was all he had to say on the subject. You may be sure it was not difficult for Jean to obtain appointments; the trouble lay in not undertaking too many. His violin was the love of his life, and you know what a wonder it was, unrivaled in softness and pureness of tone. Jean loved it with passion as a man loves a woman; he loved it with the tenderness of a father for a child. It was his sole happiness, his sole distraction. In its sound he forgot all else.

ONE night he was engaged to play at the theater of X. The house was completely carried away. It shouted, clapped, stampeded, and he was radiant at their success,—his and his violin's. It had begun to rain, and when it was time for us to leave it was pouring in torrents. We finally persuaded Jean, much against his will, to leave his violin in one of the dressing rooms, and then he and I and André there sauntered off for late refreshment to a little café near home, of which we were habitués.

"We had been sitting sometime at the table when we suddenly heard the cry of 'Fire! Fire! The theater of X. on fire!' I looked at Jean. He had gone deathly white and, rising to his feet, he threw his glass from him and rushed out of the café, I following. But he seemed to be borne along by some supernatural force; for I soon lost sight of him, and when I at last reached the theater it was to give up all hope of ever seeing him again. It was impossible that anyone could withhold his frenzied impetuosity, or that anyone entering those flames could ever come out alive. I turned away sick at heart; when I thought I saw him at the very entrance, fighting like a madman in the grip of several gendarmes. I ran to him. 'Jean, Jean!' I cried. 'Come, I beg you; it is no use! Don't you see we are too late?'

"He turned at the sound of my voice and seemed to realize the futility of further resistance. The gendarmes abandoned him to me, and together we wended our way to our rooms. All the way he said not a word, and I dared not address him. His face was white and drawn, and in his eyes was so great an anguish that it made me sick to see him. He did not undress, but simply threw himself on the bed from sheer exhaustion. The next morning he was gone, his bed still unmade.

"We were terrified, fearing the worst. Of what might he not be capable in such a frame of mind? We secretly had a search organized for him; but late that night he staggered back, worn and grief stricken, and we made him let us undress him and put him to bed.

"Then we put our heads together,—something must be done for him! He had probably been walking all day and without food; for he was weak as a child and swayed when he stood on his feet. So we had our council of war and took our resolution, determining on the next day to apprise Jean of it. In the evening we sat around, waiting for his return. At last he came into the room, threw us each a nod and a strained smile, and sank into a chair.

ONE and all we surrounded him, and Réné, who had been elected spokesman, pitched right into business.

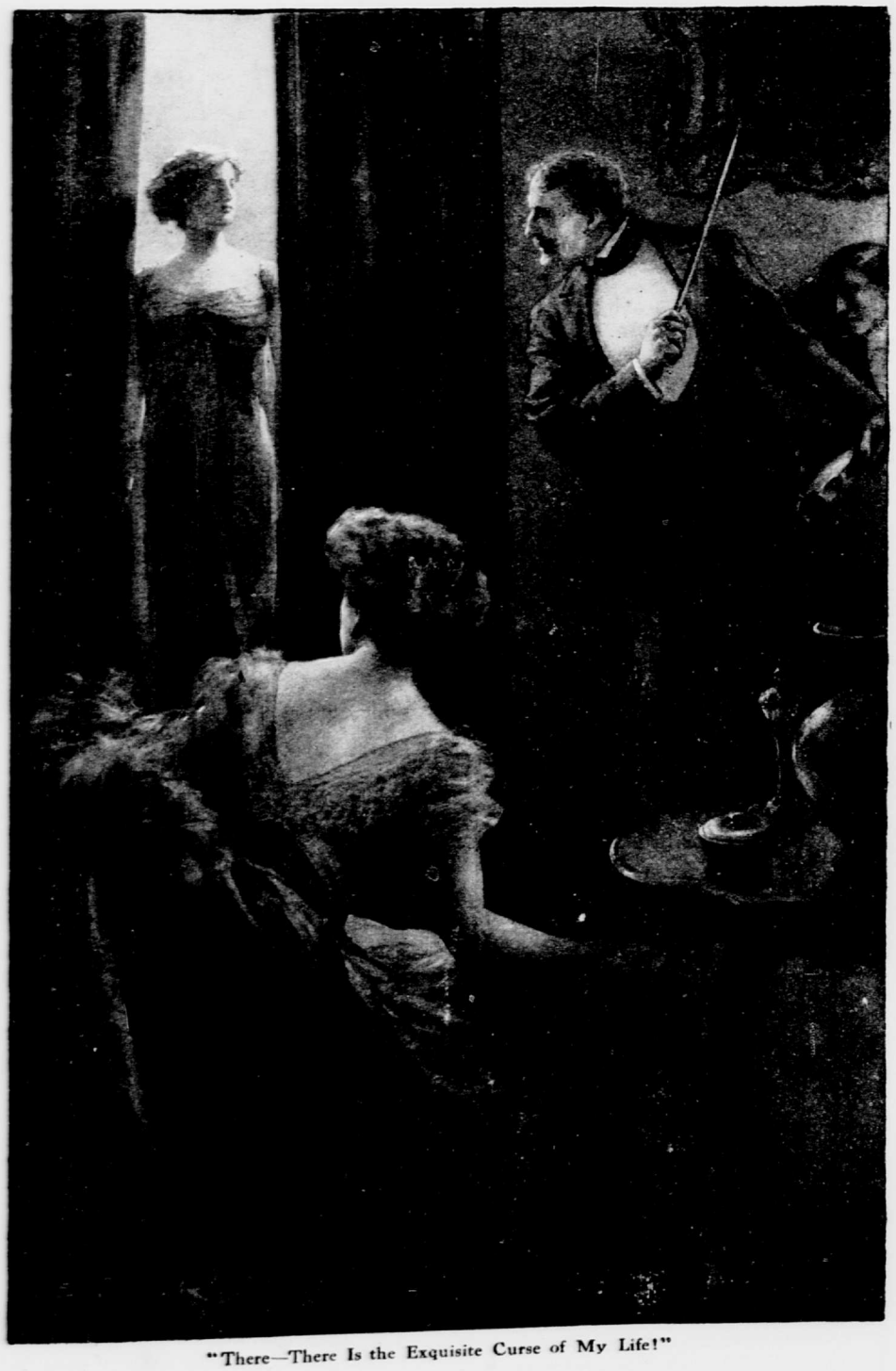
"'Look here, Jean! You know how much we all think of you, old man. Now we're not going to let you eat your heart out this way. You've simply got to take hold of yourself, and at once, and the best way to do it is—well, between us we're going to see that you have another violin, the finest that can be had.'

"Jean looked from one to the other of us, stupidly at first; then came that strange flash into his eyes that I have never seen in any but his own, and, rising abruptly from his chair, he steadied himself against the back.

"'Another one!' He laughed. But the irony, the bitterness, of that laugh was worse than a wail. Then he flushed excitedly. 'Another one! As if there could be another one! As if I would have it were there a million! Tell me, can the soul of my old violin animate a new frame? Ah! do you think my heart has no lifeblood in it? Do you think I am devoid of all gratitude and constancy? But it is because you do not know. You did not know, did you, that it was my love. My love! do you hear?' He shrieked out the last words in a spasm of grief and went on.

"'This alone of all creatures never failed to respond to my touch. This alone ever laughed with me when I was happy and wept with me when I was sad. With all her variations I found her always as I would have her. Together we have moved thousands to joy and to tears. At her touch I have trembled in an ecstasy of delight. She was my happiness, my glory, my passion, my life! I tell you, more than all these, she was my love! Do you know what that means? And now you would have me take another!'

"Suddenly his excitement died and he came and laid his hands on our shoulders, one after the other, tears in his eyes, the first I had seen there. 'Forgive me, *mes amis*,' he said simply. 'I am deeply touched by your thought of me. You would not think it, no; but I am. I don't deserve it, that is all. And you—you did not know. Oh, I thank you with all my heart! But no— Ah! you must see!'



"There—There Is the Exquisite Curse of My Life!"

YES, we saw. Poor Jean! There was nothing anyone could do for him. From that day he became but the mere shadow of himself. Though nothing could persuade him to touch another instrument, he haunted the spots where good music was rendered. And when he wasn't there he was drinking. That's what hastened the end,—his heart gave way. It was too much heart that gave him trouble all his life.

"Better would it have been, you say, to thrust aside all sentiment and force himself to overcome his aversion to playing again? Yes, perhaps; but all men are not made like Jean, and do not forget that, as he said, he lived in and for his violin, and, that gone, what remained for him? It was the last straw that bore down his already burdened and broken back.

"One evening he was not feeling very well and had remained at home. Late that night we returned and found him in bed wide awake. He asked us if we would play to him, just a little. So we played him to sleep that night,—it was his last,—and we found him the next morning with a smile on his lips."

Henri ceased speaking. A hush had fallen over us all, and for a few moments we remained motionless except for the puffing of our cigarettes. At last I rose and held out my hand to him, to each one of them.

"Thank you," I said. "I hope we may meet again." Then I walked very slowly back to my hotel to tell Kathleen.

AS I stepped out of the elevator at the second floor, I remarked that one of the doors of our suite was ajar, and that there issued from it not only a stream of light, but of much enlivened conversation. Oh, what would I not have given to find Kathleen alone, to sink into the depths of a big leather chair and tell her, as I had heard it, the story of Jean. Still, though that was denied me, I was in far too unsociable a mood to join however small a gathering. I would slip by the open door, all unobserved, and burrow, if need be, in the farthest recess of my dressing room.

But, no, there was that exquisite voice I knew so well; and then it said, "Why, there's Harry!"

I halted in my tracks, to behold Louise in all her loveliness—despite which, believe me, my greeting was none too cordial when I was saddened by such memories.

And it was Kathleen who extinguished the last spark of hope in my bosom by announcing that Louise was to dine with us and spend the evening.

I WAS not very entertaining, I fear. I lapsed off periodically into fits of glumness, while that wonderful voice would recall me from a little room in the Latin Quarter with its oldtime almost caressing utterance of my name.

"Why, Harry! What is the trouble? Aren't you well?" And so she went on and on with her chatter.

At last I could endure it no longer. I rose and strode over to the chimney with my back to the fire and my hands clasped behind me. Somehow I can always discourse to more advantage when standing on the hearth rug.

"Do you want to know?" I asked.

"*Certes*." Louise always affected the intermingling of French words in her ordinary conversation.

"It concerns a former acquaintance of yours, Louise," I said.

"Ah! And who, pray?" Her brows lifted daintily in interrogation.

"Jean!"

She glanced at me quickly, her lip curled never so slightly, her nostrils dilated,—the very nearest approach Louise ever made to looking disagreeable. Then she turned away with an almost imperceptible shrug of her shoulders.

I looked at her. Tell her the sequel,—the last joys, the crushing loss, the heartbreak, the despair, the complete self abandon, of that poor, wrecked life? Lay bare his wounds for her to gaze on with that cold, indifferent stare? Never! The words would have stuck in my throat if I attempted such a thing.

Reverently I tucked away my little story in a corner of my heart, until Kathleen and I should be alone together.

There was a tap on the door. One of the attendants of the hotel handed a card to Kathleen, and I saw her brows knit with perplexity as she scanned it.

"The Marquis de Saulniers?"

She looked to me for enlightenment; but Louise rose and, sauntering over to my wife, laid her hand lightly on her arm.

"The Marquis is calling at my request." Then she turned to me with a smile. "You seem to hesitate, Harry, with your story—and it is better so. Jean and his violin are departed this life,—one to dust, and the other to ashes. Let us not resurrect unpleasant memories. Besides," she paused and seemed to be listening for a step in the hall. We watched that gracious smile break out upon her face as there appeared on the threshold the wealthy old nobleman, fresh and resplendent from the hands of his valet,—"besides," and she stepped forward with her accustomed grace, "I want to present you both to my fiancé, Monsieur le Marquis de Saulniers."