

# BY ORDER OF THE LEAGUE.

CHAPTER V.

The weeping woman looked up, and the loveliest face she had ever seen, the girl standing before her possessed all the attributes of southern beauty. Her hair, which was long and luxuriant, hung in one thick plait down her back, and lay in careless waves upon a forehead pure as chiselled marble; under the transparent skin; her features exquisitely moulded; whilst her eyes, deep as running water, conveyed an air of pride and power—a sense of passion and of pride capable of looking implacable hate upon the fondest love. They were commanding and stern as the woman looked up into the stranger's face.

"Who are you?" she asked wonderingly. "Men call me Isodore," the stranger replied in a voice singularly sweet. "I have another name. Will you let me look at the coin you have in your hand?"

"Never dreaming of refusing this request," the woman handed over the gold piece to the girl, who looked at it long and intently. Her eyes were hard and stern when she spoke again. "Where did you get this?"

"It was given me to stake at the table," she answered. "I thought it bore some device, and I exchanged it for a coin of my own."

"It has no meaning to you! It is not possible you are one of us?"

"I do not understand you," the woman replied. "It is a curious coin. I have seen one once before—that is all I know of it."

"Listen," the girl said in a hushed voice. "You do not comprehend what its possession means to you. It is the symbol, the sign of membership of the strongest political Brotherhood in Europe. If it was known to be in your possession, your life would be forfeit; it would be regained at all hazards. If one of the Brotherhood knew it, he would deliberately pact with it, I would not give a hair for his life."

"And he is in danger of his life?" the woman cried starting to her feet. "Give it me, that I may return it to him."

"No!" was the stern reply; "he does not get off so easily. We do not temper with traitors.—Woman! what is this for?"

"He is a man and his life is in danger. Mark me!" Isodore replied with stern emphasis. "I have not the eyes of a hawk and the hearing of a hare for nothing. I was opposite you in the saloon, and I know something more than womanly sympathy prompts you. I saw the struggle in the girl's face; I saw you start and tremble as he spoke to you; I saw you change the coin for one of yours, I saw you weeping over it just now. Woman! I ask again what is he to you?"

Slowly the words came from the other's lips, as if forced from them by some mesmerizing influence. "You are right," she said; "for heaven help me—he is my husband! I saw Valerie le Gautier. Now, tell me who you are."

"Tell me something more. How long has he been your husband?"

"Nine years—nine long, weary years of blindness and neglect, hard words, and, to my shame, hard blows. But he tired of me, he tires of all his toys; he always tires when the novelty wears off."

with the same love and patient devotion one seen in the face of a dog.

"You rang, Isodore?" she asked; and again the stranger noticed the great earnestness in the voice, save as to the depth and ring of Isodore's tones.

"Yes, Lucrece, I rang," the sister replied. "I have brought a visitor to see you. Lucrece, this lady is Hector le Gautier's wife."

"Le Gautier's wife?" the girl asked with startled face. "Then what brings her here? I should not have expected—"

"You interrupt me, child, in the midst of my explanations. I should have said Le Gautier's deserted wife."

"Ah!" Lucrece exclaimed, "I understand.—Isodore, if you collect under your roof all the women he has wronged and deceived, you will have a large circle. What is she worth to you?"

"Child!" Isodore returned with some marked emphasis on her words, "she is my friend—the friend of Isodore should need no welcome here."

A deep blush spread over the features of Lucrece at these words, as she walked across the room to Valerie's side. Her smile was one of consolation and welcome as she stooped and kissed the other woman lightly.

"Welcome!" she said. "We see both friends and foes here, and it is hard sometimes to tell the grain from the chaff. You are henceforward the friend of Lucrece too."

"Your kindness almost hurt me," Valerie replied in some agitation. "I have so few friends, that a word of sympathy is strange to me. Whatever you may want or desire, either of you, command me, and Valerie le Gautier will not say you nay."

"Lucrece, listen to me," said Isodore in a voice of stern command. "To-morrow, we cross to London, and the time has come when you must be prepared to assist in the cause.—See what I have here!" Without another word, she placed the gold moiré in her sister's hand.

Lucrece regarded it with a puzzled air. To her simple mind, it merely represented the badge of the Brotherhood.

"You do not understand," Isodore continued, noticing the look of bewilderment. "That coin, as you know, is the token of the Order, and to part with it knowingly is serious."

"Yes," Lucrece interrupted; "the penalty is death."

"You are right, my sister. That is Le Gautier's token. He staked it yonder at Kursaal, giving it to his own wife, though he did not know, to put upon the colour. The coin is in my hands, as you see. Strange, how man becomes fortune's fool!"

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