THE LIAR.

I never loved but one woman. I passed five years with her in perfect happiness. I can truly say that to her I owe my success, because of my freedom from care and because she imbued me with some of her great ambition. From the first moment we met, it seemed to me that I had always loved her. Her beauty and character answered all my dreams. What woman never felt my side in my house, in my acting, and still living me—but when I think of her it drives me mad. If I attempt to describe her as she was during the five years, in all the glory of her love, with her tall, stately figure, her classical features like an Oriental queen, her simple ways, pale face, her cheerful talk, her voice soft and sweet as her glance, if I try to bring again to my mind that vision of radiant, it is only to say—I hate her. Her name was Clotilde. In the house in which I lived no one but she was known as Mme. Delache, the widow of a captain killed since Sedan. She appeared to have traveled extensively. In her conversation she would sometimes say: "When I was at Tamatave," or perhaps: "On a night like this I was once in Java." As she from those distant lands, in her manner, in her language suggested a romantic life, nothing of that disorder and hurry incident to quick departures or unusually arrivals. She was a Parisian, dressed always with exquisite taste, without a harsh or striking color. She seemed to have an instinct for the manners of officers and marines who are perpetually on the move.

When I found that I loved her, my only idea was to ask her hand in marriage. A friend spoke to her for me. I thought she seemed to hesitate, but I felt sure that she would never marry. Therefore I doubted not of success. Where I would use her and, as I was too unhappy to work, I resolved to go away. I was making preparations for departure when, one morning in the heart of the confusion of the bivouac, Mme. Delache entered my apartment.

"Why do you go away?" she asked. "Because you love me, I can love you only here for you remained a bachelor—why I am married." And she told me her history.

She was very young and inexperienced. Her parents had married her to a man she had never met. They separated at the end of three years. Her family, of whom she seemed very proud, occupied high positions in Paris, but gave her marriage they had desired for her. She was a niece of the grand rabbi. Her husband was of an office of high rank, but inherited but a small hundred thousand francs of the money at his death. As for herself, financially ruined by her husband, she had fortunately been highly educated and possessed several accomplishments, of which she now made use. She gave lessons in music in the wealthy families of the Chaussee d'Antin and the Faubourg St. Germain.

Her story was touching, but quite long; full of the pretty repartees and interminable incidents which crowd the talk of women. I hired a pretty little house in the Avenue de Vincennes. I passed with her five delicious months, looking at her without thinking of my work. It was she who first urged me to enter my studio, and fired me with ambition to become a great artist. I urged her to leave her to give up her people. This independence touched me deeply. I admired her proud lip which made me feel that I should have expressed naught to owe nothing, except to her own exertions. We were thus separated every day.

With what happiness I returned home, so impatient when she was late, so happy when I found her there before me! From her people she brought me some rare flowers. I often forced her to accept some present, but she invariably said that she was richer than I, and the lessons must have been very profitable, for she always dressed with great elegance, and always in black, which she wore through coquetry, so it seemed, for her complexion, fair as a lily, was enhanced by heavy velvets, shining jets, lustrous satins and masses of silky lace. All her pupils, daughters of bankers and financiers, adored and respected her, and more than once she showed a bracelet, a bangle or a piece of lace, which one of them had given to her.

Except when at work, we never separated. Only on Sunday she went to St. Germain to see her sister, the wife of the general, with whom, long ago, she had made her peace. I accompanied her to the station. She returned the same evening, early enough, when the days were long, we would make a rendezvous and go for a row on the water, or for a walk in the woods. She would tell me about her visit, how pretty the children were, and how happy they all were together. It seemed to make her so unhappy that I relented my tenderness in order to make her forget her sorrow.

What happy days, what happy nights, what confidence we had! I suspected nothing. Everything she said appeared so true, so natural. I could reproach her with only one thing. Sometimes, in telling me about the families to which her pupils belonged, she gave a quantity of details about balls and fêtes, imaginary intrigues. She saw always the romance around her, and seemed to live in dramatic combinations. These dreams troubled my happiness; I, who wished to fly far from the world, to be alone with her, often found her occupied with indifferent things. But I could pardon these dreams in a woman, young and unhappy, whose life has been a sad renunciation without hope of a happy denouement.

Once only, I became suspicious, or, rather, uneasy. One Sunday evening she did not return. I was in despair. What should I do? Go to St. Germain? I could not do that. Without compromising her, however, after a fearful night, I decided to go back to her. They separated at the end of three years. Her family, of whom she seemed very proud, occupied high positions in Paris, but gave her marriage they had desired for her. She was a niece of the grand rabbi. Her husband was of an office of high rank, but inherited but a small hundred thousand francs of the money at his death. As for herself, financially ruined by her husband, she had fortunately been highly educated and possessed several accomplishments, of which she now made use. She gave lessons in music in the wealthy families of the Chaussee d'Antin and the Faubourg St. Germain.

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