

FILE NO. 119

-BY-

Emile Gaboriau.

In an offended tone she said: "You promised me upon your honor, monsieur," continued Madeleine, "that you would never again seek my presence. Is this the way you keep your word?" "I did promise, mademoiselle, but so many things have happened since that terrible day that I think I am excusable in forgetting, for one hour, an oath torn from me in a moment of blind weakness. It is to chance, at least to another will than my own, that I am indebted for the happiness of once more finding myself near you. The instant I saw you my heart bounded with joy. I did not think, no, I could not think—that you would prove more pitiless than strangers have been, and cast me off when I am so miserable and heart-broken."

"In order to decide whether I will accept or reject them," "But suppose I guarantee success?" "That is not sufficient, monsieur. I will thank you for your past services, and decline them for the future, as I have no need of them. If I attempted to defend my honor and my life it was because I hoped that Madeleine would be restored to me. I have been convinced to-day that she is at an end between us; I retire from a struggle, and care not what becomes of me now."

Prosper was so decided that M. Verduret seemed alarmed. "You must be mad," he finally said. "No, unfortunately, I am not. Madeleine has ceased to love me, and of what importance is anything else?" "Prosper's tone was so despairing that M. Verduret was moved. "So you suspect nothing? you did not see what was hidden beneath her words?" Prosper turned upon him indignantly. "You were listening?" he said. "Perhaps it was not a delicate thing to say, but as the object is gone, we need not look too closely at the means. I listened, and I am glad that I did, because now I can say to you, 'Take courage, Prosper; Madeleine loves you; she has never ceased to love you.'"

Like a man who, feeling himself at the point of death, puts faith in the doctor's promises, Prosper saw a ray of hope in M. Verduret's positive assertions. "Oh!" he murmured, suddenly calmed, "I could only believe—"

"Believe me, I am not mistaken. Ah! you have not guessed as I did the sufferings of this generous girl, struggling between her love and what she believes to be her duty. Did not your heart bound at her words of farewell?" "She loves me, she is free, and yet she flies from me."

"Free? no, she is not free. In recalling her promise to you she obeyed a superior, for whom? We shall know soon, and the secret of her self-sacrifice will reveal to us the secret of the plot of which you are the victim."

As M. Verduret spoke Prosper reconsidered his resolution to emancipate himself from his guidance. He felt hope and confidence returning to him. "Obstinate man, why will you shut your eyes to the clearest evidence? Don't you understand that Madeleine knows the name of the thief?"

"Impossible!" "It is a fact; but we may be sure that no human power can extract it from her. Yes, she has sacrificed, like you, to a right to do so, for she sacrificed herself first."

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