The Black Hand

"I owe you five dollars"

Wilbert C. Blakeman

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"VERY WELL, KILL ME IF YOU CANNOT USE ME!"

Frontis. The Black Hand.

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THE BLACK HAND

BY

WILBERT C. BLAKEMAN

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THE BLACK HAND

I

Paris the *magnifique!* the *marveilleuse!* the *malheureuse!* the only!

It is the Paradise of the French Fortunatus; he knows and wants no other. Here to this elysium of sight and sound, the high noon of sensation, he comes and seethes in his gold. His senses are steeped—this cosmopolitan connoisseur who is guilty of the vice of over-civilization—in his grand gardens where music is celestial and in his broad boulevards where life seems eternal, so that he does not hear the chariot of destiny rumbling through the impending gloom.

Beneath the Beauty sleeps the Beast and the Paris beast is the most savage in the world. Mirrored in the dark look of the vast crowds of sad-faced men and sorrow-driven women that swarm down every morning from the great Faubourgs to capture the city and seize its bread at the price of blood, one sees the glare of hate and the surprise of new-found strength. The leash of the law about the

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neck of the Brute has been gnawed thin, and the soul-fodder with which the well-fed ecclesiastic would appease the deep-voiced growl is trodden in contempt under the ponderous paw.

Souls! What use for such aerial conveniences have these hunger-pinched slaves, or what purgatory can be hotter than the torture to which the Trinitarian Devil—Hate, Want and Lust—damns them now and here?

This on the right bank of the Seine. Look now on the left. Here are the *declassé* people who have capitulated before bayonets more relentless than those with which William's soldiers swept these wretched streets. These pickers and paupers live on the dust-bins of the city—live by alms, wit, crook, crime, and slowly surrender the right to live. Every year more than two hundred of these palpitating wrecks yield to the pistol's quietus, or the drug's lullaby, or the river's beck of rest. Every day the sweet epic with which life begins ends in this sad episode of crime. They must die—or sin!

Over this Dead Sea of Shame glimmers the phosphorescent brilliancy of a society the lightest and most thoughtless the world has ever seen. Its magnificent cruelty has hardened into crystals of wondrous whiteness and beauty and its sheen and gilding hide the dark deeps beneath. The gay Parisian lolls, smokes, drinks and flirts, not knowing that a millstone

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is about his neck. Now and then he is shaken rudely from his rosy dream by a prophetic nightmare in which the great Submerged and the little Emerged change places, and for a brief moment he feels what it is to hang shiveringly over the ragged edge of an abyss.

Thus it happened when the *Societe de Ton Moral* gave its annual masquerade. In Paris where dress is the essence and work only the excrescence of life, a masked ball is the Eiffel that outcrowns all other events. A glance at this parody on history may raise the doubt whether after all the human is an improvement on the simian. The dancers are all notables.

There is that grim and gory old absolutist, Louis the Fourteenth, the abstract villainy in his saturnine face taking on a peculiarly *fin de siecle* cast, but his ground-out groats yet untroubling his predacious pockets; and the famous Corsican redivivus—what masked ball could be complete without this savage in shoulder straps?—brilliant octopus with vast spread of claw, but forbearing now to insult women (time takes the starch out of the most swaggering shirt-front), mellowing into a blond gentleman unvertebrated for the plentifullest and profoundest of French bows; and poor Josephine—not the faded beauty of Malmaison, but the charming Empress of the Tuileries before Her Ladyship had been diswinged by

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the Lord High Adulterer—glittering all the way from diamond shoe-buckle to golden head-dress.

Nor is the selection of guests by the Comite de *Preparatif* narrowed by national prejudice. That good fighting Christian, Richard the Lion, in the person of an elderly roue, a French Beau Nash, rattles his sword and looks ferociously around in search of slim-necked Saracens; and that English king in the pigtail —in reality a newly varnished count who has married an American heiress—is Henry the Eighth, whose abdominal largeness and insatiable lust are not a whit abridged by his three and a half centuries of turf.

Even the spite against the land across the Rhine yields to the love of sensation; and a fat old burgher with an algebraic eye has counterfeited that giganto-maniac, Frederick the First, personating the great man-stealer spurs, tobacco pouch, ineffable stupidity and all.

Nay even history is lacking in piquancy to tickle the worn-out palates of these overswollen children of Mammon, paralyzed with ennui, and so fiction must be tortured. The father of Hamlet, lending his post-mortem presence and slipping ghostily out of his covers of calf and vellum, consents to have hellebore juice poured in his ear and to brush up against these French animals perspiring with passion.

And here are the Furies and the Fairies, the

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Plutocrat, do not admit any hunger-bitten Lazarus to this feast of the Holy Epicure!

"Mon Dieu! What do these bourgeoisie mean?" was the exclamation of the beggar who got a surreptitious glimpse of this culinary wonderland before he was bundled into the street.

But suddenly the fete came to an inglorious end.

It was just at the moment when the revellers, weary of their saltatory feats, were about to tone their lax muscles with titillations of the Bacchanalia—the very moment, in fact, when the immaculate Beau, with a leer in his mock-reverent eye, was calling upon His Satanic Majesty to say grace, while Sardanapalus declared to the Squaw, "the Spaniards discovered America, but the French have discovered Heaven"—it was at this moment that a terrific detonation shook the building. The windows were blown in, the lights were blown out, the ceiling fell, and the Eiffel Tower went down in a flood of mortar.

The effect was a panic. The Angel had a fainting fit; the hero of Austerlitz hid under the table; the Lion carried his abscinded tail in his trembling paw; Bluebeard derogated into a callow youth calling for his mamma; the Devil's horns perforated the Defender's fictitious belly; Night went to pieces, the entire structure of buckram and whalebone col-

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lapsing on the terrified head of a poor little page; the lords acted like lunatics, and the caricature of the universe was reduced to a painfully small farce.

When the excitement had somewhat subsided and the discomfited masqueraders awaited their turn in the confusion of carriages—some had taken ignominious flight on foot—four dishevelled beings—Henry the Eighth, the Man in the Iron Mask, reconstructed Night and a wilted Fairy—drifted together in the easy recognition of a family group.

"Oh! Are we all safe?" exclaimed the sylph.

"Safe,—but hungry," laughed the rakish king, who thought, as the affair was not fatal, it had better be treated as a huge joke.

With his crown off he was discovered to be a fat-faced, clean-shaven man about midway his century—an ex-broker, ex-director of the Bourse, ex-commercial schemer and financial filibuster, in fact, a kind of universal ex—a type of a class quite numerous in France who have played the game of life for high stakes and lost, a little staled among the rising young bloods with latest fads, but still holding to the fashionable set by the prestige of the past.

But the Man in the Iron Mask shook his head.

"It was the hungry man who threw the bomb."

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"What, an anarchist!" glowered the Night. "A crawling viper! A loathsome toad! Is that the beast that has sneaked in here and spoiled our sport?"

"Calm yourself, my good Madame Leon. Ours is not the only pleasure that is spoiled. There are a thousand people starving in Paris to-night," said he of the Iron Mask.

The general ex grew serious and even furious.

"The nation—*pardonnez moi,* M. Dupont—this pusillanimous government is responsible for the existence of these desperate people. It was not always so. I remember when Louise was born—he turned to the faded Fairy almost hid in the substantial shadow of Night, who threw her sable arms around the bedraggled little beauty—"there was something then for every man to do. There was war then, sir,—war."

The Man in the Iron Mask, M. Dupont, the brilliant republican member of the House of Deputies for the *arrondissement* of M——, looked from the father to the Fairy as one who is in a quandary between politics and love.

"You rightly say that society"—he had the party leader's trick of deftly shifting the blame—"is responsible for anarchy, but not in the way you suggest," he replied, removing the huge cage from his head as he suddenly became aware that he was ugly.

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The lifted mask disclosed a high forehead with the other features cast in a correspondingly generous mould and an expression of quiet confidence in the slightly sarcastic mouth and the ready blue eyes.

"But it is responsible in the same way that a good liver is responsible for the gout. The world has lived fast and society has pain in the foot. The remedy must be applied to the seat of the disease, which is in the very vitals of our social fabric. We must check the greed of the rich and legislate in the interests of the workpeople."

"You sympathize then with these murderous malcontents—these bomb-throwers?"

"I sympathize to some extent with their object, which is to help the great under class, but I abhor their methods. What right have we to sit down to a hundred-thousand franc feast when our neighbors are starving? We must level down and level up. But the anarchist would level everything down, he would cure the gout by killing the man, on the principle that the dead feel no pain."

"To my mind," retorted the fat bourgeois, "anarchy is a disease which we must be rid of by the strong hand of the law. These brutes should be exiled to some remote island where they can have liberty to ply their fiendish arts on each other and so rid the world of the maniacs."

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"You mistake—poverty is the disease; anarchy is only the nerve that runs from the diseased member into the head and gives the pang of warning. We must doctor the disease and not the symptoms. Depend upon it, not Paris —not France only—but the whole civilized world is on the eve of a social earthquake. God help us to open the safety valve and let off some of the accumulating steam!"

The professional legislator spoke with great feeling as a physician alarmed about his patient. He had that day been waited on by a committee from a convention of idle men, begging him for God's sake to do something for their relief.

"The *sans-culottes* have always been dissatisfied," snarled the general ex, who felt hurt in the house of his friends by a sentiment only fit to be heard in the Billingsgates and Tattersalls of Paris.

"But their dissatisfaction has never until now been linked with power and the consciousness of power. I tell you, M. Leon, if you want to hear the lion growl go down into the Faubourg St. Marcel any night after dark."

"To-morrow evening some friends will drop in to see me and I want you to come and dine with them," observed M. Leon, whose invitation sounded much like a whistle for help. "They are distinguished people and have some original ideas, and, I think, can suggest some

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ways of dealing with the anarchists that are new even to you."

"I shall be glad to meet them," assented M. Dupont.

He had a reason for accepting his friend's hospitality quite apart from the motive advanced. He could listen to distinguished people with original ideas any day in the House of Deputies, but he could nowhere else find such agreeable women as Mme. and Mlle. Leon. The general ex read his thought in his happy eyes and it caused a slight swerve in his current of talk.

"I am informed that a notorious woman is in league with these miscreants, if indeed she be not at the very head—a woman of extraordinary beauty and boldness, fit for anything—a very she-devil—and that she inspires them to their hellish deeds."

"A woman! The brazen-faced vixen! The good-for-nothing creature! How I would like to meet her and tell her what I think of her—the shameless thing!" exclaimed Mlle. Leon from her mother's ample shadow.

She belonged to the rather large class of young ladies who have the habit of hitching their speech with hyphens and spiking it with exclamation points.

"Perhaps you will meet her some day and then how the eagle will be crushed under the

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blows of my wee little dove," smiled the Deputy.

"Oh, you are always laughing at me! You think I don't know anything about anarchy, but I found a funny thing yesterday. A man came to the house with his little daughter in answer to my advertisement for a maid and he said that he was an anarchist, and a letter dropped out of his ragged coat. When he was gone I picked it up and read it and it said that President Carnot was to be murdered."

She imparted the startling information in the small triumph of a bright little mind that has secured a chance advantage over a large one.

"What did you do with the letter?" demanded M. Dupont, almost fiercely.

"Why, I put it in the fire! What else should I do with such a dreadful thing?"

The Deputy groaned.

"Why did you not tell us this before?"

"Oh, I was too busy getting ready for the ball. How could I think of a mere scrap of paper?"

M. Dupont and M. Leon looked at each other significantly.

"Did I not tell you that Paris is sleeping on a volcano?"

"More than one—more than one," replied M. Leon.

"What do you mean?"

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"Come to my house to-morrow night and you will learn."

Some other kings now drew away His Majesty and some other dark spirits performed the same office for Night. M. Dupont was left alone with the woman he loved. She was a beauty of the typical French kind, dark, petite, vivacious, passing at her full value; features regular and fair, the white cheek meeting the red lip like a sharp line between milk and wine. Time should stand still on such a face. The Deputy drank in her beauty with his eyes while his mind pondered the awful secret she had discovered.

"Strange they should want to kill so good a man!" he murmured, more to himself than to her.

"Oh, the President! You do not really think there was anything in that bit of paper do you? Why, the man was hardly better than a tramp!"

"It is these aberrant fellows—these atrophied, half-born creatures that make all the mischief."

"Yes, I remember his actions were singular. He looked at me as if—well, as if he hated me; so different from all other men."

"All other men admire you."

"Well, you know what I mean. And the girl, too,—she is such a freak. But then I like freaks."

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"Your admission of a preference for odd people is hardly complimentary," he laughed.

"Oh, I like odd people for servants, but regular people for companions. Still, I cannot deny a kind of foreboding that the girl's coming will be for evil; I am not superstitious, but I cannot shake off the feeling."

"We are all superstitious when trouble is brewing. Who are these men whom your father wishes me to meet?"

"Oh, some dear political friends of his. All political friends are dear, are they not?"

"They come dear," he replied, dryly. "Why does your father wish me to meet them?"

"Oh, they have such grand ideas. A Deputy wants to know the ideas of the people, does he not?"

"Yes, if they conduce to the welfare of the Republic."

"The Republic! Oh, I hate the Republic!"

"Louise!"

"M. Leon!" called the carriage director.

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II

On the evening of the fete a fiery meteor swept the heavens from the pillars of Hercules to the Winter Palace and a great blood-moon stood over Paris. The black breath of countless factories, which during the day had loafed in the upper and thinner atmosphere, stole down with the darkness and wound itself in serpentine forms, sombre, hurtling, portentous. Beneath these weird shapes the Seine glided darkly amid the vast stores of merchandise out of which the fortunate weave their silk cocoon, and the dismal dens into which the shipwrecked slink.

The city lay like a coiled snake in repose, awaiting the daybreak when, as the reptile slowly unwound itself, the head would bite the tail amid lashings horrible.

Under one of the darkest wreaths of smoke, the entire course of whose fuliginous length was pierced by ill-looking chimneys, the Faubourg St. Marcel, the savagest quarter in Paris, muttered in its sleep; and in a gray old stone-pile, half-shop, half-dwelling, whose massive walls kept well its awful secrets,

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crouched the Black Hand. It was distant only a few whips from the ball-room, for the House of Have and the House of Want stood close together; indeed, the carriage of many a reveller brushed the raven wings beneath which was hatching the plot to subvert the social order.

The building had a forbidding front—all wall except a dingy window with prison-like bars and a thick door with a judas, whose iron flap securely barred out prying eyes. Hardly more inviting was the grim interior—a narrow hall with small square rooms let into the wall in the harsh manner of cells from the corridor of a jail. The one that faced the street—laboratory, curiosity shop, powder-den of men who called themselves the progenitors of the new race—contained, beneath dust undisturbed by the feminine hand, the strange mechanical devices and chemical compounds which the inventors believed were to play an important part in the emancipation of mankind; next to this was the hall of the secret brotherhood; further back were the living rooms.

It is in the second apartment that our interest centers. Twelve dark faces glowered in a semi-circle upon a table on which stood a tallow candle and a little box surmounted by a wheel. It was no sentimental society playing with mystery, but a band of desperate men plotting world-wide revolution. They were of

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many types from many lands—dark-browed miners from under the Southern Cross, wasted exiles from the great steppes of the Yenisei, editors whose ink had been too rank for the softness of the times, broken-down men with a grudge against society.

They sat there—those grim revolutionists, with black badges in their button-holes—in a silence unbroken save by the slow-muttered words of the vow that crept from lip to lip, or by the solemn ticking of the clock, or by the ominous rattle of a ball in the box as the leader shook it from time to time to remind them of the sable ship of fate on which they were about to embark.

He was a remarkable man—not remarkable for his stature or his physiognomy, but for a certain indefinable expression in the steel-gray eyes that burned above the coal-black beard, suggesting that inward peace that made Abou-ben-Adhem bold.

This man was Paul Adám, the foremost anarchist of the world.

The person whom a spectator would select as next worthy of note had features cut on quite a different lathe—the strongly modelled Anglo Saxon rather than the sunken Gallic mould. His bearing, part of the soldier and part of the scholar, together with his smooth-shaven and finely modelled face would have

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made him sit well among the noble Six Hundred.

He had been Claiborne Douglas, the American, but he was known as Number Two among men who despised both nationalities and names.

Next to him—that phlegmatic little man in the bearskin, whose knit brows and retroflexed eyes seemed prying into himself—is a refugee from the hills of Cracow, Malo-Russian with an infusion of Polish, a disgraced majordomo who had lost his place because he refused to receive his pay in flash notes, a consequent Nihilist of the dirk-and-bomb variety, hater of priests and women—Jan Michel.

Then came Carl Barron, a red-bearded, thick-set German doctor, who had been run across the Rhine because of his gift for unfortunate phrases; his lean complement, Antonio Garcia, Spanish, with an Italian strain; Octave Bourdalotte, a wiry, wolfish-eyed Frenchman of Jacobin blood easily amalgamated with proletarian; and six other determined-faced men who vowed that they had done murder and would do it again for the sake of the human race.

Amid a silence which had become profound and even painful, Paul Adam stood up and administered the following oath to Douglas:

"I do solemnly swear that for the welfare of oppressed humanity I will take the life of

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the tyrant whose name shall be called when my number is drawn from the wheel, and that I will not under penalty of death reveal the secrets of this brotherhood to any man."

It was couched in the simplest language, for the Black Hand's words like its bolts were aimed straight at the target.

Then Douglas stood up and administered the oath to Michel; and so each one, in turn, receiving and giving the awful adjuration, felt doubly bound by its infrangible tie.

The very atmosphere of the bare, dim-lighted room seemed to pulse with destiny. The little clock ticked fatefully on the mantel, and the labored breathing of the smileless men became now and then audible.

Suddenly, there was a peculiar noise, coming apparently from a closet directly back of Paul Adam's chair. Barron was just giving the oath to Garcia and he paused in the midst of the fearful formula.

"Go on," commanded the leader in a deep voice and without even turning in the direction of the sound. "If the intruder be a spy, he cannot escape; if an officer, he can only hear what he has already heard."

The administration of the oath went on until all had taken the vow of blood.

The noise was repeated. The men exchanged glances, but remained perfectly calm. The hiding-place was not large enough to hold

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a formidable foe, and, besides, these men did not place a high value upon their lives.

The closet was fastened on the outside, but it had a slit in the form of a crescent, and through this a hand protruded. It was not the coarse hand of an officer of the law, but a female hand, the fingers of which were long and tapering.

Then came an arm, round and running up into a mass of fluffy material beyond. The arm shot out swiftly and the trim hand turned a button on the door.

Then from the widening aperture there stepped forth a form—a woman clothed in scarlet. Tall, taller than any man in the room, the towering Hickory of the Ohio alone excepted, and adding to her physical superiority an expression of singular power upon her mobile, finely-carved features, and a coquettish manner that differentiated the woman more certainly than the accident of dress, she blazed upon the Black Hand with a brilliancy and unexpectedness that for a moment struck its members dumb.

Paul Adam alone retained his composure.

"Why have you come here?" he demanded, coldly.

"I have come here because I am your daughter and because I want to be a member of the conclave. Anarchy should know no age, or race, or sex."

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The sentence was pealed from the depths of a vigorous nature and thrilled the men like a trumpet. Lip-born words were not for this forceful woman.

"Brothers," inquired the leader, solemnly, "what is the doom of an intruder in the Black Hand?"

"Death!"

The direful chorus from deep-throated men was enough to shake the soul of the stoutest hero, but the woman stood with a curl of inexpressible scorn upon her finely-cut lip.

"Very well, kill me if you cannot use me."

The folded arms, the statuesque pose, the calm audaciousness and resolve, together with the measureless strength of character which these indexed forth, filled the arch-plotters with admiration, and one of them with a more absorbing passion.

Claiborne Douglas from that moment felt his fate inextricably linked with that of Gabrielle Adam. He leaped impulsively to his feet.

"Brothers, although the doom of the intruder is death, yet this is no intrusion, for this is the home of Mlle. Adam, and how can she be an intruder in her own home? There is no rule against taking a woman into the league, and I move that we receive her and christen her the Bride of Anarchy. She is beautiful

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enough for that title. Brothers, hail the Bride of Anarchy!"

There was no formal putting of the question, for the band despised all parliamentary form, but the suggestion pleased the men and they gave the secret salute, even the major-domo yielding his prejudice to the dazzle of his senses.

Paul Adam alone made no sign.

"You have made a fatal mistake," he said quietly to Douglas.

"A glorious mistake," responded the infatuated man; "she is every way worthy of us."

"She is a woman," replied Paul Adam.

"And a woman will yet head the human race," retorted Gabrielle, her face burning with triumph and prophecy. "Why should there not be a woman Alexander?"

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III

"Number Thirteen."

All started as Paul Adam's deep bass intoned the superstitious numeral, which he wrote upon a little black ball and tossed into the wheel. The unlucky number which Gabrielle's admission added to the group of conspirators confirmed the ill omen of the taking of a woman into the circle of the secret, almost sacred, twelve.

The clock gave a warning stroke.

A drunken man in the street shouted, "Vive Bonaparte!"

The arch plotters looked at each other in dismay as the evil portents multiplied.

"Number Thirteen will take her place in the band," commanded the leader, grimly.

Douglas found a chair for the new member, and took care to place it next to his own. Several of his comrades glanced enviously at him, as the Bride with a gracious nod of her regal head accepted his politeness. He was so near her that he heard her stertorous breathing as her breast heaved with the excitement of her daring. But she betrayed no timidity, real or

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affected, in her position as the only woman among a band of fierce revolutionists. She displayed a proud superiority to sex, and swept into her seat as if by right and not by sufferance.

"Do you know what you have done?" demanded her father.

"I know what I have not done," she answered with incisive emphasis. "I have lived a life empty and useless. I am here to do."

"You are here to die."

"To do and die."

"You will have enough to do. Every one in this room is pledged to remove a tyrant."

The Bride bowed coldly.

"We are here to sign our death warrants," continued her father.

"I am ready to die."

Jeanne d'Arc receiving her sentence from her military judges could not have been more lofty. A murmur of admiration ran around the semicircle.

"By heaven, she's a Juno! Just see the I'll-strike-you-dead look in her eyes," muttered the German doctor to the majordomo.

"Better to look at than to live with," sneered the female hating nihilist, to whom a gown, whether worn by woman or priest, was like the red rag to the bull.

"Fear not; we will not die."

Douglas spoke so low that no ear heard ex-

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cept the one for whom the words were intended. In a moment the American had formed a desperate plan. He meant to save and marry this lordly and lawless woman. She turned her lustrous orbs upon him with a searching look, hardly less penetrating than those of her argus-eyed father, and read so much of his secret as pertained to love; but he, bewildered by the light of her crater fires, could not in turn tell whether her heart corresponded to his. Was she a kind of sexless goddess, incapable of affection for a man, or was she a woman raised to the fourth power, a multiple of the ordinary female unit?

"We are here," continued Paul Adam, in a tone that recalled to the men the fearful business of the hour, "to decide by whose hands the thrones shall fall."

"And you think this hand too weak?"

The Bride held up her right arm, bare and tantalizingly white, and on one shapely digit a single jewel burned.

"Remember the Maid of Orleans," she said.

While her arm was raised Douglas, at a nod from the leader, stood up and administered to her the oath. She repeated the syllables big with fate without a tremor in her pure and penetrating voice, seeming to enjoy her frightful promise.

"Are we ready?"

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Paul Adam surveyed critically every one in the palpitating crescent.

The majordomo spoke:—

"Would it not be better if the numbers were selected instead of drawn? A Russian, for example, could do better work in Russia than a man from another country."

"Anarchy," pronounced Paul Adam, "has no country. We are not here as Russians, or Frenchmen, or Germans, or Americans, but as world men. Are you ready?"

"We are ready."

It was the calm and awful declaration of men who had weighed life and were willing to exchange it for the unknown factor of death.

"We will begin at home. Who will remove the President of France?"

The wheel revolved, fast at first, then slowly. A ball rolled out. Every eye was fixed on the black oval of fate as Paul Adam held it up. The figures one and three stood out boldly against the daub of white paint.

NUMBER THIRTEEN.

Douglas turned pale. Every gaze was riveted upon the person chosen to commit the national crime—a woman. A satisfactory play of color ran over her white cheek.

"It is well," she said, simply.

"Bravo!" applauded her American lover.

The men echoed his admiration in deep reg-

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ister and thick gutteral, but one, a sceptical Russian, elbowed the Jacobin with:—

"Zat ees veree fine, but ze stroke—zat veel show. Zee femme to talk, but ze homme to act."

The Bride shot a withering glance at him, and the lot went on.

"Who will remove the tyrant of Germany?"

Again the wheel turned, and another ball rolled out.

It was Number Two.

"It is well," said the American.

The drawing continued. It was decreed that Karl Barron should be the assassin of the Czar of Russia.

The Emperor of Austria must die by the hand of Bourdalotte.

Still the wheel revolved, and still the work of choosing regicides went on. Fate allotted the taking off of King Humbert to Garcia, the Spaniard.

Great Britain was now reached. They might well pause here, for no one coveted this task. Who could be so dastardly as to lift his hand against a revered and venerable woman?

"Have we not just declared that anarchy knows no sex?" demanded Paul Adam, noting the reluctance on the faces of his comrades.

His inexorable hand again sought the box. The ball that came out was Number Three.

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"It is well," said Jan Michel, the major-domo, as he met the concert of inquiring looks.

And so the Wheel of Fate revolved until each man had taken the vow of murder.

The last one to be removed was the President of the United States.

The choice fell upon Paul Adam.

"Be it so," said the leader. He closed the box with a sharp click.

The Bride heaved a deep sigh.

The little clock struck midnight.

Every man went unto his own house.

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IV

M. Leon's town residence was on one of the southeastern boulevards, in a quarter of Paris that had been fashionable before the plebeian intrusion of trade caused the aristocrat to flee the presence of the shopkeeper. It was a pretentious pile of stone and iron, but, while the veteran speculator had not yet seen the way of dignified retreat, his foothold in his palatial home was becoming more precarious every year, and the knowing ones looked to see it thrown on the market any day. Rumors of his losses were freely circulated on the Bourse; still he had the reputation of being fertile in resources, and his operations were of a shady sort, so that, like an expert juggler, although a ball fell to the ground, no one knew how many more he might have up his sleeve.

Mme. Leon still entertained handsomely, but then a dinner party is often a kind of spectacular overcoat to hide one's poverty, and if her friends found no hint of their fears in the supply of wine, they fancied it to lurk in the ambiguous language of her whitening hair, underscored by deep wrinkles on her forehead. But

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that infallible sign of darker days, the surreptitious flow of furniture to the depot of broken aristocracy, the Hotel Drouot'* was as yet entirely wanting. The Regnaults and Proudhons that looked out of their mahogany frames, and the statues that slept in the corner, seemed as secure as the stone seats let into the wall on either side of the portal—relics of ancient hospitality to the wayfarer now fenced out by a costly iron railing.

M. Dupont had passed many a blissful hour with Mlle. Leon beneath the rare old paintings and by the side of the nude marbles, and the comparison between the cold classics and the throbbing flesh had helped the ripening of his love into a marriage engagement. His ancestry was half Russian and half French, and it was owing to this happy balance of nationalities that he owed much of his success, both in legislation and love. In the Chamber of Deputies the persistency of the Great Bear slept behind the civility of the country he called his foster mother, while in the drawing room he added the military bearing of the Slav to the mercurial mind of the Gaul.

But, although he carried his points in politics with such seeming surrender to his opponents that they counted the victory half their

*The building licensed by the government for public auctions.

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own, M. Dupont was no compromiser in any measure that concerned the welfare of the Republic. He believed the present regime the best possible one for the chameleon nation, and he was determined it should not again change its spots. Hence he regarded Mlle. Leon's final remark at the ball in much the same light as if she had attacked the Church, or even the family.

His fiancee, aware of his republican sentiments, had kept her own opinions in subordination, but the excitement of the explosion had for a moment released the repressive bit. She had now to decide whether she should again put the chafing metal in her small pearl-full mouth, or whether she should assume the air of a pretty little rebel. The near coming of her father's guests decided her course, as the ring of the doorbell would bring reinforcements.

"Well, I do hate the Republic, and there's no use in denying it!" she exclaimed, not understanding why a repetition was not as good as a reason.

They had paused before the pier glass as they came in from the informal dinner, M. Dupont good naturedly rallying her about her remark the previous evening, and, as she turned to give her expression emphasis, her full reflection confronted her. She was pretty, and

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that was excuse enough for her opinion. Her lover ought to yield to the argument of beauty.

"May I inquire whether your feeling is the result of your own judgment, or whether you are influenced by the views of others?" he asked.

"Why, I—I hadn't thought about that."

It was like asking whether her gown came from Worth's, or from some other fashionable dressmaker's. What matter as long as it was becoming and cost a thousand francs?

"I only know that we had a strong government, and now we have a weak one," she added, seizing upon the catch phrase of the royalists.

"Which means that once we were ruled by a monarch, and now we rule ourselves," translated the Deputy.

"I don't care; it is so common. We ladies do not want every coarse tradeswoman staring at us as if they were our equals."

"Ah! Then it is not the government you hate, but the people?"

"Well, then, yes; I don't like vulgar people."

"My dear little Cinderella, you should have a Paris all to yourself and your set. But," more seriously, "these vulgarians after all have little to do with the government. We are a monarchy as much as before, only now we have a hundred monarchs instead of one."

M. Dupont was a diplomatist in love as well

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as in law. If he could not make people choose green instead of blue, he would make them see that green was blue. He soon had an opportunity to try his art upon sterner stuff. M. Leon's political friends were announced.

The Duc de Broglie, the apparent leader of the trio, was a heavy man, built much like his obsequious host, his florid complexion and white flowing side whiskers making his presence impressive, save for a cast in his right eye, which, at first sight, unjustly perhaps, passed for a mark of moral obliqueness. He stood well on his stout legs, with an avoirdupois nearly equal to the combined weight of his two companions.

M. Dessereaux, who closely followed—rather, glided—after him, a tall hollow cheeked, bilious looking individual whose rakish politeness would have graced a three card monte table (but in Paris even the beggars are genteel), wore an expression less sanguine than that of his leader. Life's play of wits had sharpened his doubts until they stood out keenly on his face.

But the third man, M. Jacquot, was an entirely unknown force. Likely enough an accomplice, he might also possibly be playing an *independent* game, for the restless black eyes, *now* flashing in harmony with the common fire *and* anon retreating stealthily into their dark caverns as if the owner had a private fuse to

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look after, were as difficult of interpretation as the mysterious markings on the planet Mars. He bowed exceedingly low to Mlle. Leon, and with a gesture which M. Dupont did not like.

All three of the visitors wore an air of business.

"You are of Russian extraction, I believe," led off the Duc de Broglie, after breaking the ice of small talk. "Will you permit me to inquire if you have any distinguished friends in St. Petersburg?"

"His Grace is an ardent admirer of the Czar's country," bridged over M. Leon, who had been chosen to play the part of the mutual friend.

"I know well our Ambassador there, and I have some slight acquaintance with members in the four councils," replied M. Dupont, guardedly. "I have often used my influence in behalf of Frenchmen who wished to travel in Russia, and I shall be pleased to do so again, if I can be of any service to you or your friends."

He could well afford these little favors, which every politician understands to be the small coin of popularity, but as he bowed in turn to each he caught the twinkle in Louise's dancing eyes which told him his cue was wrong.

The visitors looked pleased and exchanged glances.

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"In case of a European war," ventured the Duc again, "you make no doubt that France and Russia would act as one—you make no doubt of that?"

"A general war, you understand," amended M. Leon.

The Deputy's tone changed at once.

"The community of interests between the two nations would, I think, assure that result, but I hope there will be no war," he replied, coldly.

"But surely Russia will not tolerate any interference with her Roumanian programme," persisted the Duc. "She means to cut her way to the Bosphorus; you make no doubt of that?"

"I think you mistake the spirit of Russia; she has no desire for European aggrandizement. Russia has a mission in Asia, but not in Europe."

"But as an ally of France," broke in M. Dessereaux, "she has a mission in Europe. France has a call to fight Germany, and Russia has a call to give order to the distracted States of the Balkan Peninsula. Why should not France and Russia make a bargain—Roumania for Alsace-Lorraine?"

The Deputy raised his hand deprecatingly.

"My dear Monsieur, France and Russia owe to the world a higher duty than the regulation of a division fence. The day of conquest for the sake of conquest has gone by. Should

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there come a war—which I pray God may not come—it will be a war for ideas, and not for provinces."

M. Leon and his friends appeared disconcerted. If they wanted a wedge in the House of Deputies they must look for a more tractable tool. But M. Jacquot's eyes began to work wickedly.

"What do you think of the anarchist plots?" he inquired, carelessly opening the dangerous switch, while he carried on a side play of small talk with Louise.

M. Dupont was glad of the opportunity to wheel about so as to keep him in full view.

"I regret to say that I regard their doings with alarm. You have struck now the real note of peril. The danger of France and of all other nations of Europe is not from the horizon, but from the nadir—not from a war cloud in the sky, but from a mine under our feet."

"Do you think the government is doing all it can to suppress them?" M. Jacquot asked, with a sceptical shrug of the shoulders.

He was speaking to the Deputy, but his gaze fell lecherously on the lovely little woman who divided the distance between them.

"Doubtless not. The republican party has acted upon the theory that toleration is the better policy. Possibly the time has come when more stringent measures should be employed."

"Have you ever thought that the war, which

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you fear, would afford an outlet for the socialistic agitation, and so prove a benefit to the country?" He was still looking at Louise.

"On the principle that you stab yourself to cure yourself," said the Deputy, with a sarcastic laugh. "But after the war—what?"

"Beautiful women and brave men."

"Pensions and paupers."

"Mlle. Leon would like to see war," suggested M. Jacquot, tickling her, as it were, with his restless eyes, which seemed to throw out little points.

"Indeed, I would! I love the troops, with their bright uniforms. If I were a man I would be a soldier!" sparkled the little beauty.

"But you are not a man; you are our *Dieudonne* (God-given) pet and will always be so," said her mother, entering in time to hear the last remark.

Mme. Leon was pious, and sought to carry in her ample soul a supply of devoutness both for herself and her carnal lord. She came and stood purringly over Louise, who cuddled up to her kittenishly. There was much more talk, but, gradually, as the ladies engaged in the conversation, the current ran toward social matters, and presently the visitors rose to take their leave. M. Jacquot held Louise's hand and muttered something over it that printed a richer crimson on her cheeks than the Deputy's

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avowals of love had ever been able to stamp there.

M. Dupont looked at him blackly. He would not mind anything a pure man could say to her, he reflected, but this seducer, this spotted soul—— Or did his jealousy warp his judgment? He stood in this arrest of thought, when he was rallied by Louise. Her parents were attending the visitors to the door.

"Well, what do you think of them?"

"They seemed to hold something in reserve. Evidently they said a great deal less than they wanted to say."

"They were afraid to trust you."

"You should vouch for me."

"I can vouch for your character, but not for your politics. I wish you did agree with father and M. Jacquot and—me."

"We agree, except that you do not love the republic. I begin to suspect——"

But Louise turned pale, and he did not finish the sentence.

"You do not love your country as I do," she said, with a little pout and tear. "You are not rooted in France, as I am—and—you do not love me."

She broke down and began a real cry.

M. Dupont folded her in his arms and denounced himself for a brute.

"Forgive me; I have been harsh, but I do

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not deserve that last thorn. You know I love you, my sweet fairy."

But he began to fear she was not so transparent as he had supposed. He had regarded her dislike for the Republic with as little significance as her disrelish for a prayer book, merely a girl's caprice—a wicked caprice to be sure, but still only a passing whim. He now suspected a definite plot for the overthrow of the government and that his fiancee might be in league with the conspirators. Her discovery of the strange scrap of paper also perplexed him. Perhaps he ought to go straight to the Prefect of Police and disclose the matter. But he could not believe there was any plot against the President's life. The evidence was too ridiculous; and, if it proved to be unfounded, his enemies might make capital out of the affair, and defeat him at the next election. It would be easy to do so, for he had already been accused of socialistic sympathies. But anarchy he could not bear to touch, even to expose it. Who can handle soot without getting black? M. Leon ought to report his daughter's startling find, but the ex-broker laughed it off as a kind of ghastly joke. Perhaps he was right; President Carnot was probably in no danger. Still M. Dupont meant to question the maid servant and find out whether her father was connected with a secret band

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of assassins. His opportunity came sooner than he expected.

Louise saw his troubled look, and its reflection began to darken her own lively little mind.

"You must not judge me by my rash speeches," she said, not supposing his concern could be for anything than her own precious self. "Really I do not know much about politics."

The confession was extorted by the fear that she had been indiscreet, for, in truth, she regarded herself as a very wise politician.

"You pretty little plotter! How foolish of me to think my country endangered by this palpitating bit of beauty!"

"But the softest purring cat has a claw, you know," she replied archly.

"Yours is velvet; it would not scratch the smallest government mouse, let alone the lion of liberty."

M. and Mme. Leon came in while the young couple held each other.

"Well, France and Russia have made a treaty at last!" exclaimed the ex-broker, winking jovially at the lovers.

His red face gleamed with overflowing good nature. He was the best souled of men, except when he had taken a little too much wine.

Mme. Leon also added her approval. M. Dupont might not be rich, but he was brilliant

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and famous, and the matrimonial alliance would sustain the house of Leon until the next deal of fortune. "Bless you, bless you, my children!" she said, placing a hand on the head of each.

At that moment there came from below a report—a kind of muffled roar, accompanied by female shrieks. All ran down stairs to find Marie, the maid, prostrate on the floor, some strips of powdered cloth lying about and the carpet on fire.

"Why, Marie, what does this mean?" demanded Louise, after the men had extinguished the blaze.

"Oh, I was just playing with that and—well, it went off."

"What were you playing with?" inquired the Deputy, sternly.

"Oh, just this!" replied the frightened girl, holding up a small piece of tin.

"Was it a bomb?"

"I don't know; I've seen father make them."

"Who is your father?"

"Jan Michel."

"Where does he live?"

The girl hesitated, for her wits had now returned. She was a queer made child—a head too old for her body, and a body too short for her years. Her face wore a pinched look, and the expression was a curious combination of simplicity and cunning.

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"I do not know; Paris has so many streets."

"I shall take occasion to make you know." Then to his host:—

"M. Leon, you have an anarchist in your house!"

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V.

"Curse you, I love you!"

Strange words to come out of wooing lips.

It was the day following Gabrielle Adam's brilliant capture of the Black Hand. Her life, hitherto in an eddy, was flowing out into the current. She had lived alone with her father in the prison of his prejudice, the great world of secret designs in which he and his comrades moved as wide apart from her as another planet.

Of her early history—of that most important and impressionable period in life—the journey from the alphabet to the abstract noun—she knew almost nothing. Her mother—if mother there had been—(she sometimes thought a being so different from all other women must have had a unique creation), had died young and there were two irreconcilable accounts of her.

In a dimly remembered visit to Asnieres she had met a woman who told her that her mother was the daughter of a bourgeois in that suburb, a good and beautiful lady who was disinherited for her marriage, and who

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had lived only a short time with her husband, and then entered a convent, where she was known as Sister Pauline; but the crones of the Rue Pascal declared that she was a notorious character of the Faubourg St. Marcel, the head of a band of female conspirators and assassins, and had been called the Red Woman of the Commune.

When Gabrielle looked in the glass she believed the Asnieres tradition, but when her blood boiled with the malady of self-extension she put her faith in the old crones. Possibly, Regulus-like, there had flowed into her veins both the nature of the wolf and the woman. Her father was reticent on the subject, and she had no other relatives. She had passed her life in Paul Adam's black-walled den, doing his simple housework, her mind feeding on books of Anarchy and—herself, her only diversion short walks or errands in a wretched district where her appearance was so different from that of the scant, scrawny, or stunted, figures of her sex, as to awaken the admiration of men and the envy of women.

Lovers she had in plenty; and if she could have fed on the pabulum of the ordinary blooming young lady of twenty, she would have been happy. But she only sported with her suitors as so many pet dogs—nice little creatures to amuse one's self with, but unfit

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for the serious business of life, which meant killing people to make the world better.

She had now a new candidate for her hand. His name was Santo Caserio—a name which has since passed into history as the synonym of everlasting infamy. His passion found vent in muttered curses, because his open heart's leaf found no opposite and corresponding page in the woman he loved. Gabrielle stood before him in all her regal beauty, more superb in her scorn than in her smile.

"Curse you—a thousand curses upon you, if you refuse me! Now will you be my bride?"

"I am the Bride of Death!"

Her face was as colorless as a statue while she pronounced her own doom, and her absolute invincibility lent a charm almost unearthly to the head which she poised like a very goddess for loftiness.

"I am the Bride of Death! I am not for any man!"

"But me save you."

His dark eyes looked into hers imploringly. He had not been long in France, and spoke the language very imperfectly, but his rich voice and softly vowelled speech had a charm peculiar to the Italian. Signs were not wanting also that in more fertile soil the crude exotic might have been something better than a poison flower. His strongly knit frame and his agile, catlike movements evinced a strength

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and suppleness of body which the quickness and lustre of his eyes seemed to indicate were paralleled in a ready and robust mind. Partly as workman, partly as suitor, he had hung about Paul Adam's tenement since the day he met the anarchist chief and his brilliant daughter at a labor demonstration in the Faubourg St. Antoine. Gabrielle, half pleased and half provoked by his devotion, had until now kept him coquettishly at bay.

"Signorina Gabriella, you are a beautiful woman; you must be mine."

"No, no, you talk foolishly, knowing not what you say. Go now!" She waved her queenly arm, and her swarthy lover felt a power he dared not disobey. He stalked sulkily out just as Douglas was coming in, and, in the passing, the door was left slightly ajar.

"Ha! that is why she wanted me to go—she expected him!" growled the Italian, and he determined to take advantage of the aperture to hear what was said.

Gabrielle greeted the American pleasantly, and in a humorous vein related Caserio's unprosperous suit.

"And do you love him?"

The question was impertinent, but they were both living nervous lives, and the times were exciting. Their eyes met, and each tried to read the other's. Gabrielle's lead touched bottom, but Douglas had only imperfect success

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in fathoming the secret that lay deep in the dark wells he strove to pierce.

"By what right do you ask?"

He took encouragement from her tones rather than from her words; the inflections were different from those in which she had lightly treated of the Italian's advances.

"None; but I would crave the right to ask."

He came nearer and sought to take her hand. She drew it partly back, but permitted the shapely fingers to rest tantalizingly in his hot palm.

"Gabrielle—Mademoiselle Adam—you are a mighty woman, and you deserve a brave man. Could you think of me as a proper counterpoise for a character like yours? Do I come anywhere near your standard of a man —of a husband, if, indeed, you could stoop to take a husband?"

She did not speak for a moment, but her gaze looked him through and through. He had never been thrilled by such soul power, except in the case of Paul Adam. She had inherited her father's magnetism, though not the peculiar scorching quality that made all men wither before him. In her the burning glass had become the microscope. The lover felt himself searched to the lowest cell of thought.

"You mean to ask if you are worthy?"

"No, I am not worthy; nor is any one. I only mean, am I as worthy as any other man?"

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"Have you ever killed any one?"

The unexpected question came like a shot. It made him reel. He was uncertain whether she wanted yes or no. The quality of innocence that would commend him to other women might condemn him to her. Hesitating as one between two doors, he ventured an implied affirmative.

"I am a member of the Black Hand."

"And the password to the Black Hand is a deed of blood. Enough. Now, what do you want?"

The abrupt interrogative staggered him again, but it brought him to his senses, as a blow on the head sometimes imparts wisdom.

"Why—why, I want to marry you!" he stammered, with a blushing consciousness that he had not hitherto approached the subject in the most straightforward way. She was the most direct of women, and his proposal had been a circumlocution. Caserio's method was better.

"But I am doomed!"

"You need not be; I will die for you, or, better yet, fly with you."

Gabrielle shook her head.

"I must fulfil my oath; I must redeem the honor of my sex."

But the lover was not discouraged. He had run the gauntlet of her immeasurable capacity of scorn and had not been humiliatingly re-

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jected. It was assuring to know that he had to cope with no rival in flesh and blood—only death.

"Come," he said, "let us make another oath; let it be this—if you are spared, you are mine."

"I will agree to that," she answered, swiftly; but he was uncertain whether it was the consent of love or the assent of despair.

"Is it, then, Douglas or death?" he urged.

"It is Douglas or death," she replied, with no more tremor than if the fearful alternative had been only a choice of alms between a couple of troublesome beggars.

He thought it strange that one ordinarily so passionate could be so calm on the most momentous of subjects. Hers was a volcanic soul, and yet she could so speak that he could construe the words to be either the devotion of love or the abandonment of hope. He did not know that opposite feelings in the deepest natures have the same note, as at the highest and lowest points of a globe all meridians meet.

"Swear!" he said, holding up his hand.

She held up her hand.

"Let us put it into writing." He glanced around for pen and paper.

"No!" thundered a voice.

Paul Adam entered from the laboratory.

"No! An anarchist's word is as good as his

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bond. Written pledges are for people who cannot trust each other."

"But marriage is a serious thing!" protested the suitor.

"Life is a serious thing," replied Paul 'Adam. "Marriage binds duty to one person; life to all. He who regards a promise lightly is not worthy of life. Thus do the lawmakers promise to take care of the people, and take care only of their party. They have forfeited life, as the unfaithful wife forfeits matrimony."

"But at least you will approve our engagement?" ventured Douglas.

"Let that man be married who seeks the things of the man; we seek not the man, but men."

"And women," laughed Douglas.

He stood so near the beautiful bride that he could not resist the temptation to press the red, ripe lips, but as he bent eagerly forward he was arrested by a voice. The Italian, glaring through the crack of the door, could not restrain his jealousy.

"No kiss! No kiss!" he cried menacingly.

"Back, miscreant!" vociferated Douglas, vexed at the intrusion, for his would-be rival had advanced well into the room.

The Italian assumed a defiant attitude and flourished a stiletto.

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"You fight me; we see who brave man. Come, I fight you. We see who love most Signorina Gabriella."

Douglas responded by drawing his revolver.

For a moment a bloody conflict seemed inevitable, but Paul Adam stepped calmly between the angry men.

"Fools! Are we not all ordered unto death? Let us have peace to-day, for to-morrow we die."

Caserio, awed by the terrible eye of the master, backed slowly out of the room.

"I go, but he must go, too," he appealed.

"Very well; he shall go."

When the Italian had departed Paul Adam turned to the American.

"The hour is at hand. We must prepare."

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VI

"Do not discharge her, but watch her. I believe we have hold of the end of a frightful plot."

This was M. Dupont's advice to his host after the cross-questioning of the little maid in the kitchen. The Deputy knew that Paris was filled with desperate men. There were earthquake mutterings in all parts of the city, and every second pedestrian wore a fierce look. This very night, as he passed the Halle des Macons, where a workingmen's meeting was in progress, he had been startled by a roar of applause that made him look up in fear that the building was falling. Behind the socialists glowered the anarchists, and it was in this lowest stratum that Guy Fawkes might be expected to develop. To discover a gunpowder plot against the government would bring him into high favor with his co-legislators, and might prove the step to the Presidency, for M. Dupont belonged to the class of rule-of-three statesmen who regarded the effect of all things, first upon one's own popularity, then upon his party, and lastly upon the people.

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At first sight Mlle. Leon's maid seemed too small an agency to exercise the slightest influence upon any of these fundamental potentialities. For she was small, ugly and odd. Her very coming into French existence was a stray strand in Paris' many-colored web. Jan Michel, like the Deputy, had his roots set in two great countries. Born on the banks of the Bug, in that province of the autocrat where even the land often fails beneath the tiller's feet, he had seen his little plot of ground disappear piecemeal in the huge maw of the Russian satrap, who pacified its owner by bestowing upon him the position of majordomo, a place he was only permitted to hold until the smart of his lost acres had somewhat eased, when he was obliged to surrender it to a fellow sufferer, in turn to go through the same course of pruning and poultice. About the same time, his Jadwiga ran off with a roving Skoptsy priest. Thus, robbed by the government of his land, by his master of his place, and by the priest of his wife, there was left to poor Jan Michel—the air. With three implacable hatreds in his heart—a detestation of police, priests and women—the luckless, landless and wifeless man fled to France, and, falling into the hotbed of Parisian conspiracy, the timid nihilist became the fierce anarchist. Narrow and suspicious, the unhappy man made few friends, and, to relieve the loneliness of the

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miserable shelter he called home, he adopted a little child—stupidly forgetting to inquire its sex—who grew up to be Marie Michel.

The little girl made strange acquaintances. Long haired men with frowsy whiskers, and shock headed men in rough attire, came to Jan Michel's rooms and talked dark sentences in strange jargon, paying no more attention to the listening child than to Fido, the sleeping dog.

One man, however—an ill looking fellow, with scraggly whiskers, through which struggled a sickly smile—regarded her as something more than a wall picture. He often tried to converse with her, but the child shrank away from his advances, noticing with superstitious terror that while he talked his eyes twinkled and his beard grew black.

When her father procured for her the position of maid to Mlle. Leon she was glad to escape from this Giant Grim materialized out of the story book. She did not know it was this man—Le Fevre, her father called him—to whom she owed the transition from the squalor of the Rue Pascal to the palace of the ex-broker, and so she was not a little astonished and frightened on the third evening in her new home, as she stood by the gate looking out upon the grand procession of equipages that rolled through the spacious avenue, to find herself suddenly beneath a black cloud

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of beard, over which glistened ominously two ebon stars. He tried to smile, but his grin suggested the cannibal more than his frown. His voice was hideously hoarse.

"Good evening, my dear, my little pearl—yes, my pretty little pet, my sweet little puss, you know."

Marie did not reply.

"And how do you like it? Pies and parties, eh? Sweetmeats and silk stockings all the time, eh?"

He tried to nudge her, but the girl drew back.

"Rich people, eh? Nice place. And it was I that got you here."

Marie stole a surprised look.

"Yes; I said to your father, 'That girl is a prize. She ought to be living where she can see things. She's got it in her—that girl has.' And so I got you this place. Nice place, now."

Marie's frozen face thawed, but she ventured no reply.

"And now as I've helped you, I want you to help me. I want you to tell me about these people."

"Tell you what?"

"Oh, about old Leon's money, and the ladies' jewels—where they keep them, what room, what bureau drawer. And the windows—have they got alarms? And are there any dogs about? Just tell me all you know."

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"I don't know anything."

He had been bending more and more as he spoke, and his mouth almost touched her ear, while his frightful beard rested upon her trembling shoulder.

"Oh, you must know, and you must tell me what you know. You mustn't tell it to any one else. Hush is the word. Don't tell them I've been here. You've just come, you know, and you must be careful; a new coat should have close pockets; that's my advice to you. List you now. I can make you rich—dresses and diamonds, and——"

But Marie had been retreating further and further through the aperture, Le Fevre's hoarseness dropping to a hiss as she edged away, and by a quick movement she shut the gate with a bang. Then she ran into the house.

But the little maid had escaped the fusilade of questions at the gate only to receive a hotter fire from another quarter. The servants, who had been instructed to watch her, reported to Mme. Leon, and she to M. Dupont, who arrived a moment after Le Fevre's departure. The Deputy immediately had her up in the parlor.

"Now, Marie, who was the strange man you were talking with at the gate? You had better make a full confession and tell me all about it."

"I don't know."

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"What did he want?"
"Nothing."
"What did he say to you?"
"I didn't understand."
"Where does he live?"
"I don't know."
"Did you ever see him before?"
"Yes; at home."
"Is he a friend of your father?"
"I have no father."
"But this man—Michel?"
"He is not my father; my father and mother are dead."
"Who were your parents?"
"They were plaster wipers."
"Plaster wipers?"
"Yes; they got their rent free for living in houses till the plaster was dry; and they got their death, too."
"Oh!"
The Deputy turned over and over again his questions about the stranger at the gate, but always with the same result.
"Did he give you anything?" broke in Louise, who had come to regard her little maid as a kind of mammoth firecracker, liable to go off without notice.
"Yes."
"Oh, he did!" exclaimed the Deputy, rushing upon what might prove an important trail. "Now, what did he give you?"

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"Some advice."

"Advice? Good! Now, what was it?"

"He said a new coat must have close pockets.

The interrogators glanced at each other.

"What did he mean by that?"

"I don't know."

M. Dupont reflected a moment, and then made what he intended should be a grand coup. Seizing her arm, he drew her toward him and demanded abruptly:—

"Marie, when is M. Carnot to be murdered?"

"Who is M. Carnot?" inquired the girl, opening her blue eyes very wide.

The Deputy fell back helplessly, and after some further questioning the maid was dismissed. She went down stairs, feeling that as between Le Fevre and M. Dupont she was like the lonely bird which was too black for a dove and too white for a crow.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Louise asked.

"The girl either knows nothing or she knows a great deal too much," he replied; adding, with a wish to change a topic on which he had failed to shine:—"But what a state of society! These plaster wipers pay their rent with their lives, because blood is cheaper than money."

"And, pray, who are the plaster wipers."

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"They are the people who are permitted to live in new houses rent free until the plaster is dry enough for the owner's family or a better class tenant. They save the rent, but they get the rheumatism."

"But why do people live in such places? If they don't like their lodgings, why don't they get other houses?"

The Deputy smiled at the simplicity that confounded poverty with rents at 3,000f. a year and supposed that starvation meant only to go without cake. Mlle. Leon went to the St. Madelaine Mission, where her mind became cast in the mould of moral atrophy, miscalled piety, which prated about the poor, dear Hottentots and horrible French peasants.

"Louise, there are thousands of people in Paris whose lives are not worth a pin. I saw a woman kill herself to-day."

"Kill herself! Why, what did she do that for?"

Why, indeed, should any person want to die who could live in Paris? The bright little woman wrestled a moment with the great problem and mastered it. She was never at a loss to find a cause for anything.

"It is all because we have no king; if we had a king like other countries things would not be so bad."

"Why, what possible use have we got for a king?"

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He was surprised and amused.

"Oh, if we had a king we would have a court. We Parisiennes are the leaders of fashion, but we have no queen of fashion. We are like a beautiful statue without a head," replied Louise, passing with the ready facility of small minds from the troubles of others to her own.

"Ah, where did you pick up that notion?"

He must look further for the idea, as his fiancee belonged to that rather numerous class of people whose smart sayings are second hand and whose original sayings are commonplace.

"Oh, I've heard M. Jacquot say so."

The Deputy's face clouded.

"Louise, who is M. Jacquot?"

"Oh, he's such a gentleman, and he belongs to such an old family, so very old!"

"Indeed! If the evolutionists are right, we all belong to a pretty old family—the good old Simian family, the anthropoid apes."

"Oh, you horrid thing! You just hate M. Jacquot, and I think it's real mean of you."

She burst into a little gust of tears.

M. Dupont looked at her fondly. It was because she was so intensely feminine, so very womanish, that he loved her. Laying cocks and crowing hens he abominated. But he was angry and broke out:—

"I believe the man to be a lewd fellow and not fit for the society of a lady."

With most women this speech would have

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made the tempest a tornado, but Mlle. Leon always cried just enough. Her small cloud was soon spent. She was daily cautioned by her managing mamma not to quarrel with the Deputy, for if her love could not keep the peace there was a sufficient reason for the unbroken troth in her father's banking account.

"Of course, I don't hold him as—as equal to you," faltered the neat little tactician.

"Nor love him quite so much, I hope," laughed the Deputy, kissing the lips which were more tempting for the pout.

M. Leon at this moment entered the room, holding in his hand a paper. He was too excited to notice the confusion of the lovers.

"Here is news; at the workingmen's meeting last night the *sansculottes* voted to abolish the President, the Senate and House and take things into their own hands."

"I am afraid they will do it—I am afraid they will do it," replied the Deputy, gravely.

"And submit every question to the popular vote?" demanded M. Leon, his voice shaking with passion. "Why, the vagabonds would vote away our property!"

"I don't doubt it."

"Sir, you are a Deputy. My friends, the Duc de Broglie, M. Dessereaux and M. Jacquot, are coming again to-night, and I want you to put some of their plans into a bill to be acted upon by the Parliament at once."

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"I have already listened to some of their plans, and I think there is too much prescription and too little pill."

"But they have some grand ideas to present."

"My dear sir, the people hate ideas; they want potatoes."

"Sir, sir; there are too many people—too many vulgar people, and there must be another war."

M. Leon struck the table with his paper.

"There will be another war," prophesied M. Dupont, "but it will be a war for bread and home."

"Oh, for a day of Napoleon!" sighed Louise.

"He will come in a blouse and smock shirt," answered the Deputy.

"The Duc de Broglie, M. Dessereaux and M. Jacquot," announced the maid.

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VII

The next morning Paul Adam and Michel went to view the palace of the Deputies. There was an expression of peace on the seamed and rugged features of the anarchist chief, as of sunlight bathing cragged peaks, but the Russian wore a troubled look. He had taken an oath to remove the most popular ruler on earth, and that sovereign—a woman. He tried to dismiss the notion that her sex should make any difference in her fate, but there are certain compass points in the mind which cannot be made to change by any wind of the will, so that, when his intellect assented to the abstract proposition that a queen representing tyranny was no more deserving of mercy than a king standing for the same odious quality, he met with instinctive rebellion the moment he proposed to himself the means by which he should fulfil his vow of blood. He could not shoot a woman; to stab her was even more revolting. But there was the bomb—the weapon of anarchy.

The Bourbon palace now lifted its massive masonry before them, recalling Valliant's

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fiasco a few months before. An aesthetic vein ran through the cramped mould of the little majordomo, and he could not help admiring the noble pile. He had no pity for the life that daily throbbed there at the red heart of the nation—lawmakers were as much the natural victims of the bomb as the mouse was the lawful prey of the cat—but he thought it too bad that such a fine work of art should be destroyed.

"What grand buildings!" he observed.

"They are at once the glory and the shame of France, and they shall pass away," replied Paul Adam; "a little while and they shall not be."

"Could we not put them to a better use when the government shall have been overthrown?" ventured Michel.

"Have you then so misunderstood the spirit of tyranny?" demanded his leader. "Do you not know that evermore the lair invites the lion? But it shall not be so here."

A coupe containing two Deputies drew up at the curbstone. As they alighted, Paul Adam turned and faced them.

"To-day is yours, but to-morrow will be the day of the people."

The men glanced at him with a frightened look and hurried away to the hall of legislation.

The clock on the Tower of Justice struck.

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A boy thrust a paper in Michel's hand. It announced the holding of a monster labor meeting in the Place de la Bastille at that very hour. "Let us go," proposed Michel. "M. Joule is going to speak."

"They are poor sheep, without a shepherd; they know not what they want; but we will go," assented Paul Adam.

The tram car was crowded, and when they reached the Place de la Bastille, one of the most crowded and wretched parts of the city, a black mass of men wriggled through ten glutted mouths into that court of the infamous name. There did not appear to be much coherence in the vast swarm, the majority seeming not to know for what purpose they had come. The greater part were idle working-men, who had a vague idea that things were wrong, and a still more nebulous notion that the meeting was a factor in setting them right. But among these horny handed laborers in smock shirts there was a large contingent of malcontents, whose minds were very clear as to what ought to be done and whose methods were very startling for the doing.

"Le pain! le pain!" went up from a thousand throats.

A patriotic device borne of four was carried through the crowd.

"Vive la France!" rent the air.

But as the sounds died away there came

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