Lea

By Marcel Prevost

BOOK THE THIRD.

Copyright—CHAPTER V—Continued.

BEYOND this point were gardens in which young men with smooth, red faces and boylike girls in white dresses with yellow leather belts were playing lawn tennis. Georg told her that these points were Princess Pier and Princess Garden.

"The port begins there," he said. "It is shut in by Princess Pier on one side and on the other by Haldon Pier, a smaller one, which you will see is just underneath your window. All the big yachts and merchant vessels anchor in the port."

As a matter of fact, several graceful ships and a few big cargo boats were anchored in the waters of the basin. But Lea was no longer looking toward that side. She was following with her gaze two little carriages like armchairs upon wheels, drawn by ponies and led by children. In the first was a woman of about thirty years of age, in the other a man somewhat younger. They resembled each other, and were both stamped so visibly with consumption that Georg, as much shocked as Lea, dared not speak another word.

The landau, after making the tour of the port, entered the town for a moment, or rather, went round the corner of it, so to speak, just sufficient to enable them to perceive the crowded, bustling streets built up the hillside. Again they returned to the esplanade, climbed up a slope with several little houses on the left all alike, their balconies hidden by canvas awnings, and stopped before one of them, bearing upon its door a plate with the name, "Dartmore House," in black letters.

At the same moment the door opened and they saw a girl of about seven years of age, with fair, curly hair, bright light eyes, dressed in a short skirt of white and blue check cambric. She sprang on the step of the carriage, clambered over the low door, with a display of little white stretched drawers and black stockinged slender and gracefully molded legs. She tumbled between Lea, Georg and Edith and began to kiss the latter with divertiing energy.

"Oh! Aunt Edith!" she cried. "Here is Aunt Edith back again!"

Edith struggled under the kisses, overjoyed to hear herself called by the affectionate name of aunt, which the children of the north give to the familiar friends of the house.

"Ida! Ida! You dear little thing!" she cried. "Be quiet! Be quiet, I beg!"

Lea smiled. Georg asked:

"Where is your mamma?"

"In the drawing-room waiting for you. She said she was too nervous and could not come down stairs. She's with Carola. Carola is my sister," she added, looking at Lea with a concentrated attention that made her become silent suddenly.

In the meantime the luggage of the two travelers had been handed down by the cabman to a short, baldheaded man in shirt sleeves, with a red face, bloodshot eyes and white beard, very businesslike and gruff in appearance, who carried in the trunks upon his shoulders.

Ida jumped down. Edith got out in her turn, and then Georg, who held out his hand to Lea.

Georg and Lea followed Edith and Ida along the hall on the ground floor and up the wooden staircase leading to the first floor, where, opening upon a landing of tiny dimensions, were two doors, one to the right and the other in front of the staircase. Lea with Georg went through the latter, which was open, into a room papered in light yellow with a big frieze at the ceiling, the walls covered with pictures, engravings and Chinese, Japanese and Indian knick-knacks.

Three tall windows, one of which was half-opened, looked out upon the sea. In the middle of the room, standing motionless with little Carola by her side, standing as motionless as she—was a young woman dressed in a skirt of white pique and a bacero of the same material over a silk chemisette. The starched dress was somewhat too short to hide these slender ankles and tiny feet in their tanned shoes. It was difficult to define the age of this young woman. Her curly hair, rosy complexion and red lips gave her a childlike appearance, in striking contrast with the profundity, fixity and imaginative dreaminess of the regard in her gray-green eyes, like those of Georg. It was Tinka.

She seemed not to see Georg or Edith, or even Ida, who was dancing around her little sister. Her gaze was fixed upon Lea and seemed really to drink her in. Lea stopped a few paces away, overwhelmed by a more powerful emotion than she had felt when Georg had appeared a short time before her. Her emotion then had been distracted by the desire to please, to be beautiful, by the curiosity to look once more upon the features of her betrothed after the long separation. But now she was face to face with a soul. Tinka was the living symbol of the doctrines that had filled her with exaltation in Apple Tree Yard. She was the pure spirit, the guardian angel of her mystic betrothal. Tinka's emotion equaled her own, for at the sight of her mysterious eyes two big tears glittered. At that moment only did Lea understand, feel and live this reality—that she had again found the source of her former sensitiveness, led astray and lost for a short time.

The little fairy with flaxen curls, in the stiff dress of white pique, stood before her in the middle of the yellow drawing-room, crowned by a nimbus of sunlight reflected from the sea, an aureole of rays that quivered around her like a spiritual flame. Lea, who until that moment had been so silent that Georg was not sure of having recognized the sound of her voice, uttered a great cry.

"Ah, Tinka! At last! At last!"

She fell into the young woman's arms, then suddenly slipped to the ground like a stricken tulip, and was carried in Georg's arms and laid upon the bed in the next room.

Twilight was already invading the room, which did not look out upon the sea, but upon a rather narrow and gloomy courtyard, when Lea recovered complete consciousness of herself. Her fainting fit, without being painful or suffocating, had lasted only a brief instant. As soon as Georg had laid her upon the bed the momentary oppression had melted into a profound slumber of fatigue. Then this also faded away, was dissipated, leaving only a vague somnolence in which she heard gentle whispers and perceived visions of living creatures and objects. The distant moan of a fog signal reached her ears. Her heart beat more rapidly, then calmed down again, filled with a confused joy. "The sea! The sea is quite close!" She fell asleep again. In her slumber she again looked upon the turquoise bay, with its golden gleams, the verdure-covered red capes, the boats, the graceful yachts and the steamers decorated with flags. Then her eyes opened suddenly, and she saw at the opposite side of the room the half-open folding door leading into the yellow drawing-room. Little Ida, dressed in her check print frock, was sitting in the corner perched on a chair, her tiny feet hooked on the bars. With an open book upon her knees she was pretending to read quietly, her forehead bowed over the book swept by her curls. But Lea saw that her beautiful eyes were fixed upon her curiously. And Lea again fell asleep. Other shadows came and went near her while she hovered between reality and dream; an unknown face with a fair beard, bald head and gold-rimmed spectacles; the familiar face of Edith; a vague female figure in pink, bibbed apron. Neither Georg nor Tinka came in, and little by little the anxiety of not seeing them disturbed Lea's repose and drove away that last vestige of sleep. She raised herself upon her elbow, and little Ida, who was still watching her from her chair, cried:

"Mamma, she is moving!"

Tinka was immediately by the young girl's side. She had not left her, but was sitting behind the bed, hidden by the curtains. She stooped over her.

"How are you, my dear?"

"I am much better. I have rested very well."

"We saw that you needed a little sleep, and everything was made quiet in the house so that you might rest."

"I would like to get up now."

"Nothing is easier. Everything is ready for your toilet. Shall I help you?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Tinka! Edith will help me. She is accustomed to it."

A strange sentiment of modesty seized Lea before Georg's sister. She dreaded to be seen so frail, so different from her former robust beauty.

"Go for Aunt Edith, Ida, to come and dress the French lady."

Edith helped Lea to make a careful toilet. Although she was the enemy of all vain coquetry, for herself or others, the nurse's rigorous principles weakened in favor of Lea, so thankful was she that she had nursed her back to health by her care and influence. Besides, she longed passionately for Lea to be found attractive by Georg, and for the marriage to be accomplished. She dressed the girl like a mother dresses a daughter whom she is going to present to her betrothed. Lea put on one of the dresses that she had made in her lodging in Gower street with the help of the Cockington girls, a light costume of red velvet, dotted with orange, which dissimulated the thinness of her body and added a little color to her pallid face. When she entered the drawing room, followed by Edith, smiling with happiness, she read admiration upon all their faces.

"Oh, Lea, dearest; how beautiful you are, and how well you look!"

It was Tinka, dancing with joy, who spoke, frivolous again, now that she was reassured by the sight of Lea standing before her living and beautiful.

Georg was there also, and came and took one hand of his beloved and kissed them indefinitely, and their hearts throbbed with fraternal joy.

The professor's deep voice broke the silence. His scrutinizing eyes, fixed upon Lea behind the glasses of his gold-rimmed spectacles, had been watching her for a few moments, and for his simple mind the result of his observation was that Lea appeared to have a keen appetite.

"Tinka!" he cried, "call Lizzie Morley and tell her to serve the soup. Mile. Lea has eaten nothing since her arrival. She is dying with hunger, that is plain."

"You are quite right, papa," said Tinka, chasing her dreaminess away with a little wayward gesture. "Ah! Lizzie! Sit down, all of you!"

Lizzie Morley, the young, fair haired, insipid looking girl with the pink apron, just then brought in the hors d'oeuvre. They all sat down. The warmth of the room and the eatables unloosed the little girls' tongues. While the others, accustomed to a cold supper, were eating caviar and smoked meats, Lea took a plate of warm consomme with a poached egg in it. Ida confided to her elder sister Carola a secret desire to taste it, and serious little Carola could not keep the secret, but told it to all those around the table. Lea smilingly called Ida to her and before tasting anything herself she made her drink a little of the steaming consomme. The child's grave air as she held out her pretty lips for the spoon amused everybody, Professor Hoedel in particular.

"Are they not both charming, mademoiselle?"

"They are ravishing," said Lea, captivated by Ida's graceful ways.

The professor stopped eating for a moment and, knife and fork in hand, gave way to a fit of sentimentalism which his attitude and countenance of a spectacled Gambrinus rendered rather comic.

"Ah, those little ones, mademoiselle! They kept up my courage to live at a time when I was really wretched, all alone with them at home in Larmsoe. That was when your mother was traveling with Uncle Georg," he added, turning to the two girls, who were not even listening to him. "Yes, thanks to laughter and playing in our empty house—much more than to my work—I am an entomologist and love my science—the methods of solitude merely resulted in giving me gray hairs."

The active young girl with the pink apron came in again, cleared the table and put a brace of grouse cooked in bacon upon the table.

"Lizzie," said Ida, in her clear voice, stopping her as she passed, "I have taken a little of the French lady's soup. I think there was too much salt in it. I don't like salt."

"For shame, Ida!" said Lizzie, in a low tone.

She disappeared, quick and silent, bearing away the plates.

"Is that your servant?" asked Lea.

"No," replied Georg. "She is the daughter of Captain Morley, the little red-faced man who carried in your luggage. In his youth the captain traded for years, principally between England and India, China and Japan, and picked up most of the objects that decorate this house during his voyages. He lives here with his wife and daughter and lets the house during the season."

"And Madame Morley?"

"Oh! we never see her. She is asthmatic and can only go upstairs with difficulty. She usually stops in her room, on the second floor."

Tinka had paid no attention to Lizzie Morley or to the remarks provoked by her appearance. With eyes fixed, her youthful countenance rigid with thought, she forgot to carve the grouse before her. Lea recognized this ecstatic expression with a secret joy.

"You are forgetting to carve the grouse, dearest!" remarked Professor Hoedel.

"Oh! carve them for me, papa, I pray you," she replied.

"She is in the clouds," said the entomologist, laughing.

He began to do as she asked. Tinka, without moving her head, her hands clasped on the edge of the table, murmured:

"Our house in Larmsoe! I think it would have been impossible for me to return there when Georg came back from Italy and persuaded me to resume life with Professor Hoedel and our daughter."

Hoedel, who was arranging the carved grouse upon a dish, interrupted his wife:

"Tinka!"

And with a glance he called her attention to the two girls, who had stopped whispering and were listening gravely to their mother.

"Why should I keep silent before them, father?" replied the young woman, putting her tiny hand upon the red, hairy one of her husband. "Will you always be afraid of the truth? The truth never did harm, and the younger the child is the more we owe it the verity!"

The professor shook his head like a man who was ready to submit to anything.

"Of course! Of course! Forgive me. I know you are always right."

Tinka again caressed Hoedel's red, hairy hand, and without touching the food in her plate, she continued:

"Even now I am not sure that I could go home to Finland and take up our life as before. It is for that that I have prolonged our stay here month after month in spite of the professor, who would like to be with his books again, his studio and his library, smoking his pipe with his old friends. I am sure that another Tinka is there, waiting and watching for me in that wooden building, near the big porcelain stove. And that other Tinka makes me afraid."

Looking at her brother, she continued:

"That other Tinka, Georg, has retained all our old ideas. We should recognize our old conscience in her. She may perhaps be hostile to the Tinka of to-day who no longer thinks exactly as she does. The Tinka of to-day is right; but was the other one wrong? Was she mistaken? I am afraid of discovering that there are several progressive truths, different and yet each true in turn. Oh, Georg, when you returned to Larmsoe to bring my husband and my daughter back to me, when you recognized afar off our house, nestling in the snow, and the somber trees in the garden, which seemed to mount guard over it, were you not also afraid of finding your old conscience standing upon the threshold—the one that had commanded you to do the exact contrary of that which you were going to do?"

Georg, like Tinka, had ceased eating. Leaning back in his chair, with downcast eyes and with the meditative beauty of a young sage, he replied:

"No. I returned there impelled by a strength that knew neither hesitation nor obstacle. If I had found the phantom of which you speak I should have driven it brutally from the threshold. The new influx of light and life had penetrated and transformed the barbarian that I used to be. I believed I held the absolute truth. My conviction and confidence were boundless. Hoedel was subjugated by it immediately."

"Yes," murmured the scientist; "Georg made me leave the house and my work and collections that very day without giving me time to reflect. He ordered me about like a king."

Ida broke into a peal of ringing laughter.

"They packed our trunks quick, and we took the boat in the evening to go to mamma. I forgot my blue dress. I hope the rats will not eat it."

"Mine is upstairs," said Carola. "I did not forget it. But I don't want to wear it, because I always want to be dressed like Ida."

"Oh," resumed Georg, "how strong I was at that moment. The despair of having failed to win Lea from her companions in Paris doubled my energy and fortified my conviction. I hated the past. The more I suffered the surer I felt of the truth."

Lea could not help asking:

"And now, Georg?"

"Now, months have elapsed and naturally far from the country of light I have become again a little of the barbarian of former times. The truth no longer appears as imperious and violent as of old. If it had not already been accomplished I doubt whether I should have will power to reunite Tinka and Hoedel as I did then. Like Tinka, I look back with sympathy upon the phantom of our former consciences which inspired us to the flight regarded by people in general as an act of madness."

Professor Hoedel let his fork, with which he was struggling with the carcass of a grouse, fall into his plate and cried:

"You are surely not going to begin again and leave me alone a second time with the children?"

He said it with an undisguised terror that set everybody around the table shrieking with laughter, the children louder than the others with that instinctive laughter of childhood in which dominates their desire for movement and noise.

"No, Justus," said Tinka, looking at Hoedel with affectionate kindliness. "I will never leave you again. Did I not tell you a few moments ago that my present conscience is in perfect accordance with my life?"

"That may be," said the professor, rather fearfully, "but suppose you find your other conscience, as you call it, at Larmsoe when we return, and it acquires control of you again? God only knows what will happen then. I would prefer never to see Finland again!"

This time it was Georg who replied:

"Don't be afraid, Justus. Precisely because our faith is less overbearing, we are incapable of taking such a violent and unexpected decision as our flight, or even as our return. The truth now appears to me as a changeable communication between the world and my mind."

Hoedel, a little reassured, poured out a glass of beer and, to prove his desire to be agreeable, said:

"You mean probably that there exists an objective and a subjective truth. We learn that at the university."

Georg did not reply, but Edith, who up to that point had said nothing, protested:

"You talk like Gentiles," she cried severely. "The truth is unchangeable. For he never changes, he who said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' Apart from him there is only confusion, error and death."

Ida and Carola looked at each other, suppressing a giggle. Aunt Edith's bibliical quotations were an endless source of amusement for them.

"Happy Edith!" murmured Tinka in a low tone. "A few sentences are sufficient to solidify her faith, just as Carola and Ida are satisfied with little stones which they pretend are pieces of gold. Carola and Ida imagine they can buy the whole world with their stones."

Edith blushed. Lea had listened with gladness to this conversation, in which she had only taken part by asking a question. She was not accustomed, as Tinka and Georg were, to abstract discussion, nor had she any particular taste for it. But the simple, tranquil conversation of the brother and sister charmed her ears like a once beloved but long silent music which imperiously awakened old memories and took her back into the cherished time of her sentimental initiation. And even the sense of Georg and Tinka's words added to her happiness. It would have saddened her to hear them renounce the past and the moral faith that had made them so attractive, so exceptional in Lea's eyes when she first knew them in London. The Georg that she had seen in Paris, destroying his idols, had not appealed so closely to her heart. To-day, in meeting a Georg and Tinka resembling the Georg and Tinka of old in face, she rejoiced to discover that their minds were unchanged. She felt a sentiment of tenderness for the beings and objects around her. As she was sitting between Tinka and Georg she bent over Tinka, kissed her at the nape of the neck; and Georg was thrilled by the kiss.

In the meantime the indefatigable little Lizzie had entered and gone out several times with dishes and plates. She had successively laid upon the table cold ham, salad, poached eggs and two dishes of the Devonshire fruit, which is equal to the most magnificent gathered in southern countries. Lea ate of all with keen appetite, no longer as a sort of duty, as when she was in the Commercial road hospital, in obedience to "Little Tom's" prescriptions. A little champagne was poured out into the glasses, and the children having tasted it, their noisy chatter soon put a stop to any continuous conversation.

"Uncle Georg," cried Ida, clambering on the knee of the young man, "are you going to stop at home a little, now that the French lady is here?"

"Shall you take her out to sea with you?" asked Carola, more timidly, watching her sister's antics without daring to imitate them.

Tinka was just then telling Lea of the strange life led by Georg since his return from Paris.

"When he came back to London from Larmsoe, bringing the children with him," she said, "his nervous prostration alarmed me. He seemed to have exhausted all his energy in this act of atonement. He became much feebled in London, remained shut up all day long in Apple Tree Yard, refused to go out or to see any one, except us and dear Edith. As far as regards her, he never tired of hearing her talk of the days you had passed together in Clariss & Sons' factory. What trouble we had to make him agree to leave London! At first we went to Penzance, in Cornwall. And there he suddenly appeared to be hypnotized by the sea and made several voyages with the fishermen. He would disappear for weeks at a time. I was very uneasy about him. But the sea has saved him, has restored his strength and his desire for life almost in spite of himself. During one of his cruises he discovered Torquay and was immediately fascinated by its resemblance to Italy. So he dragged us here."

"What does he do here?" asked Lea.

Georg continued to play with the two girls, but his eyes at each moment sought and caressed Lea's affectionate gaze.

"He continues to lead a solitary existence away from us," continued Tinka. "But he seems to have become tired of long voyages. It is very rare that he goes outside this favored bay. There is a rock called Glider Rock not far from Torquay, near St. Mary's Church, about two miles from the coast. It belongs to a certain Mr. Saville, whose father seems to have been an original sort of individual, for he built a little church, which his death prevented him from completing, upon a little plateau half way up the rock. The present Saville or, rather, his steward, agreed to let the rock and the church, already in ruins, to Georg and he has had it furnished after a fashion and has made a sort of studio of the church. He spends his days there, far from everything. He has even slept there on one or two very warm nights in August. As for me, I have never seen Glider Rock, except from afar; in fact, from the tower of St. Mary's Church. Georg has never consented to take me or the children with him, although they implore him to do so every day."

"He will take me," thought Lea.

And the thought increased her desire to be alone with him, face to face with the sea upon the rock where no other human being had ever accompanied him.

They were rising from the table when a young man with a black beard, an immense forehead, regular features and fine brown eyes, was shown in by Lizzie.

"Ah! Doctor!" cried Georg, going to meet him. He presented him to Lea: "My friend, Dr. Robert Bryce."

Lea bowed slightly, somewhat troubled by the scrutinizing glance the doctor gave her. Lizzie wished to take the children away, but Ida, dancing gleefully around the young man, cried:

"Doctor! Doctor! Tell her that it's not time for me to go to bed."

"She calls him her doctor," said Tinka, "because he nursed her and saved her, poor little thing, when she had diphtheria last June."

"Yes," declared Ida, gravely, "my doctor saved me and we are going to be married."

Bryce sat down for a few moments and spoke but a few words. He watched Lea with close attention, and she divined that he had come there for her. He did not please her. He was rather abrupt and peremptory, affecting to despise science, and declared the doctors knew no more than their patients, except that there are good and bad patients. The good ones, in fact, those who wished and knew how to be cured, got better!

"For example, Ida is a good patient, because she is very fond of life. One has only to see her to be convinced of that."

"The good patient" was energetically struggling against sleep, leaning on the doctor's knees. Carola was already fast asleep on a sofa. Bryce took his leave.

"Well, I will come again to-morrow."

And in reply to Georg's mute interrogation he said:

"No, I will leave Miss Surier in peace for to-night. I am sure she will sleep well. I will come again, if you will allow me, to-morrow about 11 o'clock, and then we can talk."

Before going he added, half seriously:

"It is rather warm here. The night is splendid. Open the windows and go out on the balcony and breath a little fresh air. You know it is the fashion to treat the lungs by a surplus of food and air."

Lizzie came in for Carola and Ida, who held up their flowerlike lips for the kisses of their elders. Ida still managed to keep her eyes almost open, but fat Carola, unaccustomed to such late hours, was asleep standing. Lizzie had to carry her away, the fair curls of the child and one of her helpless arms hanging over the young girl's shoulder.

They opened the window. There was no sea breeze and the air was motionless and warm. Just as Georg had said, the evening mist had become rarefied, had melted and left the sky clear. Edith went for her cape and threw it over Lea's shoulders.

"Come out on the balcony," she said.

Lea looked around for Justus Hoedel.

"Where is your husband, Tinka?"

"He is gone up to his room. He usually snores a little after meals, and perhaps he dared not before you."

They all left the yellow parlor, while Lizzie Morley was clearing away the table, and went on the balcony. The cloudless night was very gloomy. The stars in the somber sky seemed oxidized with rust. Out toward the open sea no other lights were to be seen save the stars and the evanescent silvery phosphorescent gleams on the surface of the water. At the foot of the rising road, which passed Dartmoor House, the black mass of the bathing establishment stood up dark and gloomy. Still further on, in the middle of a sort of dock in the port, a steam crane was hoisting the cargo into a big boat surrounded by a halo of light. Tall electric globes, like a necklace of mauve pearls, outlined the curve of the quay, between the port and the station. Beyond the most distant of these lamps the obscurity began again and all the scenery disappeared in the night.

But just in front of the Morley's dwelling, upon the horizon at the other side of the bay—far, far, extremely far away—scintillated the low lights of Paington, stretching along in a sort of straight line. A gulf of gloom separated Paington and Torquay—a gulf broken here and there by the ruby and emerald signals hanging at the masts of ships and yachts, like a flower on an invisible stalk, buried in the sea in a long red and green root, with a quivering outline.

And that sea, faintly revealed by a few phosphorescent gleams; that sky, with its reddish stars; those scattered lights; the balmy air of that fortunately situated bay, the vast silence in which every sound could be counted—all united to form a landscape of mystery and enchantment. Lea, standing leaning on the iron balustrade, between Georg and Tinka, felt that this scenery equaled her vision. In the feverish nights spent in the hospital she had already looked upon this night. Its southern warmth, impregnated with salt and iodine, had already soothed her limbs and cicatrized her throat and lungs. She nestled closer to Tinka's supple figure.

"Oh, Tinka!" she murmured. "I am so happy here. Keep me near you. I want to live. I want to be happy."

"Yes," replied the young woman. "It is very beautiful. We ought to love this moment. It is a halt for repose in our destiny after a hard journey up the Hill of Calvary. Like you, I feel the approach of happiness."

Some moments passed and no one spoke. A little space still separated Georg and Lea upon the balcony. And yet they had not been closer together, even at the moment when Lea left the train and flew into the arms of her betrothed. They were thinking of the same thing, of the same hour in the past, when they had also leaned side by side on the balustrade of a terrace overlooking the Thames and had looked into the night together. Then, as now, they had felt a violent desire to embrace one another, to become one, the desire that torments and enfevers the blood of young creatures who love each other. But a law of their conscience, although they had not formulated it clearly, had restrained them then. They would not yield to their desire; they hardly admitted this desire. To-day their consciences were free. Through a hundred trials they had succeeded in rejoining each other. They were near one another—were free to belong to one another.

"I am going upstairs to see the little ones," said Tinka suddenly.

She slipped away quietly through one of the open windows leading into the yellow drawing room. Lea and Georg, turning around to look after the neat, white silhouette, then perceived that Edith was no longer there, although they had believed her to be sitting in the dark at the other end of the balcony.

They were alone.

Lea, realizing this, was seized with a fit of indecision. She turned toward the house, then made up her mind and moved away as though to go after Tinka. Georg retained her by the arm and murmured:

"Stop here, I implore you."

She obeyed at once, overjoyed by words which guided her wavering will. She threw Edith's cape on a chair in the drawing room and followed Georg to the corner of the balcony, where he led her and where he was leaning against the iron bar. Their hands trembled when they met, seeking each other. They looked in each other's face by the light in the room, which lit up the balcony. Then Georg's hands abandoned Lea's, which fell limply by her side. He caressed her arms, her shoulders, quivering at the thrilling contact of her velvet dress. He joined his hands behind the young girl's neck among the soft curls that had slipped from their confines. Lea, vanquished, yielded up her head to this loving clasp. She immolated herself to the beloved victor, whom she had found at last, unheedful of the indestructible modesty which protested against that immolation. With her head bent backward she only saw the immense orb of the sky, in which the red stars seemed dying. A delicious giddiness made all things seem to turn beneath her feet. She felt no other support in the vast, dark blue ether than that provided by the two beloved hands clapsed under her hair, holding her suspended among the worlds. Her vertigo became so intense that she had to close her eyes, and then she seemed to see her soul from within. She felt the impression that something was drowning, was falling into an abyss. She saw the indignant faces of Piraitz and Frederique, her own former image, the image of the mystic Lea who had exchanged her troth with Georg on the moors of Hampstead Heath.

"Oh, I want all that to disappear! I want to think of it no longer, to think of it never again!"

She wished to be an ordinary woman, to abdicate her great enthusiasms. And she was happy in her defeat. She nestled against Georg, though she still resisted the slow, delicate attraction of the fingers that irresistibly drew her toward his face. She thought of the kiss he had given her at Richmond, a kiss that had remained the one souvenir of her senses, but one that was so dear, so living, that it had been sufficient to overwhelm insensibly her entire conscience. She felt Georg's face close to her own, felt his breath upon her cheek, and sighed.

"No, dearest! I pray you! Not yet!"

But their lips had met, and then Lea thought no longer. It was not the inexplicable, incomplete emotion aroused by the kiss at Richmond, the apprenticeship in happiness of ignorant lips. This time Georg conquered her veritably, sealed the lips of his betrothed with a conscious violence. She was a slave, and her emotion, less pure and more voluptuous, was tinged with bitterness. When, through lassitude and powerlessness to support the excess of the sensation, their lips released each other, she pressed her forehead against Georg's bosom. She bruised her forehead with ecstasy against the round gem in one of the young man's studs. They remained silent for a few moments. Then Georg, putting his lips to Lea's ear, his voice changed and trembling, murmured:

"I want to remain with you to-night. I cannot leave you."

As humble and touching as poor Christine might have been formerly when she still had courage to resist Henri d'Aizac's appeals, Lea replied:

"No, I beseech you, my beloved! Not now. Let me become beautiful again. Beautiful as of old, for you, so that you may love me!"

(To be continued.)

"Oh! Tinka, I am so happy here."