft waves of great silence. She said, "I think it will be like this to die." It seemed to me that I had thought exactly the same words, and I answered — I recognised my voice, but it also came from far away — "Yes, death is like this."

Again we lay quietly. I felt Marie's hand cling closer and closer to mine as we floated higher and higher. Then I heard again Marie's voice speak to me: "I should like to die together — with you!" But again I thought the same words, and I answered: "When we are tired we will die together. Will you promise to come if I call you?" For answer she pressed my hand. We did not speak again, before the grey daylight broke through the night, and awakened us to the painful truth that the hour had come when we must say good-bye. . . .

On that night was Babylon destroyed.

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MARIE has gone away to a foreign land, and I have gone into a monastery. For many days I have not set foot outside my door. Why should I? I should not find her. I have locked myself up in my rooms and stuck a placard with the words "Gone away" on the door. It is no lie, for my whole soul has followed Marie.

Now and then during the first few days, I heard a creaking and clattering on my staircase; the sound stopped outside my door, and then I heard it creaking and clattering down again.

Now there is nobody who looks me up. People think I have left town and no one inquires for me.

In my silent lonely rooms, where the memory of Marie is everywhere, I have spent the time in telling the story of Marie as it is written in this book. It is not a novel artistically composed. It is only a bundle of loose leaves from a love-story for which only one art is necessary, that of being in love. It is a book about the way in which I learned that simple and yet so difficult art.

MARIE, my holy one! See! a sinner is kneeling at your feet and he asks nothing. He who could never ask enough wants nothing now but only to lie at your

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feet and look up into your lovely face. He, the autocrat, is now the suppliant, he the disbeliever swears by your holy name! . . .

Marie, you, whose love gives me all, you, from whom flow all good gifts, only to rest at your feet and to worship your every look, seems riches enough! . . .

Marie, so tenderly human, so heavenly pure, you, whose soul rises like a white dove from the passion-fire of your body, I thank you that you taught me the unearthly happiness of earth-born love.

MARIE writes to me in a letter from her foreign town: "My dear friend, this city is great and beautiful. There are wonderful art-collections and many well-kept parks. The streets swarm with merry people and one sees something new and interesting at every step. There are, too, plenty of theatres and concert-rooms and glorious confectioners' shops! My friends are sweet to me, they take me about from one show to another, and we go to the theatre every evening.

"If you were to ask me for any minute description of my life here, it would be impossible to give it, however much I might wish to do so. I watch heaps of

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people and heaps of things going by, but I remember nothing of it all. I am only longing all the time for night, that I can go to bed and be alone.

“Then I lie perfectly quiet, trying to live over again the last night I was with you. But there is such a noise in the streets here. The noise sounds like the murmur from a riotous crowd of people, and through the threatening hum I hear the coachmen’s angry shouting and their lashing of their whips on the horses’ backs. I was afraid the first few nights. I seemed to feel these lashes in my innermost heart, and trembling, I would creep under the coverlet. But then I thought that if it were only you who tortured me to death it would not be torture at all. Willingly I would take death from your hand.

“Do you remember our talk that last night? You see, what I promised you then, I meant. This I want you to know — before we part.”

I STOOD on the platform of the car. I had been standing there, wrapped in my cloak, all through the night. I had seen the evening shadows rise from the valleys, creep over the mountains and cover all in darkness. Now day is dawning, a pale light shines on the horizon, and quicker and quicker the train is

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hurrying on towards Marie's foreign town, the engine keeping time with the beating of my heart.

What strange anxiety is it which has kept me awake all night? What is the meaning of all these questions, full of fear, which my heart wants answered, while I stare meditatively into the darkness.

I have no reason to doubt Marie's love, and I doubt my own no longer.

Yet, I am going trembling to meet her, and this is the question so full of fear: "Won't we feel strange to each other?"

The Marie I am travelling to find is not the Marie of old. She is not the heedless, loving child who, in former days, used to lie in my arms. She is not the merry willing mistress, my conquest, and my prey — yet, perhaps she is still both, but at the same time something greater and higher. That has been developed in her which no doubt was always the backbone of her personality, that, which I only discovered the last few times we were together, that, which ultimately has become the beautiful sacrament I worship.

And she! How will she recognise me? I scarcely recognise myself. I won her in play, I took her with sword in hand, and we used to step off together into the lightest dance. But now I am coming to her



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weaponless and in earnest. Before I asked for a dance, now I ask for dear life. Before, in my sublime arrogance I was satisfied with little, now I beg in humility for everything. . . .

We rush along towards the dawning day. But suddenly it is dark as night again, with a roar the train flies through a tunnel. I feel the darkness press heavily upon my chest, my ears tingle, and half-giddy I seize hold of the railing. It seems as if the tunnel will never end, I grope about to find my way back to the carriage, where the light is burning, then — what a transformation.

The sun is rising on the purple edge of heaven — wide, wide it spreads its golden halo, pouring quivering light over glimmering, grassy valleys and dewy cornfields.

Beautiful young day! In thankful joy I kneel to you; you set me free from the dark and anguished night and lead me into new-born love for Marie.

OH, to meet again!

What golden sunshine over the mountains, and what gentle tears in the peaceful valleys!

We stood opposite each other in wondering rapture, we had no words to ask or answer, but we fell into



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each other's arms, and with tears of joy, and faint with happiness we sang the praise of the dawning of the day. Is it not all a dream? Is it really you and I? We are looking at each other, but we shake our heads, we cannot believe it. And yet for the first time now it seems as if we really knew each other. This is the wonderful beauty of our meeting; before we had met in a scarcely realised dream of happiness, now the dream has become living reality.

You lovely girl, so full of life, with such glory of joy and peace in your mischievous eyes, and with that grown-up woman's thoughtfulness on your childish brow, you are putting your arms round my neck, saying: "So at last, in the eleventh hour, that has happened for which I never dared hope. For it is true now, is it not? It is not something you will repent to-morrow, not something you imagine at the moment, because you have been longing for me?"

I answer: "I love you, as surely as I have always said too little rather than too much. I love you in joy and in sorrow, on week-days and Sundays. You are the woman I will die with, but with whom I intend first to live a long, long time. Naturally I have been longing for the caresses of my dearest love, but still more have I been longing for all the rest that means

## MARIE: A BOOK OF LOVE

you, your true heart, your pure thought, your gentle speech, your bright smile, which is my sun in the darkness, your faithful hand which gives me strength on the way."

But as I tell Marie this, she bursts into tears, because she knows that I speak the truth, and because she is happy.

AT this point some one pulls my sleeve from behind. I am sitting with Marie on my knee, and I ask angrily, "Who dares to interrupt us?"

But a voice whispers: "I am here as deputy from some of your readers. Your book which began so terribly has now struck a better vein, there are even some of us who feel tears in our eyes. But now we are so afraid that, after all, it will remain depraved. For heaven's sake marry Marie! Remember you have taken her from a man who had the most respectable intentions."

Have no fear, my implacable censor. Marie, tell the nice lady that she can without scruple leave us alone together.

THE bishop stands in front of the altar, his golden robes vying in splendour with the shining candles.

## MARIE: A BOOK OF LOVE

The venerable marble statues in the niches have been washed, and at the organ sits the old white-haired organist with a silk cap on his head and the grand cross on his breast. The pews are filled with the most loving young couples in the country. They carry flowers in their hands, the young girls white roses, the young men, red. They are all looking towards the entrance-door, where twelve kind old clergymen in black velvet surplices are standing, six on either side. The organist is beginning to play, and the organ-tones roll under the high arches of the church. All the young men and maidens are standing up.

The heavy oak door is thrown open and a dazzling light fills the opening; Marie stands there in white bridal robe, with the long veil-like foam falling round her. A blushing woman with downcast eyes. A heavenly peace, a serene joy shines out from her.

An admiring whisper runs through the church, the bishop at the altar turns round and puts on his spectacles, and seeing how lovely Marie is, he hurries forward, bows to her and leads her to the altar.

The young men and maidens scatter roses before her, roses white and red. As she passes along some of the roses catch in the veil, and Marie smiles when she sees her flower-sprinkled dress.

## MARIE: A BOOK OF LOVE

But the old organist has stopped playing, he is leaning over the railing to catch a glimpse of Marie, and through all the peep holes in the arches, angel faces are looking on. . . .

In the words of the Old and of the New Testament, Marie is given into my hands; I lead her out followed by the bishop, the twelve clergymen, and all the loving young couples, while the old organist is playing with his one hand and waving to us with the other.

Outside waits the carriage with the white horses. We step in and drive to my home, to our home. Then the church-bells begin to ring.

YES, ring all bells, sing all angels! A soul is saved.

It was a very bad soul, a soul which revelled in sin and only knew repentance by name. Ring out, ring out, bells! Sing all angels. It is a very hardened sinner who is being carried up to you!

Who was it who saved him? Who is it who carries him?

A weak woman, not herself without fault and stain, but strong in her faith. Her faith guided herself and saved him. Ring, sing, now she is carrying him up — up —

## MARIE: A BOOK OF LOVE

Why does he not come alone? Why must she lead him?

He is still weak, and his foot trembles. But helped by her strong faith he will find the way.

Alas! he is sinking! She is not strong enough to carry him any longer.

Let the joy-music sound, that the weak woman may be strengthened, and to encourage him sing out his beloved's name.

What is the name of this faithful woman?

Marie is her blessed name. Ring it out, sing it loud! Look, he lifts his head. He grows stronger. Now they are coming higher and higher, hand in hand. But silence! he speaks. What does he say? Hush, ye bells; be silent, ye angels. Listen to the words he is calling from the sinful earth.

He speaks the name of Marie.

But he goes on speaking. Can you hear him? Ah, sing joyfully, ye angels, ring blissfully, ye bells. He has spoken the words of redemption:

Through the many to the one.

THE END



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