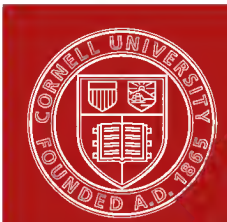
THE SECRET OF NARCISSE

EDMUND GOSSE



THE SECRET OF NARCISSE

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THE SECRET OF NARCISSE

A ROMANCE

BY

EDMUND GOSSE

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1892

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DOMINAM AMICISSIMAM

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THE SECRET OF NARCISSE

I

IT was Monday before Pentecost in the year 1548. There had been rain and wind, but the gusts had fallen, and it was a yellow soundless afternoon that was now drawing to a close. From the whitewashed steps at their doorway, women and children of four generations could see, down the steep and tortuous street, the vineyard opposite the town, the long, smooth, round hill-side, as brown as a bear-skin in the warm flood of sunlight. All these Mercillats were talking at once—all, except the silent extremities of the family—the bald and toothless grandmother, bowed upon her staff, and

the baby, wrapped up and stiffly set, like an image, along the arm of its young mother, Lucie. One other member of the group said but little, Rosalie Mercillat, of whom her father, the gunsmith, was heard to swear, a little too frequently and too loudly, that she was the prettiest maid in Bar-le-Duc, or, for that matter, in the whole Duchy of the Barrois. Handsome she was, with dark blue eyes beneath her masses of black hair ; large of limb, but tall and graceful, carrying an even flow of healthy blood under the creamy pallor of her complexion. For Rosalie the loud discussion of market prices, of the reproof given by the curé to the daughter of their neighbour, the flesher, of the propriety of feeding the low fire of charcoal on the hearth, seemed to have less fascination than for the rest. Hence it was she who, gazing down the street, gave the expected signal.

"She is coming," said Rosalie, and the family rose languidly to their feet, while a few knots of persons gathered, in a similar

position, at one or two other doorways. Below them in the narrow street, a singular procession made its appearance. At the head of it, a tall figure, entirely shrouded by black flowing garments, embroidered in white with death's-heads and pierced hearts, advanced laboriously, its train supported by two indifferent pages, the one of whom yawned so often that he set the other's jaws agape in sympathy. The Ducal chamberlain, stiff with sumptuous mourning, strode beside, and a little careless bevy of servants attended. Slowly, slowly the procession climbed the Rue Chavée, ascended the Place, and disappeared within the great portals of the church. As it did so, the chatter about the price of pigs' feet broke forth as exuberantly as ever at the doorway of the Mercillats.

It had been on a Monday, at an hour before sunset, that, six years earlier, the dying body of René de Châlons, Prince of Orange, had been carried into the castle of Bar-le-Duc, to the arms of his distracted Duchess. Over the

hills at the back of the town it had been brought, through the southern gate, and down the beautiful new Rue des Ducs de Bar, where all the noble ladies clustered at their carved windows, pale with horror at the sight. Every Monday since then, at an hour before sunset, the unhappy Duchess reversed the order of her terrible pilgrimage. Leaving the castle by the private door, at which the dead body of her husband had entered, she walked on foot up the track of his magnificent funeral to the church of St. Maze, and, after weeping at his grave, she returned by the Rue des Ducs de Bar.

Always on foot—always, in frost or rain, sunlight or mist, arrayed in the same excessive pomp of woe—this weekly apparition of the shrouded Princess had long ago ceased to interest the inhabitants of the town. Her Monday procession had become a natural phenomenon, a meaningless ceremony which no onger impressed or excited the spectators or even the actors, with one exception. The

agony which shook the stately frame of the Duchess, the sobs which were audible under those depths of veil upon veil, showed that with her, at least, grief, wilfully nurtured and cultivated like a delicate plant, had taken entire possession of the morbid spirit in which it grew.

When the train of the Duchess, conducted inward from the gates of St. Maze by the priests in attendance, had entered the church and had vanished behind the closing doors, the street recovered from its momentary disturbance. Well knowing that their lady would leave the building, as she always did, by the other exit, the Mercillats strolled up the pear-shaped Place which descended from St. Maze, and seated themselves gaily on the broad steps of the church. Rosalie still seemed distracted and inattentive.

"You listen no more than a radish," said her mother, Eudoxie; "you make no decent face of listening, though I speak of what I know and have seen with my eyes." The buxom

woman had just recounted an incident of her youth to which her daughter had not paid even the compliment of that smile we spare for the twelfth-told tales of relatives.

"Rosalie is listening for the ting of the pincers round the corner," said her young sister Bibianne.

"Be not a fool, Bibi," replied the person so pointedly addressed; and settled her plump hands on her lap.

"Nay," said Lucie, as she bobbed her infant, a swathed wave-offering, at one of the carven apostles on the porch-front, for the babe had wakened and might probably howl, "nay, Narcisse is not pinching and hammering at so late an hour as this, and why you must all torment Rosalie, I know not."

"Where is your Narcisse?" said her mother. But, without waiting for a reply, she went on: "The new grille he has made for the window of the Chevalier's mother is warped out so far that you see it if you look up from the street."

"Who told you so, mother?" asked Rosalie, fiercely.

"Nay, one sees it for oneself—one glances up along the wall and it sticks out like a gargoyle. Well," she continued, abandoning at once the pretence of personal inspection, "the robe-maker's daughter to my lady told me so."

"Much she knows of warpings or of hammered work, or you either, mother," rejoined Rosalie; "why do you hawk such foolish tales about? Narcisse is good enough craftsman, I hope, for such a town as Bar."

"What do you know, Rosalie, of what manner of craftsman he is?"

"Can I not see with my eyes? Do I not know what all say of him? Do they not come hanging round his booth with 'Pray, Master Narcisse!' and 'Good Master Narcisse, the medal in my cap'?"

"What do you know of him? He is not one of us. Where did he come from?"

"Who knows, Rosalie, what good or bad work is in a town like this?" said Bibianne.

Rosalie stood up, lazy and angry, and leaned against a stone saint.

"You have not heard, silly Bibi, of the great Ligier Richier? Eh? Of the greatest artist who ever lived in Barrois or in Lorraine, who has been heard of to the ends of the earth, and as far away as—as Rome?"

"What has Master Richier to do with our Narcisse?" asked the mother.

"You, mother, do at least know that when Master Richier came here years ago, when we were children, to make the images in the church, he brought Narcisse with him as a 'prentice, and did nothing without him."

"And why, if Narcisse be so great a craftsman, did he leave him behind him in Bar when he went away again?" continued Madame Mercillat, with a nagging air of triumph.

To this Rosalie had no definite answer ready, and she was already tired of the dispute. The

family, though civil to her artist-lover, had no fondness for him. He was not of their class or race. They had the provincial dislike of a new personality, brought into their circle from the unknown and therefore unloved world outside, the world which, if only you went far enough, became the haunt of savages, and monsters, and hairy creatures that did not worship God. Narcisse was not savage, perhaps, but he came from a distance, from some place on the high road to Heathenesse. He was not Barrois, and why should the Barrois love him ?

The cause of Narcisse Gerbillon's settlement in Bar had nothing mysterious about it, though Mother Eudoxie might choose to forget the reason. Seven years before the time of which we are writing, the Duke Francis had succeeded, after much blustering and wheedling, in persuading the great sculptor of Lorraine, Ligier Richier, to quit for a while the palace he had adorned for himself in St. Mihiel, and all the works he was finishing in that town, in order to come across

the vineyards to Bar, and enrich the new city that the Sovereign Prince was building. Richier had come at last, like a travelling cardinal in state, with his suite of servants and 'prentices. His square jaw and arrogant eye had been seen in profile by a few astonished peasants as he crossed the hills in a sort of Persian sedan-chair, designed by himself, with the flag of that guild of which he was the master waving from the silvered roof of it. An old but spacious house close to the wall, lately abandoned by a noble family for whom a residence had been built in the new renaissance Rue des Ducs de Bar, was placed at the sculptor's service by the gratified Duke, who laid all his reserve aside in his anxiety to please the magic-working master whom he had captured.

Once settled in Bar, Ligier Richier was in no hurry to leave it, though his own cities of Lorraine were sighing for him; and when a deputation from Toul waited upon him for the decoration of that ancient cathedral, he bid them

wait three years, or be satisfied with a pupil. The churches of Bar and its castle were already full of his statues, the nobles strutted with his medals in their hats and his coins in their pockets, when the fatal field of St. Dizier called upon him for fresh exertions of his griesly imagination and adroit hand as a modeller. At last, having tapped a fortune from the still-brimming coffers of the Duke, a sudden whim of fancy, or the promise of an interesting commission, carried him away to Châlons, and the palace that had been so noisy a workshop was left to the bats and mice.

This was two years ago, and already the visit of the great artist began to be a myth. One living memorial of it remained by the side of so much that was in stone and metal. Of all his pupils, the one whom he had at first loved and trusted best was a pale young man from the south, of whose antecedents no one knew anything, Narcisse Gerbillon. Richier apparently did not cease to trust him, but the master's

arrogance had cooled the warmer relations which had existed between himself and his 'prentice before the former resolved to leave Bar. It was this decline in cordiality, no doubt, which had changed to Narcisse the prospect of his life. Adoring the genius of Ligier Richier, to which his talent owed its own graces, he had determined to follow him through all his pilgrimages, never seeking to be himself a master, since he could serve the best of masters. But, if tempestuous gestures and scornful suspicions were to be the order of their day, better to break the bond before it became too irksome. Warmly recommended by Richier to the Duke, Narcisse Gerbillon had stayed behind when the Persian carriage and all its convoy had taken their noisy farewell of the streets of Bar.

He was amply employed, and his work, though without originality, was carefully and skilfully done. He rented for himself a booth under the shadow of the great church, and fitted that up as a workshop for the daytime, still

living in one room of the empty house, near the southern wall, which had been Richier's palace. His business soon brought him into close relations with Mercillat, the gunsmith, for whom he wrought ornamental pieces in which his art showed to advantage. Mercillat, a subtle man, who concealed great acuteness under a noisy demeanour, knew how to appreciate a workman so adroit and punctual—one, moreover, who gave the gunsmith no trouble by demanding for his designs any personal credit with the nobles, content that Mercillat should hear the praise if he himself got ready money. When it appeared that the second daughter, Rosalie, had fallen in love with Narcisse, her father alone of the family, but with an authority which overbore all resistance from the women of the house, smiled upon the match.

As the colour grew fuller in the west, where the light grew less, the Mercillats rose to their feet, and prepared leisurely to descend the Place. Rosalie moved in the opposite direction, and as

she discreetly turned the flank of the great church, she glanced at the booth that clung to the corner of it, like a limpet to the base of some vast rock. This was the workshop which Narcisse rented from the town, and the spot where all day long he was to be seen busy with his tools, or gazing out in a melancholy reverie. It was now shuttered and locked up, as she expected it to be. He was beforehand with her, no doubt, in their innocent rendezvous.

She went out of the town at the upper gate, passing but a few belated hinds returning from the fields, herself the only person to pass outwards at so late an hour of the afternoon. Directly beyond the gate, the broad brow of the hill on the edge of which Bar is built was covered in all directions by what had once been woods. At the last threat of invasion, before bolting their doors against the world, the Duke's townsmen had cut down all the timber, partly to supply themselves, in case of siege, with firewood, partly to deprive their enemies of the

same useful stores. Some years had passed since then, and along each side of the road brushwood had sprung up in the neglected coppices, making a thin shadow from the sun and a delusive shelter from the rain. The floor of this unimpressive woodland, in which there grew but little grass or moss, was gemmed at that season of the year with a lank profusion of spring flowers. Rosalie stepped out of the deserted road, and gathered a great bunch of grape hyacinths and lilies of the valley; it was a new thing for her to care for flowers, for which Narcisse, on his part, had a veritable passion. She had learned to gather them, at first, for his sake, and had grown to love them for their own.

It was not a common thing for women to venture outside the walls of the town so near to nightfall, and if the family of Rosalie had not been wearied of restraining her, she would have been forbidden to do so. There was little danger, perhaps, yet wandering soldiers or

vagabonds might have annoyed her, if Narcisse had not always conducted or preceded her on these occasions. The spot was so close to the town that a louder turmoil than usual on the rough pavement would come in diffused murmur to their ears as they stood there. For Rosalie's part, she would have been well content to have leaned, in full publicity, over the stall at which Narcisse was working, and to have counted that enough of a lover's meeting. But his romantic and more imaginative temperament had insisted upon greater solitude than this.

Here the solitude was indeed absolute ; so near as the town was, it yet seemed as distant as those mystical cities of God which a man may seek for ever and not have sight of. The point at which the lovers stayed or met was just where the road from the town crossed the path from Sermaize to Nançois-le-Petit, a path little trodden, except, in high noon, by a few pedlars or friars. At this spot a huge crucifix was raised, the post of which had sunken a little

in the loose soil and now leaned forward, as though its heavy arms and the terrible load they bore would descend upon the passer-by. The image was of colossal size, rudely painted, with lamentable dripping clusters of red hair, and a crimson trickle of blood drawn like a thread from the wounds in the crossed feet. It had been carved, before the Italian taste came into the country, by some rough carpenter of Lorraine, who designed no more than to imitate, as well as he might, some horror of the wars that continued to haunt his memory.

It was strange that these lovers should choose the shadow of this awful symbol for their trysting-place, yet, so complete is the indifference born of habit, the phantasmal or even the religious horror of this cross never affected either of them. To each it was merely a landmark, unless when Narcisse, unwontedly professional, might chance to remark on the clumsy workmanship of the limbs or speculate on the probability that, after some heavy night

of rain, the whole structure might be discovered sprawling across the roadway.

Out of the brushwood Rosalie emerged, at the well-known spot, to find the solitude absolutely unbroken. Narcisse had not come. Where then could he be? She perceived at once that he had failed to keep his appointment. After shutting up his workshop, he had gone—whither? Certainly not to the feet of the cross at the high meeting of the roads. Rosalie felt her whole body invaded by that physical sense of distress which comes in youth only, and solely to those who love not wisely, when they are suddenly prevented from seeing the one they have been expecting to see. It is a disappointment so transitory, a grief so puerile and unreasonable, so inconceivable to all who are not suffering from the very malady of love, that we are apt to think of it as trifling. But to the sufferer it is absurdly poignant, and as overwhelming as the irrational despair of a little child. In this town of Bar, with all the quiet

world so close about them, occasions for such disappointment were rare. Rosalie stood, stark and cold, under the coarse painted feet of the huge image, and her brain refused to act. But, all around her, the evening murmur of the wind began to rise in the broad woodland, whispering, sighing, grumbling. The light grew less in the west. She was alone, she was in despair, and she fled from her solitude.

That brief flight was an agony. Down all the open alleys of the wood came chuckling sounds, rapid advance of unseen feet, shock of muffled wings, the infinite trembling and gasping of beings without form or substance. Devils probed the thin foliage of the lime-trees to reach her, devils leaned on one hand and laughed at her from the entrance of rabbit-holes. It grew and grew, till the whole air and earth became a vast imbroglio of annoyance and temptation, and at length, as she fled, she heard behind her the great crucified figure from the cross itself pursuing her, limping after her on its pierced

and naked feet, stretching to seize her with those coarse arms from which the blood was trickling. In vain she tried to console herself, to murmur a prayer. All she could feel was that God and Narcisse had alike forsaken her, that she was given up to devils, abandoned within that spiritual riot of the night to which no girl in her senses should ever venture to resign herself.

It was all over in three minutes. Once in sight of the open doorway in the southern gate, her supernatural fears gave way to a mere paroxysm of anger and of jealousy. Where could Narcisse be? With what other girl? Crudely and stupidly enough, but irresistibly, that question rose for the first time in her spirit, and settled itself to stay there. Who her rival could be, whether there were not a dozen reasons of a natural sort to account for the disappearance of Narcisse, she scarcely asked herself. The corroding acid of jealousy, a liquid fire, began to steal through her veins.

With it came the determination to punish him. She would not look for him; she would not even take the street which would bring her close to his house; she would go home, and wait for his explanations. That he would explain, and that she would promptly forgive him, were not matters of doubt.

She paused at the door of the church, and went in, to compose herself a little before presenting herself to the women of her household. Inside the church it was almost dark. A young priest was moving in front of the altar, instructing two acolytes in the lighting of the tall candles. One by one the faint yellow stars of light appeared, waking still fainter silvery reflections among the holy vessels. Around the aisles, stopping at each of the sacred stations, a little girl was wandering, belated and inattentive, doing her enforced round of prayers after tardy confession. Rosalie sat and smelt the light odour of incense, while her heart sank more and more to its normal motion, and her

eyes grew clear after her dizzy racing. Round her, behind new stone screens of Renaissance design, little in keeping with the Gothic splendour of the church, were half seen and half divined the gorgeous tombs of all the Dukes of Bar. In the furthest chapel, only the eastern wall of which was within sight, she could just perceive the corner of the entablature of the most magnificent of these monuments, that raised by the widowed Duchess to René de Châlons. As she was inattentively gazing in this direction, a slight shadow seemed to flutter across the chapel, to subside, to move again ; and at length the hand and arm of Narcisse, raised with a wide gesture familiar in him, appeared for a moment in the chapel.

To whom was he gesticulating ? Who was his companion ? In the happiness of finding him thus unexpectedly these questions scarcely troubled her serenity. The priest and the boys were gone now, leaving the altar flashing as with a pendant curtain of stars. Rosalie rose

discreetly, and crept towards the chapel of René. She would, at least, satisfy herself whose company it was that her lover preferred to hers. When she reached the doorway, Narcisse was standing motionless, in a reverie, and he was alone.

In the centre of the chapel rose the amazing monument which Ligier Richier had made at the command of Anne of Lorraine. Of the florid accessories which supported the central figure, little could be seen in the fading light; that and that alone arrested the eye. Carefully carved out of two blocks of the creamy white stone of St. Mihiel, and relieved against an ermine-dotted shroud of black basalt, a statue of the skeleton of the soldier-prince, whose actual bones were growing green within the tomb below, leaped into the light. At his own special desire, the prince was represented not as he was when he died, but as he would be three years after his decease—that is to say, with the osseous structure still lightly covered, here

and there, as by veils of gauze and webs of gossamer, by the last filaments of skin and flesh. The attitude which the sculptor had chosen was so singular and so imaginative that the design was preserved from much of what would else have been grotesque and hideous in its composition. With the legs close together, the body drawn up and the left hand outstretched above the head to its full length, the whole figure seemed vitalised and elastic. It was Death itself, but in an ecstasy of life. In the uplifted hand was held a small box of chased silver, empty at present, but destined to receive the heart of Anne of Lorraine upon the decease of that princess; the empty right hand was pressed hard to the ribs of the skeleton, to the spot where that other faithful heart had beaten so loudly.

Familiar as Rosalie was with this statue, it seemed to her this evening possessed of unusual distinction and beauty. The silence of Narcisse intimidated her; she dared not speak so loudly

as to attract his attention. Through all her flight and agony, she had preserved her posy of lilies of the valley and grape hyacinths, and she held them still, hot and flagged, in her strong hand. She now ventured forward, and laid them in a heap between the feet of the skeleton. At this, Narcisse finally looked round, and gazed at her with a gentle glance of surprise. She had expected excuses, a hurried series of explanations and exculpations. Instead of this, with his wide gesture, he captured her shoulders in his arm, and drawing her softly to him, continued his rapt examination of the articulations of the statue.

Totally pacified, all her troubles, as it were, washed away by a warm tide of satisfaction, she let her head lean on his neck in silence. At last, as if delicately to draw him down from heights unattainable to her ignorance, she pulled a curling lock of his reddish hair with her lips. For only answer, he lifted one lily and one grape hyacinth from the heap at the

skeleton's feet, and stuck them in his shirt. This broke the spell, and still leaning there, in the growing darkness, she asked :

"Why did you not come ?"

"Come whither ?" he asked again.

"Nay," she pouted, "you know well enough—to our meeting-place under our Lord of the crossways."

"It was never in my mind," he answered, with a simplicity so perfect that she was finally disarmed. "I worked on late to-night, and when I locked up the booth, I turned in here."

"To pray ?" she asked.

"No," he said ; "to look again at some of Master Richier's work. I wanted to be sure——"

"What did you want to be sure about ?"

But again Narcisse, though her arms were round his body, had passed from her in thought. He was curiously observing, with a knit brow, how the ribs were joined to the sides of the statue, in a series of bold hoops or notches, not indeed closely studied from Nature, but full of

practical cleverness. It was some time before they spoke again. Rosalie was not very skilful in understanding what she felt. Yet she could not but be dimly conscious that the broken appointment under the cross was so small a thing to Narcisse that he could not comprehend its importance to her. To her the remainder of the day was nothing; to him the meeting was but an agreeable episode with which art or business might have to interfere.

After their rendezvous, it was never she, but always he, who noted the passing of the hour, and suggested, in a placid way, that they ought to return. But, on this occasion, it was Rosalie who made the first movement to be gone. Outside, upon the steps of the church, the twilight was still surprisingly strong; and Rosalie, who had counted on a parting kiss in the darkness, drew back, a little abashed, from her own thought. They parted, smiling, with complete decorum.

II

NARCISSE went back in the fading light to his house, turned the key in the lock, ascended the echoing staircase, and let himself into the large chamber which had now for two years been his home. He lighted a small fire on the hearth, and crouched beside it till the place was quite dark save where the flame flickered. He brought out his food, and at first left it on the floor, uncooked; then at length returned to it, and prepared it, making a hasty and uncomfortable meal. Thrown across the bed, there lay a rude sort of southern zither, a small instrument, shaped like a heart and strung with eight strings. Nothing of this kind had ever been seen at Bar until Narcisse brought it with him, and he was shy of producing

it, as it seemed in some sort the token of his alien fortunes. Now, as he rose from before the fire, and paced to and fro in the great empty room, he snatched the zither from his bed, and ever and anon struck upon it a certain air of his own country, always the same. There would have been something mysterious to a stranger in this huge, four-square apartment, dimly lighted from the hearth, in which a single gigantic shadow leaped and danced about the walls, and a single fitful tune wailed from an unknown instrument. If the movement and the sound seemed singular, they only the more fitly illustrated the curious agitation that fluttered in the veins of Narcisse.

At last his restlessness took him to the window. The night was chilly and obscure. No stars were visible; only, after long staring out, he saw the dead, high line of the wall beyond the garden, and a few vague masses of a blacker blackness which were plane-trees shivering in the wind. As he gazed, a crazy wish

came into his head, a desire to throw his window open, to strike upon his zither, and as he struck to walk out upon the black night air, to skip, playing all the while, from roof to roof across the dim and twinkling streets, to enjoy a kind of solitary sabbath dancing a little way above the nocturnal town ; not precisely to soar or fly, but to float, like a loose bladder in the wind, bumping from roof to roof ; or like the little painted angels, with trumpets and long robes, that play on rebecks hung round their necks, and float about at martyrdoms just out of the executioner's reach. None of these images, all of which passed through his mind, exactly interpreted the wish of Narcisse, which had in it a sort of lawlessness as well, a kind of revolt against the restrictions of civic manners, a desire to be out in the darkness on some innocent devil's errand. And then he thought of the stories current of eccentric men and women to whom in their solitude the devil had come and bidden them fly with him, to explore all the secret provinces of the

night. He shuddered, and turned from the window.

But as he stood before the fire—his legs strangely brilliant in the light, the polished edge of the zither flashing like silver, the veins in relief on his long white hands, yet his face in complete darkness as though still under the shadow of that satanic suggestion—a wholesome thought occurred to him, and a memory rushed back to his mind. He laid the zither gently down upon the table, and prepared in haste for a ceremony which had recalled itself to him. He lighted a candle, and opened a clamped box in which he kept his treasures. He changed his working clothes for a blue cloth jacket which revealed a white doublet underneath, and for the close-fitting hosen which were then in fashion. His graceful figure was well shown off by this distinguished and modest dress. He had recollected that his friend, the Duke's trumpeter, had a gala supper at his house that night, and that he himself was expressly bidden to it.

Out in the narrow dark lane the wind blew cold. He wrapped his mantle closer round his shoulders. The trumpeter lived in the lower part of the town, but Narcisse made his way first to his own booth under St. Maze. It was all silent and doubly dark beneath the shadow of the enormous minster. Not a sound vibrated from the huge hollow shell that hummed so often, with such a choral pulse, through the long working hours of the day, murmuring above and around him with the various services of the church, and cheering him in his workshop with a whisper of protection. Now the vast building, looming through the night, seemed dead and awful, the abode of unconsidered terrors. Narcisse unlocked the booth, and groped his way in. Sitting down at his work-table, he felt about until he found some steel springs and other mechanism ; without a candle, gradually growing used to the darkness, he sat in silence there for a long time, testing some arrangement of these materials with his fingers.

He seemed to become absorbed in this odd labour, and to forget that time was passing.

At last he rose suddenly, and put his work away. Stealthily, as he had come, he left the booth, crossed the dim Place on which rain was by this time falling, and descended the rough and twinkling street. The Trumpeter lived in the house of his ancestors, an old construction, built round a courtyard, and set close under the wall of the Ducal palace, up into which, indeed, a staircase led from the back of it. For generations past the same family had enjoyed this same office at the little Court. Father had taught son the mysterious art of blowing music through tubes of brass and silver, and each had handed down to his successor a richer collection of instruments and a fuller code of traditions. The present man had come young to the honours of the trumpet, and he was still unmarried, the very type of a jolly bachelor, the most sociable of all the rich burgesses of Bar.

Narcisse was hesitating by which of the inner doors to enter, since both seemed reverberating with jollity, when that on the right hand burst open, and a great dog, carrying half a fowl in his mouth, rushed between the legs of the fresh visitor, followed by a man's cap and a volley of humorous abuse. Narcisse stood in the doorway dazzled with the lights, bewildered with the noise.

"Hah! here he is at last! Scoundrel, to be so late! The very dog has been anxious about thee, and was carrying thee a bone when we all thought, poor wretch, that he was stealing!" cried a hearty voice from the interior of the room.

The scene that Narcisse had so suddenly broken in upon was a lively one. Twelve or thirteen persons of both sexes were seated on benches round a narrow table, which was laden with good things. A copper chandelier above the door at which he was standing threw down a yellow light over the group, and lent its aid

to two or three tall wax candles in bronze candlesticks, which guttered in the night air upon the table.

"Come in, come in, and shut the door!" shouted the host; "come in, before the wax drops down on your fine blue coat, and before we have all caught a fever from the cold wind. Come in, and sit you down here by me."

The room was richly furnished, and, as a peculiarity of the house, the eye instantly sought out the variety of curious tubes that hung by leathern bandaliers from nails upon the walls. The light, which was not strong anywhere, was all concentrated upon the tablecloth and on the faces that gathered around it, yet the brown gleam of the walls was lit up with golden flashes and sparkles on the strange instruments that hung fantastically there. The young trumpeter was exceedingly proud of this collection. Here were not only the trumps and clarions of the day, but grotesque and battered instruments of a bygone time, the presence of which upon

his walls testified to the antiquity of his family in their profession. Here was a whole row of *bucines*, those long, straight trumpets of bell-metal, slowly opening to the end, which had once been used for signals in camp, and even now were occasionally blown in processions of Ducal etiquette. Here were the curled and slender horns of brass, with their bell over the man's shoulder, sweet in tone as those on which the minstrels of the Prince of Antioch blew their swan-songs before the gates of Jerusalem.

At the moment that Narcisse entered, the trumpeter had launched upon his favourite topic. He started ever and anon from his chair to exemplify the various sounds, the sharp and resonant note of the *graille*, the solemn organ-harmony of the *araine*, the piercing cry of the *clairon*. He had just succeeded in persuading Mercillat, the gunsmith, who did not love to be made ridiculous, to put to his lips the ivory mouthpiece of that huge leathern worm, with its thin pipe of metal, which was called the

serpent, and in those late days had come to be only blown in church. Mercillat puffed and strained, but the tube hung inert, and not a sound proceeded from it. When the gunsmith, between blowing and fuming, was at the purple verge of apoplexy, the trumpeter snatched the instrument from him, touched it with his mouth, and called forth a succession of notes so clear, so piercingly sweet, that they seemed rather the music of some mysterious bird in the forest than of this uncouth coil of leather.

Delighted with his triumph, the glowing young trumpeter hurried back to his seat at the top of the table, and was descanting on the mysterious virtues of the central piece in his collection, a stained and beaten *oliphant*, or hunting-horn of elephant's tusk, bound with bands of thin gold, such a horn as Roland blew at Roncevaux, and the very one, so he declared with an oath, from which his sainted grandfather, long since with God, sent such a blast at the battle of Vaudemont that all the vanguard of the Emperor broke up

and fled. As he sat and talked in his eager way, Narcisse glanced sideways at him with great content. He had long been strangely drawn to this red-blooded, braggart child of the Barrois, this genial and generous fellow, with his handsome face and rich muscular frame that seemed to burn with vitality. A very tender comradeship had sprung up between these two young men, so utterly unlike in temperament, in nationality, in physique. The coarse jollity of the people of the town commonly jarred upon Narcisse, who could give them no change in this their own currency; but as he sat here at the feast to-night, the trumpeter's large hand, brought emphatically, half caressingly, down upon the knee of Narcisse, filled him with a vague contentment of spirit, and seemed the homely circumstance in all this alien drama.

But the inner door was flung open, and another familiar face appeared. Carrying a large open-work gridiron in her two hands, and laughing loudly, Rosalie hastened to the table, and

deposited the savoury results of her cookery on a silver platter before their host. Famous for her art in broiling meat after the favourite fashion of the time, Rosalie had volunteered to prepare for this laughing Esau and his friends the food that their soul loved. She was greeted with a cheer of applause, but as she rushed forwards, she saw that Narcisse was there, and her good-humour was complete. She took, as by right, her place on the other side of him. The Trumpeter was now magnificent indeed. With his feathered hat upon his head, he carved the meat, and as he pressed the finest bits upon guest after guest, he dexterously handed the platter with one hand, while he bowed with his hat in the other, as he had seen the Duke do at ceremonious dinners. The air was perfumed with the delicate scent of the meat, and Rosalie's masterpiece was divided amid a shower of compliments and pleasantries.

With this savoury resumption of the feast, the spirits of the company, which had been

excellent before, rose to a very animated pitch. The flushed serving-boy, who made rather a rough but an exceedingly conscientious substitute for the pages at supper in the castle overhead, had enough to do in keeping every one supplied with wine. His boots clapping hither and thither on the floor, he seized the tall, narrow glasses as the drink grew low in them, tossed their heel-taps into a basin, and refilled the glasses from jugs standing in a silver cooler on the floor. Such a spirit of good-humour prevailed that the flesher's wife forebore to scold the lad when, in his excess of zeal, he sprinkled her sleeve with wine-drops. It was a special vintage, at least three years old, a pink wine with an odour of the grape-flower hanging about it, delicious and innocent-seeming, but headier than an inexperienced tongue might have conceived.

The air grew hot, the candles guttered their wax down the flutings of the tall candlesticks. The manners of the company became a little relaxed.

Lucie was seen to hold a glass of wine to the lips of a young metal-caster, in whom she was believed to take a more than sisterly interest, and whose hands seemed at the moment to be engaged elsewhere. Her husband's back was turned to her, for he was burning a nut at the end of a fork for the delectation of two girls, who laughed overrosily, with louder merriment than the jest demanded. The jokes began to grow less pointed, the allusions more embarrassing. The trumpeter, as a watchful host, saw that the moment had arrived for a division.

"Bring in the hanap," he called to the serving-boy, and every one turned with interest in the direction of the door. The boy came back, his eyes starting out of his head, overwhelmed with the weight of the goblet and the dignity of his office. The hanap proved to be a barbaric cup of silver-gilt, ornamented with old-fashioned enamel-work in red and white, filled with spiced ale. It was put down before the trumpeter.

"There has been blood in here," said the

trumpeter solemnly, as he took off the cover; and although almost every one at table knew the familiar tale, the refreshing shudder that he wished to awaken ran round. There was silence at once where all had been so boisterously noisy.

"This hanap," he went on, specially addressing Narcisse and Rosalie, who had not, perhaps, heard the story before, "has had blood in it. It belonged to my great-uncle Remi, who was trumpeter to the Duke's great-grandfather. He was a mad fellow, it seems, and one night when he was following the Duke with all his baggage at the siege of Toul, he filled this goblet with wine and threw in a gold piece. Any one who could drain off that at a draught and come down to the gold should have the coin. Several young men tried, and failed; there was still wine over the gold piece. At last a boy took up the hanap full and drank, drank, drank till there was only a little red drop around the piece of money. The other fellows were so mad, that one of them

struck him on the head as he was grinning, and his blood trickled so deep into the hanap that the gold piece was covered again, and he died afterwards of the blow. It used to make my grand-uncle laugh till the tears came into his eyes to tell that tale."

As they had so often done before, the guests laughed aloud, some of them a little obsequiously, at this rough old jest. Rosalie smiled, as in courtesy bound, though the story scarcely added to her gusto as the hanap went round from mouth to mouth, and each guest, standing up, drank the trumpeter's health in it, with success to the noble art of trumpeting. When Narcisse's turn came, he alone could neither laugh nor smile. "There has been blood in it!" rang still in his ears, and he scarcely touched the drink. Though he sat between his friend and his sweetheart, he was ill attuned for the evening's mirth; nevertheless, he tried to answer with civil animation such few remarks as were directed to him. But the feast was now ended, and the serving-boy

ran round the table with his jug and basin, pouring water over the fingers of each guest in turn. It was the sign for rising from table, and when this ceremony was concluded, all stood up and gathered into knots.

"What shall we do?" said every one to his neighbour. One man suggested a game of bowls in the alley, and shouted to the trumpeter to have his torches lighted. But one of the girls went to the door, and the night seemed cold and windy. "What shall we do?" and the host began to grow anxious lest his guests should lose their gust of cheerfulness.

"Let us dance," cried Lucie, and the metal-caster echoed her wish, his arm already stealing round her waist. But no one had prepared the floor, nor even sprinkled sweet herbs upon it. The table was cleared to the side of the room, and a desultory couple or two spun round. But the general wish did not seem to incline to this informal dancing.

"What shall we do?" said the flesher's

wife. "Let us play at the king who cannot lie."

"Yes! yes!" cried all the girls; "but then the king may be a queen?"

This was agreed to, and the lots were drawn. Whoever drew the marked stick should be king or queen, as the case might be. To his manifest vexation, the trumpeter drew the stick. He could not be king in his own house, and he begged leave to nominate another monarch.

"Yes! yes!" they shouted; and then, to almost every one's disappointment, it was Narcisse whom he named.

"What must I do?" said the sculptor, who alone of those present had never seen the game played.

"You must wear a cloth crown on your head, carry a long spoon for a sceptre, and go stalking round the room. When you tap any one on the shoulder, he or she must ask you a question before you can count ten. If the

question is asked in time, you must answer it openly and truly."

A sort of turban was rapidly wound up to serve for crown, and Narcisse stepped forth on his comic travels with a very dignified air. There were squeaks of hope and dread when he approached a group of girls; as he passed the men they had the most stolid air of indifference. Every one, however, was preparing a question, and not unfrequently with so much care, that when the sudden tap of spoon to shoulder came the elaborate sentence would not out. For this failure there was a forfeit. Such questions as were delivered in season were mostly of a very trivial and obvious kind. A few were crudely coarse, giving occasion to the more decorous of the party to glance upon the ground, and merely echo the roar of mirth with a titter. Good-nature reigned, and there was no real intention of offence.

Narcisse had skilfully nonplussed several of the would-be wits, and had answered adroitly

when he had to answer. But Eudoxie's question was :

" Of whom art thou thinking ? "

Rosalie looked self-conscious, and then puzzled and slightly vexed, for the answer was :

" Of the most silent of her sex."

It was impossible so to describe the talkative Rosalie, and half a dozen frank voices at once assured her that she was not in the sculptor's thoughts. She was ready to be angry, but he looked across to her with such an open countenance of friendly merriment, that she joined in the laugh against herself.

" Thou art sworn on thy sceptre to speak the truth, Narcisse," was all she said in reprobation.

The metal-caster was tapped next, and had his question ready.

" I see the future in my mind's eye. What is it ? " he asked.

" There is blood in it," said Narcisse mechanically, before he had time to think.

The trumpeter was understood to be exempt, but while he peered into a cupboard to bring forth some bottle as thick as himself, his broad back was smartly handled with the bowl of the spoon.

Busy as he was and distracted, his wits were ready. Before the ten numbers had left the lips of Narcisse he had blurted out:

"Foul play! But—in what company dost thou best like to be?"

"With no man's maid who shall be all men's mistress," replied Narcisse, and then blushed very red with anxiety, for he thought—as we always do if we speak in riddles of our secrets—that all must guess what he meant. The company stared blankly, but the old cordwainer in the corner, with many noddings of his long grey beard, gave it to be understood that he saw the jest, and that in faith it was a mighty true and pregnant saying.

The only other question and reply that will bear to be repeated were given a little later on in the

game. At length, when almost all were tapped, Narcisse succeeded in suddenly capturing Rosalie. She had her challenge ready.

"Where hast thou been most happy?"

"There where I have followed my fancy," he replied.

The company had enough of these enigmas and of the game. The king took off the crown, which hampered his overheated forehead, and with his broad gesture he laid his sceptre aside. There was a general feeling that another man, one more truly of their kin, would have made a merrier monarch, and have played in a lustier fashion, with more whim and farce. But no one spoke rudely, because of Rosalie and of their host, and because Mercillat did not approve of any disrespect to his best craftsman. There was fresh discussion now as to what was to be done, and the young fellows clamoured for music. The fiddles were pulled out of their cases, a ring formed round the performers, and the master of the house was persuaded to take

part with one of his resonant curled tubes of metal in the concert. But something seemed missing.

"You miss a shrill kind of note in the harmony," said the gunsmith; "'tis too loud and brassy. What you lack is the part of something tingling. I know not what you call it, in the art of music, but I would fain have a cricket in the corner."

"The cricket would be Gerbillard's lute—what do you call it? That is gay and light, with a twang like a wire."

"Where is your—your——?" said Rosalie, for no one in Bar was easy with the name of the strange southern instrument. "Where is it, Narcisse?"

"I will fetch it," he said, and started to do so. At the door he glanced back for a moment into the room. The candles, still but half burned, were crumbling with the heat, and giving the serving-lad work enough to do in snuffing them. Ranged behind the players, they threw odd shadows on the wall, profiles of

instruments between the knees and in the arms of young men, gigantic phantom elbows that sped up and down as the possessors of these lutes tuned the strings. There was a babble of loud voices, treble and bass, the shuffle of feet, the squeak of the fiddle-bows, the full tide of noise in a company that is at its ease and has lost all traces of restraint. The candle-light made warmer the hues of all those flushed faces, drew out the colours of the Barrois gala-dresses.

Narcisse glanced once more. The trumpeter had passed about some hospitable duty into an inner room. Rosalie's back was turned from the door, and she was in dispute with her sister Lucie upon some local matter. It rushed upon Narcisse as with a flood that this was Bar, his lodging, not his home—the life in which he was a pilgrim and a stranger. His absence would not make any difference to any one. He opened the door stealthily, and turned his back to the riot and the light, the shriek of the music and the perfumes in the girls' hair. In a

moment he was alone in the darkness, in the cold air of the courtyard, under a dim vault of colourless immensity.

Something rubbed against his legs. It was the dog, long ago tired of its enforced exile from the warmth and food, but still slightly conscious of an evil reputation. As clearly as it could, it explained to Narcisse that it was all a misunderstanding about that fowl, and glanced around, as dogs will do, as if inviting a personal inspection of its innocence. Drizzling rain was falling, but when Narcisse was out in the dull, blank street, he was still conscious of the dog, a whitish mass, moving just in front of his steps. He went back to the house, and let the dog in, opening for a moment a door which let out a tide of light and noise. He glanced back as he left a second time, and saw the window hastily unshuttered. Rosalie's face appeared dark and flat, with an aureole of candle-light in the edges of her hair. She had heard the door reopen, and had fancied that already Narcisse

might be returning with the zither. Although she had been so undemonstrative while he was there, she had no sooner turned to find him gone, than her heart began to beat out in wave upon wave of longing for his presence. She was already fretting at his delay, though he had scarcely left her a moment before. But she saw nothing in the darkness, not even the smile he gave her as he fled away into the wetness of the night, and she turned back to bear as well as she could the tedium of waiting for him.

She waited and waited, but he did not come. His absence was unnoticed by the rest of the company, for the trumpeter had discovered among his treasures a little old stringed instrument easily tuned, which completely fulfilled the purpose for which Narcisse's zither was required. An hour went by, with a succession of those short pieces, so sweet and positive, all gurglings and silver prattle, of which the chamber music of the day consisted. Once the door had opened and Rosalie had half risen from her seat in her

impatience, but it was only the Abbé, bringing his viola to swell the concert. He came in smiling, and was greeted with respectful warmth; he had judiciously waited until the turmoil of the feast had declined, and until music had somewhat etherealised the boisterousness of his flock.

"Where is your Narcisse?" said one of the girls to her, insolently.

Rosalie scarcely glanced in her direction, and then, with admirable coolness, murmured:

"Eh? Oh! he went more than an hour ago."

"But why does he not come back?"

"He did not mean to come back," Rosalie coldly replied. "He said good-night to me under his voice, not to disturb the company."

In her heart she was asking herself what it was that had happened to Narcisse, and who could thus have enchanted him.

III

NEXT morning the sunlight was brightly suffused through a pearly firmament of broken cloud. Rosalie, pausing in the course of her household work, stopped for a moment at the doorway to gaze up the street in the clear air. There was no excuse for her to meddle with Narcisse at his business thus early in the day, yet she could not resist glancing in his direction. The shop was out of sight, hidden by a buttress of the church, but her attention was attracted by a point of intense vermilion colour against the grey church wall in front of her lover's booth; this red object was absolutely motionless, and below it the sunlight fell on a stripe of golden hue. Her curiosity was excited, and she could

not resist stepping out into the Place, and wandering a few paces upwards towards the church.

The mystery was easily explained. The trumpeter, with a scarlet feather in his dark green velvet cap, had been chatting with Narcisse at his workshop, and was now being induced to stand at a little distance in profile, to serve as a model. Drawn onwards by her inquisitive mood, Rosalie passed the steps of St. Maze, and turning the corner found herself in front of the little booth where Narcisse was seated, his brows somewhat bent, sketching from his friend the trumpeter. A rough lump of red wax was piled on the board at his side, and with his long supple fingers, by aid of the little boxwood spatula that modellers use, he was making a profile head for the clasp of a belt. There was not a word said. The trumpeter nodded as he saw the girl approach, but did not disturb a single muscle of his face. Narcisse greeted her, out of his full grey eyes, with a look of discreet affection, and

motioned that she should lean, out of eye-shot, on the other side of his table. The sketching went on in silence, until Narcisse, swinging backwards a moment, came up out of his trance of composition, like a diver out of the depths of the sea, and regained consciousness of the condition of things.

He glanced at Rosalie, who was watching him, and then at the trumpeter, who was still admirably rigid, gazing away at right angles, in an attitude of studied and exaggerated grace, perfectly immovable. A very strange notion passed through the sculptor's brain. He contemplated his two visitors with a sort of critical attention. The trumpeter, a good fellow if ever a good fellow breathed, was a handsome specimen of the Barrois race. His copious dark brown hair stood out in curly clouds under his close cap; his countenance was perfectly handsome, except that the muscles of his cheeks were already slightly relaxed with the exercise of his profession. His thick neck, hairy to the nape,

with its very white skin, already showed signs of the coarseness which would presently invade the whole of his comely person. But in this, the close of his youth, he was still a magnificent specimen of his kind. So, Narcisse reflected in a moment, was Rosalie—alike in colour, in texture, in temperament—Barrois both of them, of the purest water. Would it not have been better, more seemly, he said to himself, in this flash of odd emotion, that these two should belong to one another than that he should come between them, he with his foreign nature, his totally distinct physical characteristics? As this idea passed through his brain, he glanced at each of them, and he smiled.

He smiled—to see how little either of them seemed desirous of any rearrangement of their relations. The trumpeter, who had borne the constrained position and monumental stillness of a model for so long a time without a murmur, supported by the glorious sedative of vanity, had now discovered that the sitting was over, and

edging closer to the booth, was awkwardly endeavouring to catch sight of the result, the waxen sketch half concealed by the hand of Narcisse. In an ecstasy of self-study, he had not found a glance to spare for Rosalie ; it was obvious that for him she and her large beauty did not so much as exist. Nor was she more conscious of the trumpeter. As Narcisse glanced in her direction, he caught, thrown full at himself, that fiery, tender gaze of hers which often troubled him, so little did he feel able to respond to the self-abandonment it hinted at. At least, he smiled to acknowledge, he had no cause to lie awake at night tortured by jealousy of his good friend, the trumpeter. And now, gaily rising to fetch some other tools from the back of the shop, he drove both his visitors away, threatening that they should feel the weight of his hammer if they loitered there wasting his time any longer. Rosalie fled down the Place, as if for her life, laughing aloud. The trumpeter made a lunge at the sketch of himself, caught it,

lovingly contemplated it, and returned it, with the prints of his finger-tips deeply set in the edges of the red wax.

"Devil that thou art," he said, "thou hast given me the snout of a swine."

"Pray to St. Maze thou mayst never see thy ugly muzzle from the side," answered Narcisse.

Whereupon there followed hot horse-play, to and fro, across the booth table, and then the trumpeter strode off, his vermilion feather dancing a saraband in the breeze. Left alone, Narcisse settled to fresh work, adroitly twisting the iron wire before him into coils and tendrils, the sharp rap of his hammer ever and anon ringing out in the silence of the morning, as he flattened the surface of a form he had secured. But there was no other sound from the workshop. The townspeople were as well accustomed to hearing trills of only half-intelligible southern song proceed from behind the buttress of the church, as to hear, from his ivory cage, the piping of the Abbé's famous greenfinch. Nar-

cisse had a trained and effective tenor voice, not strong, but held well under control, and it was his habit to sing continuously as he sat at work. To-day, however, he was silent. It was not that he was unhappy. On the contrary, his face expressed a species of eagerness and even elation, but he was restless. So preoccupied did he become, that he was convinced at length that to stay longer in the workshop was useless.

From the inner wall he took down a gun that Mercillat had given him, and threw his brown cloak across his shoulders. As was his custom when his head became too hot to guide his hands, he locked up the booth and went down to the river-meadows to see what luck he might have in shooting. There was little to be seen at first, but presently, in an alder-swamp close to the stream, he bagged a brace of snipe. He missed another cock-bird, and it rose, squeaking and zigzagging, in the air, before taking its straight course out of all possible gunshot. He followed it, aimlessly, his mind all the time

reverting mechanically to something which lay heavily upon it. By degrees, though he found no more snipe, his sharp walk along the oozing edges of the water-meadows cleared the current of his thoughts. It was not the habit of that age to observe in any very conscious way the features of landscape, but perhaps those at the feet of the traveller were more real to his attention than the stars and mountain-tops which engage our restless modern thought. Four hundred years earlier St. Bernard of Clairvaux had been able to ride all day along the shores of the Lake of Geneva, without noticing that there was a lake. This was no longer possible, perhaps, yet Narcisse would scarcely have been able to say why the glowing fields, laced with little grey streams and edged with water-flowers, affected him as they did. It was really a result of association, it was the sentiment of youth revived.

He began to think of those southern fields where he had wandered years ago with boys

of his own age. Giles, with the mole on his lip; Aribert; the boy with the large ears—what was his name? It was he, the fellow with the ears, who had such a clever way of getting barbel out of the river-pools. Narcisse wondered if there were barbel in this river that flowed down under the citadel of Bar. And Aribert—whom he beat for stealing the big knife, Narcisse's father's hunting-knife. Did he ever make that up to Aribert? No doubt he did; if not, what matter? How long ago it all seemed, how vague, with intense clear spots, like a picture that has been smudged all over, and carefully filled in here and there. Giles—yes! he was one of the spaces that was most highly finished. With Giles he had never quarrelled; even when they fought together with fists, it was all in the way of comradeship. And what had become of Giles? Gone to be a soldier in somebody's wars, no doubt; shot down, perhaps, some rainy evening, by an arquebuse from behind a stack of wheat, when he was so tired

with the day's long march that he had no power left to struggle for his life. Some story of that kind, commonplace and likely enough in those days, Narcisse seemed to remember.

The days of his later youth, down there in the flat south country, where the broad river sank so shallow in the summer that one could ford it, of them he remembered less. Nothing seemed very clear, until the magical hour when the great and mysterious artist, Ligier Richier, had come riding through the village, and, stopping to ask the lad a question, had noticed the mechanical toy he was framing on his knees. Suddenly, imperiously almost, he had carried Narcisse off with him, seating him on the saddle-bow in front of one of his own servants, capturing this native talent for his own purposes, as the pirates of the Bey of Tunis steal good Christian 'prentices while they stroll on the sea-shore. Patiently and gently, bending his arrogant will to train this bewildered southerner, the Lorraine sculptor had developed to its highest pitch the skilful

hands and clear imitative brain, producing at last a replica of one side of himself which just fell short of genius. Then had come, on Richier's part, the sense of vexation at the limitations of the pupil. Doing so much, why would he never do more? Excellent as a mechanic, as a carver, as a modeller, as a musician, why could he never, in any one of these directions, proceed beyond mere excellence into genius?

Narcisse thought of the adored master, and of the little cloud that had risen up and spread itself between them. Vaguely he understood that Richier had believed in him and had been disappointed. Narcisse was still too much under the spell of his old idolatry to question the master's right of finding fault. But he mourned his absence, and not without a touch of resentment. Now, if he, Narcisse, should perform the miracle of originality, the master would never know. Was it barely possible that if such a portent of a thing were made that men all over the world met to wonder at it, some whisper of

it might not be conveyed over to St. Mihiel? If a certain adventure went bravely through, would not Ligier Richier hear before he died that he had not been wrong when he snatched the village-boy away from being a gooseherd on the long white road? And Narcisse smiled a little, in the covert of his beard, as he strode along from one streaming tussock to another.

From the battlement of the mill, which was crenelated like a little fortress on the side that faced the meadow, a lean scarecrow of a miller called down to him. This lonely dwelling became, in times of sudden war, a haven of refuge for those who could not escape up into the town.

"What luck, Master Narcisse?" shouted the miller.

Narcisse held up a brace of birds by way of answer.

"Ah! 'tis too late for snipe. After an April frost, I've seen those running ditches full of them. But they hate the smell of my old

woman's cows, and off they go up stream to the empty pastures. Come in and rest a while, Master Narcisse."

"No, thank ye, miller, I must be climbing back. That falconet in your wall looks out of repair."

The miller patted the little rusty cannon with an indulgent air, and said, "Ay, she's out of gear somewhere; she's fallen forward off the tressels. She wants a touch of your skill, Master Narcisse. Why, 'tis four years since 'twas used. She killed her man that day, though she nearly killed me into the bargain with her fizzling and her jump back into my legs." The miller gazed lovingly sideways at his rusty protector.

"Any more sycamore-trees for sale, miller?" asked Narcisse carelessly.

"Why, there be two left on the point of the ait, and 'tis so hollowed away with the stream that one of them must go for certain. What a power of sycamore-wood you use, Master Narcisse!"

"Sell me one straight bough off your tree, and I shall want no more."

It was agreed that in exchange for setting the infirm falconet on its legs again Narcisse should carry away as much of the best part of the sycamore as he wanted. He was impatient to secure the wood, so he was presently admitted into the mill and ascended the wall inside, to examine the little cannon, while the miller and his man sawed down the sycamore, and brought it across the stream. The falconet was not seriously out of order, and so, taking a note of what it wanted, and promising to come down with his tools soon—since, as the miller said, "times of peace are the times for mending, ready for war, which the saints forfend"—Narcisse shouldered his straight sycamore-pole, and, wrapped in the flying folds of his cloak, ascended the hill.

In passing through the town, Mercillat was standing at his door and challenged him.

"Where have you been with that gun and

pole? You will have his Reverence at your heels if you go fowling in the Abbey waters. What sport?"

Mercillat eyed the snipe and felt them. The birds were in excellent condition.

"Ah! lucky that you are! The hen, what plumpness! Feel with your thumb here, the fat under the wing! Ah! the cock too! Pity there's but one brace, yet that is much."

He persisted so loudly in praising the birds, that Narcisse, who had not thought of it until then, felt obliged to offer them to his future father-in-law, and did so with the best grace in the world. Mercillat was offended. He thrust the snipe back upon Narcisse, and folded his own hands behind his back.

"Nay, nay! What do you take me for? You go down to these horrible water-meadows, you toil all day, and I, forsooth, must rob you of your little spoil. You will cook them for yourself, and relish them. Ah! the pity of it that you do not know the true, the Barrois art

of cookery. You will ruin those sweet birds. Take them away, my friend, cook them and destroy them. If I accept them, 'tis but that they may not be defiled in the ashes or soaked in too much oil. It is not to rob you, but to save the birds. They shall hang from our rafters, Rosalie shall cook them divinely after the true Barrois manner, and you shall come in on Sunday and eat them with us. Nay, nay, freely given—I grudge not the labour of watching them being prepared. They shall be, on Sunday next, a morsel for a bishop's nephew."

Narcisse went home, and up to his solitary room. Here he deposited his bough of sycamore-wood, and presently descended. The arched courtway next to the door of his house led to a vast herb-garden, belonging to the guild of physicians of the town, and the key of this garden, which was seldom used, was in the custody of Narcisse. On this warm afternoon of May he descended from his room, and let himself into the physic garden, which spread

under the hinder windows of his house. He had sometimes thought of constructing a flight of steps which should drop from his own window into the solitude of the garden, but this still remained a dream of the future.

Long, long he walked on this especial day, up and down the sombre aisles of the green, overgrown enclosure, his feet treading one perfume after another from the lush and tufted herbs, shoots of which trailed out upon the path—rosemary and basil, germander and calamine—all planted there by the physicians of the town, for health and not for beauty. His reverie grew upon him. At length he stopped short, sawed the air with the wide gesture of his arm, and sallied vehemently indoors, wholly forgetting, in his absorption, to lock the gate of the enclosure behind him.

The physic garden was a favourite place of meeting for Rosalie and Narcisse. Often, for an hour before sundown, the two lovers would wander there, leaving the gate unlocked. The

local conventions saw nothing unbecoming in this, if the couple restrained themselves from sitting down or even standing still. While the air was yet a little chilly, they might often be seen slowly, regularly threading the paths of the garden, she wrapped from head to foot within the folds of his great brown mantle, sauntering, sauntering ever, with their heads bowed towards each other and almost touching.

On this particular afternoon, Rosalie, puzzled at the disappearance of Narcisse the night before, and again throughout the day, and still slightly piqued at his repeated neglect of her, could not prevail upon her feet to take her elsewhere than to the empty street in which he lived. She thought to stand there, and gain a glimpse of him, or even perhaps, by a discreet call, to win his attention. Without any distinct plan of campaign, and as if against her will, she started in that direction. When she arrived at the courtway leading to the physic garden, she passed down it, thinking it possible Narcisse

might be within. She leaned against the grille, looking through it hither and thither. As she did so, it yielded to her weight, and, with a rusty scream, gave way. To her surprise, she found herself inside the garden, and she was now sure that Narcisse must be there.

Hemmed in by its high walls, the enclosure seemed cold and gloomy in the fading light. She looked for the tall figure of Narcisse on this side and on that, but in vain. At the further end there was a bower of ragged eglantine which might conceal him, but he was not there. The garden possessed so little shelter that it was not by any means needful to examine it so closely for the body of a full-grown man, which could scarcely have been buried in it even by the piety of robins ; but Rosalie hastened hither and thither, glancing under bushes where Narcisse might possibly be seated, or behind buttresses which might conceivably shelter him. At last she sat down on a soft mat of thyme, which exhaled its sweetness round her. She rested there,

and tried to command the tumult of her pulses.

It would have been difficult for her to explain why it moved her so much to find Narcisse absent from a place where she had not the least reason to suppose him present. But Rosalie was in uneasy spirits. The suspicions which had seemed to prove vain the evening before, were they truly so groundless? She had expected from Narcisse some expression of penitence. It is true that in the chapel he had seemed absolutely incapable of perceiving that he was in fault, yet in that state of mind he could hardly continue. Thinking over the events of the twenty-four hours, he must have admitted to himself that he had given Rosalie more than one just cause of offence. Yet all day long she had waited, and waited in vain, for any word from him. What did it all mean? What had come between his thoughts and her? When she considered her own inner being, the image of Narcisse seemed

to fill it to the uttermost corners; there was no room in her for any idea that did not, in some way or other, refer to him. But with him it was not so: as she now reminded herself, it never had been so. She began to hate all his other interests. What did he want with other interests, when he had her? All things became an offence to her as she sat there on the odorous cushion of the thyme; she reflected with anger upon the metal-work because it absorbed his fingers, on the trumpeter because he permitted his head to be sketched, on the very birds because they took her lover away from her to those water-meadows whither she might not follow him.

Suddenly, from where she sat, she heard in the atmosphere a clear note of music. Some one was playing a well-known air on a flute. Rosalie knew it by heart. It was a favourite tune with Narcisse, and it was from his window that the bright notes were now descending into the garden. A tide of happiness flowed through

her veins; she smiled as she listened. The air shrilling down in the deep silence seemed a direct and intimate message from her lover. She would let him go on for a while before she answered him. When the tune was finished she would rise, and stand just below the window, and noiselessly would throw a great bunch of sweet herbs into the room. How delightful to see his grave white face peer out in amazement, and then wrinkle into smiles! She would wait now, keeping very still, until the flute had piped that southern air right through.

But the tune came abruptly to an end, as though it had only been started as a test or to set some other music going. There were steps, and a murmur like some one speaking, and then the fluting began again. Not alone this time, but, to Rosalie's infinite surprise, accompanied on a zither. After a few notes the zither-player stopped; not a very accomplished practitioner this, evidently. There was an exclamation, as the flute stopped also, more shuffling

steps, and then the same performance over again.

There could be no doubt about the matter. Narcisse, in his great chamber, was teaching some one to play in accompaniment to his own music on the flute, and the pupil was the object of his most assiduous patience. Who could this pupil be? If it was some boy or man, why had Rosalie never heard of him? What could there be to conceal in such a matter? How could it possibly be that he had neglected to tell her of the arrangement? Of course it must be some youth. But who? No doubt it was of no importance, yet why hide it from her? He had not found so many things to talk about during their long walks together that he should fail to tell her that he was teaching some man to play the zither. He was perfectly at liberty to do so, of course; she wondered a little that he should have the patience to do it. What could be the reason of it? Who could it be, once more? In the

innermost centre of her soul the conviction was already settled that it was a girl whom Narcisse was instructing.

Beneath the window, and a little at one side, an aged vine-trunk rose out of the ground, its tough and gnarled mass projecting a few inches from the wall. Six feet up, close below the window-sill, it took a twist to the left, and soon divided into boughs and tendrilled shoots that flung a canopy of pale green leaves over the greyness of the upper wall. Rosalie perceived that the turn of the vine, underneath the window, gave a coign of vantage from which a nimble climber could stretch upwards and peer into the room. At this moment the fluting and zithering began again. She sprang up the vine-trunk with the skill of a cat, and arriving at the shoulder of the tree, settled her foot upon it firmly, and clung there pendant. The harmony proceeded better than before ; the pupil was evidently advancing in skill. A curious feature of the performance was that he (or she) made no false notes, but either struck the

instrument with absolute precision, or ceased to play altogether. As Rosalie hung in air, the zither stopped abruptly. There was a moment's continuance of the flute, and then it also was silent. An exclamation of impatience followed in the voice of Narcisse, and then a quick and heavy step across the floor. The curiosity of Rosalie could endure this torture no longer, and she threw herself silently forward, clutching the vine in one hand and the window-sill in the other. She found herself further off than she had imagined, yet she could just peep in.

What she saw, made the blood run scarlet behind her eyes. Narcisse was there, with his back turned to her. She could scarcely see him, because of the dimness of the light in the room, and because of the distance. But she could observe that he was close to his pupil, that his arm was round her, and that he bent his face down with a gesture which was not to be misunderstood. Who the zither-player was, and what she was like, it was absolutely impossible

to ascertain. She seemed very pale, and was apparently dressed in white, but that was all that Rosalie could discover. The figure of Narcisse completely veiled his companion, and as he was about to turn towards the window, Rosalie swang herself violently back. She hung there in the vine, with her eyes closed, for a few moments; then she descended, leaping without a sound into a deep bed of tansy. She walked across the herbs—so as to make no noise—as far as the gate, which, on a sudden impulse, she viciously slammed, so that all the echoes of the street were awakened by its clangour. Then she ran as fast as she could to the church of St. Maze, pushed her way in, sank beside a pillar, and, with her hands pressed to her face, knelt for a long time gazing through her fingers at the pale lights twinkling on the altar. She proposed to herself to weep, but tears, like slumber, will not always come when the weary call for them.

IV

LATER on that evening the Mercillats were gathered in their general dwelling-room, around the hearth. During the wars the family had grown impoverished, and now that the master-smith was wealthy again, he made no change in his ways, preparing for that great house in the new Italian manner which it was his dream to build and furnish. The fat coarse candle had burned itself down to its stick and had gone out in a splutter. As it was not worth while to fetch another candle, the fire was stirred and fed so as to give enough light for the women who still spun or knitted. The men lounged, lazy, stretched to the flat of the blaze, like dogs. Eudoxie sat upright in an old-fashioned fixed

chair, over which a sumptuous brocaded hanging, somewhat faded with use, was thrown, the stuff running out so far that her feet rested on it. She occasionally stopped the soft clatter of her spinning-wheel, and gazed into the fire. Lucie kept up without a moment's intermission the rattle of her knitting-pins, on which the firelight flashed and died away, much to the satisfaction of the wakeful baby in Bibi's arms. Rosalie, plunged in a lethargy, sat heaped together in the corner of the settle, silent. Indeed, very little was said in the warmth and repletion of the hour.

But presently Eudoxie addressed her daughter: "Were you in the physic garden to-day, Rosalie?"

"Yes—a moment."

"I forgot to tell you to bring me a bunch of archangel for the liquor. Is it out yet?"

"I don't know. I didn't notice."

"Look to-morrow, and if only the yellow is out, wait a while. It is the white flowers I want."

"What is archangel good for, mother?" asked Bibianne.

"Stamped into vinegar, and made up as a poultice, it is sovereign for blains and swellings; my grandmother made a conserve of white archangel that saved a lady's life."

"And, sister, bring a little rosemary for the pot," said Lucie; "your fresh rosemary is as tasty as allspice."

"She will put it in our wine to make us drunk," said one of the young men, alluding to the properties then popularly attributed to this herb.

"Why do you not fetch your own green-stuff," said Rosalie crossly; "what else am I to get? Chevril for the hotch-pot, and tamarisk for your toothache, and bindweed root to dye your hair? Go and get your herbs yourselves? Why should I wait on you all?"

At this outburst, every one looked up. This petulance was unlike Rosalie.

"But it is you alone of us, as you know, who

can enter the physic garden. What so irksome in stopping to pick a few herbs in your lap when you are wandering there with Narcisse ?" said her mother meekly.

The subject might have been dropped, but that Bibi with tactless curiosity pushed on her inquiries.

" Did Narcisse speak to you of those birds ?"

There was no answer. With her fists pressing her cheeks, her eyes glowing through her hair into the fire, her bare elbows on her knees, Rosalie seemed in no mood for conversation.

" Was Narcisse——?" Bibi began again ; but was crushed by the violence with which her sister checked her.

" Never speak to me of Narcisse again," she said, and vouchsafed no more.

The family were not given to reticence, however, and Rosalie's outburst was taken to mean that Narcisse might be freely discussed. He was no favourite, as we know, with any of the household, except with Mercillat himself. Not

much was said, but the old charges were dwelt upon : that no one knew whence he came, that he was an alien in the town where all else were friends of old standing, that he held aloof from the townspeople.

" I should like to know what he does in that vast house all by himself," said Eudoxie.

" Why does he not come and live down here, like a Christian, with all the blessed smells and noises to make him comfortable ? " remarked Mercillat.

" They say," remarked one of the sons, " that he walks for hours at night in the physic garden."

" By himself ? " asked Bibi.

" Well, could he walk with any one at that time ? " was the reply ; and Lucie crossed herself, for a little chill seemed to strike across the floor.

" How do we know with whom he walks ? "

" Perhaps he gathers poisons there."

The fire was getting low, and when a hollow log fell inwards, rousing a cloud of sparks, the women started. Rosalie, who had been sitting

perfectly still, with fixed eyes, now said: "Mother, have you still any of your angelica-root left?"

"Why, yes," replied Eudoxie, with a housewife's eagerness, "a little. Why?"

"What is it good for?" asked Rosalie.

"You know," said her mother; "it is a strange remedy against poison, and against the plague. If you do but chew a piece between your teeth, you may walk through a dead city; it will most certainly drive away the air of pestilence, even though that corrupt air shall have gripped your heart."

"Has it no other virtue, mother?" Her face was so impassioned as she said this, and the malignity of her expression balanced so ill with the indifference of her words, that they all gazed at her with apprehension.

"Yes," said Eudoxie, trying to speak calmly, "if you carry angelica-root about with you, you may even consort with those who walk with the devil, and may take no hurt."

"Then give me a piece of it, mother," said Rosalie, rising to her feet and looking in that angry flicker of the logs like the very Witch of Endor; "give me a piece of it, that I may carry with me when I go next to visit Narcisse!"

There was no further word spoken. It seemed as though the doors had fallen open and an icy wind was sweeping through the house. One by one the Mercillats crept off to bed, while Rosalie, a motionless heap in the settle, waited there glaring at the embers, till the last of the redness had died away into white ash. When she awoke next morning, a vague pain woke with her. She could not, for a few seconds, recollect what it was. Then her resentment swept back upon her, and she repeated to herself that she was not sorry that she had punished him. No one, she decided, would take any notice of what she had said, and, if they did, Narcisse deserved the worst that might be whispered about him. It would go no further, and, if it did, it would only serve him right. She thought again of the

twilit room, of Narcisse with his arm round the zither-player, of the white hands she had just dimly seen in the darkness. She closed her eyes, pressed the lids tightly together, and told her heart that it had done well to be angry, and her tongue well to be spiteful.

She was, none the less, aware that it was a very serious thing to allow a fellow-citizen to be accused of magic. She was known to be the most intimate companion of Narcisse in Bar, and she, in the full circle of her family, had broadly hinted that he walked with the devil. At that time there was no charge so terrible as this. It meant complete social degradation as well as judicial condemnation if it was proved, and the mere accusation was a stain. The bare suggestion of black-magic brought so strong a wind of terror in its train that all the human affections were blown away before it ; fathers would denounce their children, sister accuse sister, friend desert friend. This was the terrible engine which Rosalie, in the concentration of her rage,

had not been able to deny herself the little pleasure of wielding; she had started it, in the vain belief that she could call it back with as much ease as she let it go. But that could not be. Before the day was hot, the most terrible insinuations were beginning to stir in all quarters of the town, and little knots of people crossed themselves as they mentioned the name of Narcisse.

He, perfectly innocent of what was going on, and of the tempest in the mind of Rosalie, appeared at the usual hour in his booth. He had seen little of the girl for two days, and was beginning to realise that she would regard his interest in other matters as neglect of her. He presently strolled down the Place to the house, where Bibianne was sitting in the doorway. The child rose when she saw him coming, with fear and disgust in her eyes, and was about to disappear, when he called to her, and begged her to send Rosalie out to him.

"Your sorcerer is asking for you," said Bibi spitefully.

Rosalie went slowly out, and met him. Narcisse could but notice her changed look.

"Are you ill?" he asked. And then, as she said nothing: "Forgive me for not seeing you yesterday," he said; "my work was heavy, and my hèad was troubled with it. I must go back now to the workshop, but will you come this afternoon and walk in the physic garden?"

Rosalie had said nothing, and her whole mind was bent on a scornful refusal. But with his ingenuous eyes fixed upon her, and the accents of his low, placid voice in her ears, she was no longer mistress of her resentment. She melted to him, and, moreover, unless she walked with him, she could never find out the secret of the zither-player.

"Yes, I will come," she answered.

And Bibianne, hidden behind the doorpost, giggling, cried out: "Take your piece of angelica in your pocket, then!" and ran noisily into the back part of the house.

Rosalie, gazing at the utterly bewildered face

of Narcisse, blushed burning red. "I will come," she repeated in a softer tone of voice, and then she vanished.

In the shop where Mercillat worked, with his son and two apprentices, no other subject but the scandal could occupy conversation. Young Mercillat had already, in confidence, told Droz, the younger 'prentice, what his sister had revealed, and these two were now whispering together on the subject. The gunsmith himself was much disturbed this morning. Nothing could be further from his convenience than any slander of this sort, and yet if the good fame of Narcisse was to be tarnished, it was not Mercillat who would make a martyr of himself by defending him. He was angry that the question had been raised at all, and the whispering of the lads completed his ill-temper. "What are you two chattering about?" he asked.

"About sorcerers," the son replied. And then, after a pause, "Droz saw a real witch once."

"Pooh!" said Mercillat. "Go on with your

work, or I'll whip you both. What witch was that, Droz?" he added sullenly, his curiosity getting the better of him.

"It was in our village," said the lad, delighted to have an audience; "the Abbé caught her by the sleeve when she was flying over a cornfield. Her mother was just as bad as she was; she used to make some ointment in a pot and rub it over their two heads, all but the face, and wait, with their window open, for the devil to come and fetch them. And they had their sabbath in a little wood, just behind our farm. She confirmed it all, and they burned them both, thank God! I thought I should never get over the fright it gave us."

Mercillat wiped his fingers on his apron, and hurriedly crossed himself, moved in spite of his scepticism. No doubt such things did take place, though not so frequently as silly people imagined.

"Was she hard-featured, this girl?" asked the other apprentice.

"No, just like any ordinary maid. You would not have noticed any difference. She used to come and fetch the milk from my sister's every evening; we never guessed that anything was wrong."

"What crimes do sorcerers commit?" asked young Mercillat in a rather subdued voice.

"They swear by the name of Satan, for one thing," said Droz; "and they blaspheme God."

"They dedicate children to the devil," continued the older man, "and often they kill and eat them."

There was a long pause, and deep silence broken only by the ringing sound of the smiths' tools.

"How can one tell a sorcerer by sight?" asked young Mercillat presently.

"Oh! there are marks," said Droz significantly, nodding his head. "If a man has a little blue crescent, like a coriander-seed, in the soft of the flesh under his arm, or in the flank, that is a certain sign."

"What is that little crescent?" asked the lad again, drawn on by an intolerable curiosity, yet stammering with confusion and discomfort.

"Oh! that is the stamp of the devil's nail in his body," said Droz, almost in a whisper.

"Stop this talk!" shouted Mercillat, with an oath. "Lazy vagabonds, go on with your work, or down comes the whip from the wall in one twinkling, and across your shoulders in another. Not a word more, or the largest piece left of any one of you shall be his right eyelid."

Who shall say how a report which deeply and universally excites the interest of a community passes from ear to ear? No one can be accused of climbing to the house-tops to shout it, and yet if the town bell were rung, and the story told to an assembled crowd by the crier at the top of his voice, it could hardly become more widely known than when floated from whispering lip to shuddering ear. It permeates the town, like oil. The mice seem to carry it in the shape of crumbs; it is ground to dust, and blown against

every window; the rain sighs, and is full of it, and flushes every gutter and every sewer with it; the sun comes out, and the steaming town is steeped in the vapour of scandal. In the midst of all this electrical excitement, Narcisse Gerbillard sat in his workshop, absolutely unconscious, singing at intervals in his clear bird-like voice, hammering his iron coils and tendrils, in perfect ease of spirit and with goodwill in his heart to all the world.

It is not to be supposed that the accusation, so lightly thrown up into the air, had suddenly produced a crop of conviction. At first, people accepted it provisionally without further comment than an exclamation of horror, and passed it on in the same way. Rosalie Mercillat was quoted as the authority, and her intimacy with the accused man was matter of common notoriety. Bibianne had sustained a rather severe disappointment in telling the story to a group of girls. It was long since there had been a trial for witchcraft in Bar, and the accusation had not so

horrid a significance to these children as to their elders. Some of Bibi's audience laughed, the rest were apathetic. One girl ventured to ask what that meant, to "walk with the devil?" Bibianne could not very clearly say what it meant, but the curé had preached about it at Easter, she knew that. It was the worst thing you could possibly do—oh! much the worst. "What! worse than stealing the holy vessels from the altar?" asked one little maiden, this being a crime lately punished in Bar with extreme severity. Yes, Bibianne thought, on the whole, even worse than that. Much worse, at all events, than murdering your mother, because Martin Blaize who did that got off altogether, after confession, by grace of the Church. Bibianne was practically certain that there was no grace if you walked with the devil.

"Where did Master Narcisse walk with the devil, Bibi?" asked one tender creature of thirteen.

"In the physic garden," whispered Bibianne, delighted to have awakened a real interest at last. "Rosalie went up there, and found the gate unlocked, and walked in, and oh!—she saw sights."

"What did she see, Bibi? Tell us what she saw?" said the pale cluster of flaxen heads, in chorus.

"No, you will repeat it if I tell you."

"Oh! we will not, my Bibi, we will not."

"Swear you will not, Zoë, and you, Bertha, and you, Pulcherie, and all of you! Swear you will not tell!"

"Oh! my Bibi!" sighed the whole company, excited beyond power of further affirmation by the secret which now seemed to hang imminently over them.

"Well, then, come closer to me." The children stirred a little, but closer they could not come. "She peeped in, and then she saw Narcisse walking, walking, and what do you think was with him?" No one ventured upon a

suggestion, and so she went on: "It was the devil."

"Ah! what was he like?" one girl constrained her tongue to ask. But Bibianne's imagination was limited.

"Well, just like the devil. He had a tail, and—and horns. Oh! and he mowed off the tops of the flowers by swinging his tail to and fro as he walked."

This was said with great confidence, and was received as being, in its way, circumstantial. But nothing more could be extracted from Bibianne, who became duly conscious that she had gone rather beyond her text in this little narration. She hurried the girls away, with a fresh charge that, whatever happened, they should not repeat a word she had said, and that, if they did repeat it, they must not say she told them.

Rain came rattling down upon the streets during the middle of the day, making the pear-shaped Place gleam to the very steps of St.

Maze. Narcisse stayed longer than usual at his booth, for he had a piece of work that demanded all his attention. It was a chain of small steel rings, for the Duke's chamberlain, and the clasp of it was to be a mask held between two naked figures of children. He doubted whether to design a tragic mask or a comic one. The latter suited with his sprightly mood, but at length he decided that the necessary mechanism could be more conveniently concealed under the symbol of tragedy. He rejoiced in the rain, for he supposed that he owed to it the circumstance that no one came near his booth all day to disturb him. He was not very fond of company at any time, and when he was designing, the presence of idlers specially distressed him. But when the hour came for him to leave, the sky was blue again, with great rolling clouds, tinged with pink, tumbling over one another down in the south-west.

His thoughts turned to Rosalie, and he felt that he must make her amends for his self-

absorption. He smiled when he thought of that—a cunning, innocent smile. He walked home, smiling, and as he strode along he thought of many things, so happily, so dreamily, that it never once occurred to him that the people in the streets stared at him or avoided him. Yet it is a fact that two or three persons did so, and that two burgesses nodded their beards at one another with an air of extraordinary mystery as he passed them.

The testimony of the little girls—each of whom had been allowed to speak at home in the presence of her betters, because of the importance of the news she carried—was beginning to tell on the population. A boy, too, had been discovered, who asserted that, very early one Thursday morning in Lent, he had seen Narcisse descend the tower of St. Maze, head foremost, crawling on all-fours, like a lizard. The little wretch had invented this incident, or had adapted it from some story of a witch, and then, finding that it gained credence and made of himself a

youth of importance, without any great difficulty succeeded in believing it. Ultimately, indeed, after sleeping a night on the anecdote, the boy became so firmly convinced that he had really seen this reptile descent, that he shuddered in private when he thought of it, and would have endured a very smart chastisement before denying it. His evidence was held to be of great importance.

Although as yet Rosalie had no conception of the rapidity and completeness with which her wanton piece of revenge had taken hold of the town's conscience, she nevertheless became more and more uncomfortable as the day went on. It was not her nature to retain any impression long, and although she sedulously nursed the image of the zither-player seen through the open lattice, yet her conception of what she had seen grew steadily vaguer. This was inconvenient, because her only excuse for the monstrous accusation she had made was the firm assurance that Narcisse had done her

this great wrong. Without a fresh vision of the interloper, she could not retain her resentment, and with the cooling of her rage, as she felt, would come a return of love for Narcisse, and of shame for herself. Already she began to reflect with extreme vexation on the step she had taken ; she must reassure her jealousy, or the tide of her feelings would ebb to the uncomfortable degree of positive compunction. To wind her anger up to the proper pitch again, it was imperative that she should see Narcisse, and in this frame of mind she made her way to the physic garden.

Narcisse was just inside ; he unlocked the gate, and she went in. But when he prepared to throw the brown wing of his cloak over her shoulders, she evaded it. She would walk alone, she said ; it was not chilly.

"You are angry with me still, Rosalie ?" he said.

"Am I not right to be angry ?" she replied.

"Ah ! yes, perhaps ! yes, yes !" he mur-

mured; "I ought to think of you only, and my mind is full of other things."

"What other things?" she asked eagerly.

"My secret!" he said, smiling; "this little girl wants to betray my secret!"

"How can I betray what I do not know?" asked Rosalie, flushing deep red, for her conscience upbraided her. How could he be so cool and light, she wondered? Why did he not show an embarrassment proper to his part? She would force him to confess.

"What have you done with your zither?" she asked.

"Eh!" he said, surprised, "my zither?"

"Oh, do not feign not to know what zither I mean! The one that used to stand in the corner of your workshop—the one I put a new string into when the old one snapped with the heat! What have you done with it?"

"How do you know it is not still in the back part of the shop? Come, child, let us not talk about these foolish things. Come here,

closer to me; give me your head here on my shoulder, and let us walk along as we are used to do—swing, swing, swing—so that we seem to make one person and not two in our walking. I am tired, Rosalie; come in here under my great cloak, and let us march, march. Do you not smell how sweet the basil is after the rain? Stick this piece of it in my jacket, and lean your head just over it. Come, child."

His quiet force overcame her. Feeling like a traitress to his simplicity of faith, a coward to her own unshaken purpose, she yet could not escape from the serenity of his unconsciousness. She took refuge in silence, and silence was what he desired. No one who saw these two persons oscillating along the garden, with their balanced swing, drawn together so lover-like under one ample cloak, would have dreamed what diversity of thoughts occupied them in the silence. He, once released from the necessity of answering Rosalie's questions, and permitted to be dumb without being upbraided for his

coldness, passed back immediately in spirit to that secret thing which occupied all his energies, while she, in the dark chamber of her narrower mind, was balancing each of the slight phrases he had uttered, and was trying to wring from them an admission of that infidelity of which now she almost wished to be persuaded. It was a mocking phantom of the marriage of true minds which these two beings carried up and down the odorous alleys of the garden, under the shelter of that hypocritic mantle. Yet even in Paradise itself it was only the innocent beasts that supposed the thoughts of Adam to tally with the thoughts of Eve; the angels who read the secrets of all hearts, gazed but once, and covered their eyes to hide the tears that gathered in their eyelids.

V

NARCISSE tossed long upon his bed that night, listening first to the hard rustle of the heavy rain, then to the delicate whisper of the wet trees in the windy moonlight. The moon had sunk very low, and it was near the middle of the night, when the problem that was tormenting him resolved itself. He tried the formula over once again; there could be no question that it settled the difficulty; he turned his face away from the moonlight and slept at once. Next morning, he determined not to go to the workshop. He rose and went about his simple household duties as if in a dream; he cooked himself some food and ate it slowly. The day was before him, the long day that was to crown

his life and make him famous, the day that was to reconcile him to his master. It was perfectly needless to hurry. For once, time was too long, and the residue of art was short.

The large double room in which Narcisse lived stretched across the first story of the house, and was raked with light from the street on one side and from the physic garden on the other. It was scarcely furnished, but it bore some traces of having been the scene of wealth and even of ostentation. The walls were naked stone, the tapestry having been pulled down from them everywhere ; but there was a gaudily coloured Gothic fireplace, in a corner of which, among the ashes, Narcisse prepared his meals. The sculptor's effects were contained in a large coffer bound with belts of brass, which stood against one of the walls, close to his bed. The floor was strewn with chips and curls of white wood, carelessly swept hither and thither into heaps and drifts. A few benches of the roughest carpentry, and a rude deal table, contrasted with

an elaborately gilded and painted chair, ornamented with angels in scarlet and blue, which Ligier Richier had left behind him, much the worse for wear.

The only ornament to be seen was a large design pinned on one of the walls. It was a drawing in sanguine, with some details added by the pen in Indian ink. This also was a relic of Richier's tenancy, and had been given by him to his pupil, because of the impassioned interest the latter had always shown in it. It was a spirited rather than an accomplished piece of work, curious chiefly because of its sympathy with the odd instincts of that particular generation. It represented two soldiers, in Florentine dress, lying dead, side by side, in what seemed to be heather or fern, since their bodies were sunken in it. They had, apparently, just been slain suddenly by a skeleton which had come behind them, and which was even now dancing with rage above them, and brandishing in its fingers a small dagger. The skeleton was female,

for its hair was flowing in the wind, still uplifted by the speed with which its owner had descended the long brae-side which sank from a little turretted city far away up in the background, against the sky. The cere-cloths, which had enfolded the bones, were now flapping elegantly and conventionally around the skeleton, like narrow banners or like strap-work in a decorated ceiling. Underneath the drawing were scrawled some Italian verses—

Era miracol novo a veder quivi
Rotte l'arme d'Amor—

the rest illegible. What it all meant might have puzzled the most learned emblematist at Venice or Lyons. To Narcisse it had a meaning which he kept to himself, and in the melancholy refinement of which he found the satisfaction of his temperament.

One other object there was in the room which might attract the eye of a stranger. This was a light but tall screen in one corner, that divided

off a space as a sort of pen, within which, indeed, it might not be unnaturally supposed that some animal was confined. Narcisse, his morning duties over, sat down at the table with some atoms of steel and his tools in front of him, and completed what appeared to be a spring. Every now and then he would go behind the screen, remove some cloths, and adjust the object which he took with him. A long note of music, or a succession of notes, would result from his movements. He would reappear and return with his mechanism to the table, bending over the delicate apparatus in the deep morning stillness. At last the result seemed to give him complete satisfaction. He returned with empty hands, and began to gather up and carefully to wipe the various tools upon the table.

To an unseen spectator, ignorant of what was passing there, the conduct of the mechanic himself might well have caused profoundest amazement. He strode up and down the room,

loosening his girdle and unfastening the points of his jacket, as though the pressure of his garments suffocated him. His shirt was tied low in the throat, but he pulled the loop of it, and threw it open. His face was lighted up by an odd smile, flickering and fugitive, while a bright colour, like the hectic crimson in a consumptive girl, burned out in his cheeks that were commonly so pale. His grey eyes seemed larger and more blue. His reddish hair escaped from the close cloth cap he wore, as he pushed it off his forehead with an impatient gesture. He looked as though he was addressing a crowd, for his lips moved, although there was no sound from them. All his customary placidity had left him, and was exchanged for a curious excitement. Up and down the room he went, in his cloth shoes, noiselessly, restlessly, too elate to sing or whistle, too happy to speak or to be still.

Suddenly this electric storm of vitality died away. He seemed to grow very tired, very old.

He pulled one of the stools to the window that overlooked the physic garden, threw open the lattice and stretched out his arms, resting the flattened elbows on the window-sill. He kept them there, outspread, while the spent rain-drops pattered down from the vine-leaves into the palms of his hands. He stretched out his arms, as though exhausted with a long and critical exertion, which was now over, altogether done with and completed. He could relax all the muscles, let them lie open to the heavens in that awkward, helpless posture, for their work was done. And the perfumes from the fresh garden, all moistened with the night's rain, came steaming up to him through the vapour of sunlight. He could distinguish them, he thought, as he could notes of music. There was the sweet, light scent of herb frankincense, so gay and wholesome to the senses. That coarser, heavier perfume, mingling with it, yet easily distinguishable, came—he knew well—from the great clump of hairy growth, with umbels of rough yellowish

blossoms, out of which wise women, like Rosalie's mother, distil the precious gum opoponax. There was the high note of the rosemary, the pungent bass of the cat-mint. One after another, too numerous for Narcisse to name or to distinguish to himself, arose and interpenetrated, making one great altar-mist of perfume, the various invisible clouds of wholesome odour. He bathed his tired hands and eyes in this exhalation. It seemed a morning sacrifice in honour of his toil accomplished, his victory won.

Suddenly in the deep silence of the garden, he heard a sound he knew. Some one was rattling the broad iron padlock on the gate of the enclosure. He listened again to be sure, and again he heard that furtive and discordant sound. This was the signal Rosalie made when she came, but why should she come in the morning? A third time it sounded, and then Narcisse sprang to his feet, fearing to be too late to detain her, snatched up the vast key, darted down the stairs and turned, in a moment,

into the arched way. Yes, there was Rosalie, weeping, and shaking the lock of the gate in her distress.

When she saw him she tossed her tears aside, and leaned, facing him, against the iron grille. There was something tentative in her attitude, which gave her the look of an animal at bay, half fierce, half frightened. She had found it impossible to keep away from Narcisse. The night before, she had gone to bed intending to lie awake and think the whole matter over, but her punctual eyelids, in despite of herself, had refused to be held apart for five minutes. This morning her mood was hopelessly confused, the sore of jealousy still open, but the visionary cause of it more vague than ever, while the memory of the placid, undulating walk of the previous night, with the tall presence of her lover overshadowing and hushing her troubled heart with his own quietness, was uppermost in her sensation, as her latest experience always was. She had reached the point when the

quarrel which she had made was grown to be an intolerable burden to herself, a burden which she would give a great deal to throw off. Her conscience, too, that provoking and tactless companion that it is impossible to get rid of, was recalling to her, much more frequently than she appreciated, the cruel wrong which she had done to Narcisse in her blind fury. To this tiresome monitor she replied that nothing was cleared up, that she had herself seen the interloper, and that Narcisse confessed that he had "a secret." To discover that secret, and to know the worst, had now become objects so acutely desirable that she lost, for the time being, all instinct of safety and decorum in the search for them.

Neither Rosalie nor Narcisse spoke at first, but gazed at each other. Then Rosalie adventured in a sulky tone of voice: "I want to pick some allspice for my mother."

"Child," he answered, "it is not your mother—it is the holy Mother of God who has

sent you to me. This is a blessed hour for us —for me and you."

She gazed at him astonished.

"Last night," he went on, "you asked me about my secret. How my heart leaped when you said that! Tell me, Rosalie, my friend, tell me—how did you come to know I had a secret?"

She blushed with shame; she could not tell him how. He misunderstood the colour in her cheeks.

"You do not know. But I know. It was our Mother, to whom I pray every night and noon. Our Mother, to whom I have vowed a gift for her chapel in St. Maze—a little ivory casket with the Passion of our Lord upon it. I shall begin it to-night, at the time of vespers. It is Our Lady who has told you of my secret."

It flashed across her mind that he must be impious to talk in this way, or else mad. Perhaps it was true; perhaps he did walk with the devil. She said nothing, but clung to the

iron network. He did not seem aware of her silence, but went on speaking, as though she had answered him.

"Yes," he said; "this is the blessed hour which makes all things golden. Come up with me, up to my own room, and see what awaits you there. Come, it is dull and wet down here." And he waved his arm in welcome, with that gracious gesture of his. His face was radiant, without excitement. He looked like an angel in a missal, like the messenger of Annunciation, solemn and blissful. Rosalie was torn with doubts and hesitations. It was utterly in defiance of every code of manners for her to go up, even for a moment in midday, to the dwelling-room of this man. On the other hand, he was so grave and, she believed, so honest, and her own curiosity was so extreme, that she risked it. She would make a pretence of refusal, however:

"That is impossible. How can you ask it?"

It rose to his lips to say, "We are betrothed,

we shall shortly be married—what matters it what people say?" but he refrained, through a strange delicacy which he could scarcely have put into words. He saw the burning eyes of this girl fixed upon him, full of love, and he was conscious that his own mood leaned much more to comradeshlp. He would not suggest anything that should place them, at that moment, on an amorous footing. The occasion was solemn, almost sacrificial; he wanted her sympathy, her tender friendship, but not the profanity of an earthly love. Life would stretch away in years long enough to be absorbed in that; this was the spiritual moment that might never come again.

By no arguments, therefore, but by a sweeping insistence, graceful and irresistible, which bore her before it, he overcame such scruples as remained with her, and they entered the house. The clammy desolation of the ground-floor, with its damp and naked walls, struck cold upon Rosalie, and awed her; it was like going into

church on a hot summer morning. On the staircase she paused, and would even now have beaten a retreat.

"Hush!" she said; "what was that noise? Who is up there?"

"No one," he answered, but he smiled as he said it, and she flew to a conclusion.

"Very well," she thought in her heart, "if *she* is there, and dares to face me, I will try which of us is the stronger. Narcisse may look on, and take his choice."

She was absolutely determined to go through with the adventure now, and when Narcisse pushed his way into his own room, she followed him directly. She glanced round and saw in a moment that in that place, at all events, was no interloper. Her eye flashed about in search of signs of a female presence; there were none, she was obliged to admit that. She refused to be seated on a stool, from a cautious instinct, but sat, as it were provisionally, on a corner of the table from which she swept Narcisse's tools. And then she caught

sight of the screen, and the little den it made; and suspiciously rose to her feet again, gazing at it.

"Rosalie, Rosalie!" said Narcisse, taking her two hands in his, and forcing her attention to him. "Listen to me, and be at rest for a moment. I am going to tell you—to show you my secret. You are to see it first, then all the town and all the world. You first, Rosalie!"

He went to the screen and folded it back against the wall, revealing something, about five feet high, wrapped in cloths. One by one those swathings were removed, and there was found beneath them a finished skeleton, in polished white sycamore-wood. The posture of it imitated, in some degree, the statue of stone in the church, but not in the case of the arms, which hung at its side. As a piece of mechanism it was very ingenious, for each of the principal bones was made separately and fixed to its neighbours with springs, but the labour had been lessened by the conventional treatment of

the framework. The figure in its brilliant whiteness was unmistakably intended for a skeleton, and in the dusk might have startled an unwitting guest, but no one who examined it, even cursorily and ignorantly, would take it for a genuine relic of humanity. The skull was very cunningly carved, but in the rest of the figure art was sacrificed to mechanics. In the hollow of the chest was arranged a sort of clock-work, which was not seen except on close examination. The feet were firmly planted upon a wooden base. It was very cleverly made, but rude and childish, the masterpiece of a provincial craftsman.

Rosalie gazed at it in wonder and admiration, not unmixed with apprehension.

"Was this your secret?" she said.

"Yes. I could not speak of it, even to you, until it was done. It has been a long, long business to finish it."

Her curiosity in the image began to flag. It was very clever, but—! This could not be the

real secret of Narcisse. This did not explain the girl who played the zither with him that evening.

"That is not your secret, Narcisse!" she cried, and she turned away as if to go.

"Ah! you gipsy," he exclaimed, in an ecstasy of delight; "she knows everything by divination, she reads the stars! No one can deceive her, the cunning jade! No, no, that is not my secret—not all my secret."

He stooped behind the skeleton, and drew forth the zither. She started as she saw it. Narcisse was more excited than ever.

"Ah!" he cried" did she not ask about the zither, too, when we were walking in the garden? She knows everything, she reads the stars!"

He set a spring in motion between the ribs of his skeleton, and a buzzing sound was heard; then he bent one of the pendant arms upwards and confined it below the neck, settling the zither firmly within its grasp. He then bent the other arm lower down, so that its fingers touched, or

nearly touched, the strings of the zither. Then he retreated to a distance of eight or nine feet, and put a flute to his lips. As he blew the first note, the fingers of the skeleton struck the same note on the strings of the zither, and continued to the end of the tune to accompany the flute with a surprising exactitude. It was a very fair duet on the two simple instruments.

Rosalie listened, standing in the middle of the room, and staring. With a growing horror in her eyes, she retreated backward, till she touched the further wall, and in that position she met the gaze of Narcisse when the tune was over, and he looked over his shoulder to her radiantly, for congratulation.

"Then it is true," she said, in an awe-struck whisper; "it is true that you have sold yourself to Satan?"

"To Satan?" he cried, and his laughter rang out and echoed in the rafters overhead. "No, indeed, to my own good head and brain, and to the memory of my master, Ligier Richier, and to

the service of our Lady, the Mother of God. What are you afraid of, foolish child? See! It is not even made of bone: it is all white wood of the sycamore-tree, grown down by the river, in the miller's ait. Every piece of it was fashioned in this room, by these hands of mine, with these tools of mine."

"The skull is a dead woman's skull," she said dubiously, still half afraid.

"No, no!" he exclaimed, and laughed in pride and merriment; "it is all carved out of the good white wood, parqueted together, piece upon piece: and what a labour it was, I warrant you! Come and see, come and feel, for yourself." And he laughed again, that soft, contented laugh of his. But still she would not come.

"I tried to make her dance as well as play, like those skeletons that are painted on the rood-screen at St. Mihiel, that take their rebecks and fifes, and foot it, foot it, so merrily in a country galliard. But I could not contrive it. She was too stubborn. I could not teach her feet to

learn the saraband, and so, to punish her, I fixed them down so tightly to this board that they will never stir, however madly she rattles on her zither. Ah! she has been an obstinate wench!"

Rosalie did not much approve of this form of address. Was she already, or again, a little jealous of a skeleton of sycamore, all joints and springs? Partly this feeling, and partly a curious confidence born in her by the familiar way in which Narcisse spoke of and to his invention, overcame her scruples. She gave way to her intense instinct of curiosity, and was persuaded not merely to look closely at, but even timidly to touch, the skeleton.

This, then, was the secret of Narcisse! This it was which had occupied his thoughts so completely and taken him so often from her company. This was the white-handed maiden whom she had seen him embrace from her vantage point on the shoulder of the vine-tree. When she supposed that he was bending to kiss a rival sweetheart,

he was arranging the swivel of a recalcitrant link, or twisting a wire in a fresh direction. She was ashamed of her jealousy, but she rejoiced to think that Narcisse, absorbed in his invention, had been wholly unconscious of it. There was no cloud on the laughing blue of his eyes when he gazed at her. She had never seen him so eager, so radiant; it added a new charm to his serene and unaffected comeliness. She felt that she had never loved him so much. She forgot all her own mistrust, all her faithlessness of temper, and rushed into his arms. In another instant she had set the old empty staircase ringing with her sudden descent, had swept through the house like a south-westerly gale, and was flying down the street.

Left alone once more, a great peace descended upon the spirit of Narcisse Gerbillard. After so long anxiety, after such an ecstasy of triumph, a happy weariness stole over him. He sat for a long time on his bed, leaning his head against the wall, travelling over in his mind the diffi-

culties which he had overcome, the disappointments which his art had conquered. He was profoundly happy, at peace with all the world. He did not attempt to look far forward. No doubt large fame and profit would accrue to the inventor of such a wonderful image. He would be pointed out as the maker of the Musical Skeleton. The Duke would send for him and make him perform in his presence. The dowager Duchess, who had to excess the fashionable taste for skeletons, would wish to buy it. No! he would never sell it. His maiden should never play with any one else than with himself. Except, perhaps, with his dear friend the trumpeter; and he smiled to think of the figure with its docile white bones accompanying the brazen notes of the trumpet, while Narcisse stood by, anxiously superintending and applauding.

But all this was looking forward, and he had said that he would not do that. He was content with the present, with the exquisitely still and complete and sufficient sense of accomplishment.

From the garden there poured in upon him the soporific sweetness exhaled by the hot clusters of balm in the sunlight. He dozed in happy dreams on the border-land of consciousness, dreams in which his white lady seemed to dance before him with the black eyes of Rosalie in her sockets, and the trumpeter's scarlet feather nodding over her temples.

Presently he roused himself and cooked some food. It had never tasted better, and he had never been more hungry. Then he remembered his vow, and determined to set his hand to his work at once, to the design of that ivory casket which should stand in the chapel of the holy Virgin in St. Maze. It would be small because he was poor, and ivory was so rare and dear, but he knew a man in the castle who had a piece of walrus-tooth. He would get it from him as cheaply as he could. Then—it should be a long box, with the Passion in relief along the front of it. Or else—the story of the Fountain of Youth, with naked figures in the

fountain? No, perhaps the Passion would be best, because the head of Our Lady herself could be introduced, with soft, pouting lips, and little plump hands lifted to the cross in the French mode. Yes! that it should be. And he sat down, with a small board in front of him, to make a sketch of the relief in wax. When the wax study was finished it would be time enough to buy the walrus tusk. He would take the waxen sketch to church, and dedicate it to Our Lady there. If she knew it was being done she would help him to buy the ivory cheaply. Ah! what a happy world it was!

And the consequence was that Narcisse, amply occupied at home, never left his house at all that day, and in his radiant peace and satisfaction never guessed that a storm of popular insanity was gathering in the town of Bar, or that his good name, his art, and his life were threatened by a monstrous prejudice. The evening sank slowly and delicately over the green garden of herbs, the stars came out in

clusters overhead, the moon showed a broad golden face in which there seemed nothing sinister, and Narcisse went to bed at last, sleeping suddenly and restfully, like a tired and happy child.

VI

EARLY the following morning, Rosalie went down to the well under the castle wall, with her yoke on her shoulders and the two swinging buckets at her side. When she reached the water no one else was there, and she began her task. The first bucket had but splashed the surface of the well, when a little door in the wall above her opened, and the Duke's trumpeter hurriedly descended a flight of stone steps to her side. He had evidently been watching for her from the battlements. He looked anxiously up and down the street, but there was no one to disturb them, and after a hurried greeting, he said: "Does Narcisse wear a shirt of mail?"

"No! I do not think so," said Rosalie; "why should he?"

"Why should he? He will get off well if he does not need one to-day. You must know what I mean?"

"What do you mean?" asked Rosalie, in astonishment.

"It is all your doing," answered the trumpeter sulkily. "Why could you not leave it undone?"

"Leave what undone? I swear to you, trumpeter, I know no more what you mean by all this than the innocent bird there in the cage."

"Did you not accuse Narcisse of witchcraft?"

"No!" said she indignantly, but waxing very red. "No, indeed!"

"Well, then, the town has gone mad—stark, staring mad—of its own accord. Did you not say anything to set this story going?"

"It is not for you to put me through my questions," she said, with an attempt at dignity.

"Did not you let them accuse Narcisse of witchcraft without denying it?"

"I was angry with him," she said, in a low tone, after a pause.

"You were angry with him," the trumpeter repeated, in a mocking voice, "and so you let the foulest thing that man can say of man pass uncontradicted? You were angry with him, and so you were willing to damn him body and soul? And are you still—angry?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Then why are you so cool and quiet this morning?"

"Why should I not be?" said Rosalie. "You know something. What is it? What is it?"

"If you are true in what you say, and it is not you who have set this thing going, borrow a shirt and sleeves of mail from your father and hasten with them to Narcisse. Tell him that all the rabble of the town is after him, and bid him fly out of Bar as quickly as possible and as

secretly as he may, till this thing blow over. If he gets down to the miller's house on the river, he will be safe, and he can stay there till we have cleared up this matter. But many friends in Bar, as you know, he has not. What you do, do instantly." And the trumpeter leaped up the steps again and vanished within the castle.

Rosalie filled the other bucket, and took the water home, working out her ideas as clearly as she could. Then she hastily pressed round to her father's workshop. She thought to ask him to lend Narcisse the armour, but concluded not to risk the chance of his refusal. She stole in, and went to the back-shop, where she knew a suit was kept. For some time she could not find it, but at last, in a coffer, she came on the chain-mail jacket, with the sleeves folded above it. She took them all out, threw a cloth around them, brought them unchallenged through the front shop, and hastened to the courtyard of the physic garden, where she made her usual signal.

As she passed near the church, she saw that the booth which Narcisse rented was empty, and she also noticed a little crowd of the worst ruffians of the town clustered at the entrance of one of the narrow courts which led into the Place.

Narcisse descended at the sound of the rattling lock, with the large key in his hand, but, to his surprise, Rosalie hastened into the house itself, ascended the staircase in front of him, and rushed into the room.

"Do you wear a shirt of mail?" she asked him.

"No, of course not," he answered, smiling.

"Then you must put this on at once," she exclaimed, showing what she had brought.

"I could not breathe in those things," he replied. "I have not worn mail since I came here with Master Richier, and he made us all carry chain shirts as we crossed the hill-country. He found out that I was carrying mine in my coffer instead of on my back, and

flew into a rage with me. Why should I wear that stifling armour?"

"Narcisse, you must; you must put it on and fly. Go down to the miller's house on the ait, and ask him to give you shelter. It is not safe for you to stay in Bar. Put on this armour, and go at once."

"Why is it not safe? I have not an enemy in Bar. What has happened?"

"There is a sort of rabble making trouble in the town. They will come here and insult you."

"Why should they insult me? The Duke will protect me. I will appeal to him if the worst comes to the worst. And your father with his 'prentices would be enough to drive back an army of rabble."

"They will not dare to do anything. Father will do nothing, the Duke will do nothing."

"What is all this, Rosalie? You speak as though I had become an outcast. Are there no laws in Bar? Is not a God-fearing citizen safe in this Christian town?"

"Not," she said slowly and hesitatingly, "if he has been accused of witchcraft."

"Of witchcraft!" he gasped, growing very pale; "who has dared to accuse me of witchcraft?"

She longed to tell him that it was she, that she had lighted this dreadful, inextinguishable match in a paroxysm of jealous rage—to tell him all, and to gain his absolution by her utter devotion, flying with him into the dark world outside, accepting the heaviest punishment, which would for her be sweetened, she felt dimly, by the ecstatic pleasure of his continual presence. But she lacked the courage to make this confession.

He had no suspicion of the truth. "It must be the Curé," he said, "for he has never loved me nor my works. He hates the Italian taste, and they say 'tis he who scratched the carvings on the chapel gates that Master Richier put up; he hates those little sea-goddesses with their marble breasts, and would turn them out of the

church if he were not afraid of the Duke. It must be he."

"Yes," said Rosalie, in a low voice, "it must be he."

But when he pressed her for further particulars, he found that she knew nothing specific. As she was ashamed to confess that she had started a rumour of his walking with the devil, it really did appear that she knew nothing. She said that the trumpeter had sent a message; but Narcisse laughed and said that the trumpeter only wanted to get him away, and down at the mill, that they might go shooting together. She told him of the rough fellows clustered in the court, but she had no proof that they threatened Narcisse. He did not want to go, and he made light of the affair. No one, he said, could accuse him of anything evil without being made to bring proof, and there could be no proof.

"You shall listen to the White Maiden," he replied; "before I think of stirring anywhere,

she shall play to you ;" and Rosalie allowed herself to be persuaded. The cloths were taken off the Musical Skeleton, and her mechanism was set going. The machinery acted perfectly, and the strangely fascinating duet of flute and zither proceeded in the silence. As the figure and Narcisse played, however, Rosalie became conscious of gathering steps in the street below, and walking quietly to the window, without disturbing Narcisse, she glanced out. There she saw below her a grotesque assemblage of people, most of them roughs and idle persons, with a scattering of boys. The head of the procession appeared to be the sacristan of St. Maze, who held a pair of brazen tongs in his hand, with which he gesticulated, swaying his instrument to and fro at the crowd, to invoke silence, like a conductor leading a band. By his side an acolyte stood, carrying a pot of holy water, and another young man was armed with a pan of burning coals. It was evident that this reconnoitring party had been quite unpre-

pared to hear the music which proceeded from Narcisse's room, and that they were pausing in astonishment to listen to it.

At length the sacristan called out, in a shrill squeaky voice :

"I conjure thee, Lucifer, by the living God——," and sprinkled holy water nervously to right and left.

Still Rosalie watched, unseen, and still the duet continued inside the room.

"I conjure thee, Satan! I conjure thee, Beelzebub! Come out, come out!" shrieked the sacristan ; and taking a coal in his tongs, he waved it in front of the door. The smoke disconcerted a small bird whose nest was under the eaves, and she flew out with a rustle of her wings.

"There he comes," cried one of the boys, "like a little monkey with wings and a black face." But the rest of the company felt that it was a common sparrow, and the boy was snubbed. So far as the matter had yet pro-

ceeded, it seemed absurd and almost comic. But the crowd was gathering, and it did not seem to be at all a friendly crowd.

"Come out, Nambroth, I conjure thee!" screamed the sacristan, louder than before.

"Fly, Narcisse," whispered Rosalie, "fly now while it is not too late. Climb down into the physic garden, with the key, and hide in the bower until all this is overpast. Then slip down and take shelter with the miller."

"And leave you here!" he said.

"No, no, I will come with you."

"You could not leap down from this window, or climb by the vine," he objected.

"Oh, yes, yes! I could," she urged, blushing to recollect how well she knew the roadway up and down the vine.

"But, Rosalie," he said slowly, "even if you come with me, I could not leave *her* behind, and we could not carry her"—he pointed to the Musical Skeleton.

"Oh!" cried the girl, stung anew by his

devotion, "what of that thing? You made it, could you not make another? Hide it in your coffer."

"She is much too large."

"In your bed—under cloths upon the floor—in one of the empty rooms! Let us drag it up the stairs! Come, Narcisse, come! I will take its head, and you shall take its feet."

"No," he replied, "I cannot. She is part of my life. I should never make an image like that again. Where she is, I must stay; you do not understand. I have done nothing wrong. There is not a word of sorcery in all my head. I can prove my innocence. If I ran away, how could I ever come back again? After being accused, and not clearing myself, could I ever see Bar again, or you, or—or—her?" He turned from his sweetheart to touch the wrist of the skeleton.

Rosalie left him, and rushed to the window overlooking the street. The crowd was growing

more excited, and was shouting. The sacristan, like a madman, was rushing hither and thither, brandishing his tongs. When the girl appeared, leaning out upon the balustrade, the shouting ceased.

"Rosalie! Rosalie Mercillat!" one or two voices called out.

"Come forth from that accursed house," shrieked the sacristan. "Satan is there. You will be carried off upon his shoulders, through the window. What is that sorcerer's music? If that is the hymn before the Black Mass, beware, wretched girl, that you be not scorched into a coal."

"What is that music?" shouted two or three men in the crowd. Rosalie was so well known, and was so generally supposed to have denounced her companion, that the public, though amazed, were not exactly scandalised to find her in the house.

"That is Master Narcisse playing the flute," she said, "as you all have heard him do dozens

of times in his workshop below the church," she continued.

"And the other music, that which accompanies him, Rosalie?"

"That is the viol of Beelzebub, steeped in the blood of he-goats, stringed with the hair of women who have cursed God," yelled the sacristan, waving his nauseous smoking coal under the window.

"Fool, that is a zither! Did you never hear a zither?" But, as a matter of fact, that being a southern instrument, very few people in the town were familiar with the sound of it.

"Who is playing that—that—whatever it is you call it? Tell us who is playing it, since Master Narcisse is blowing the flute.

"No zither," squeaked the sacristan; "the sackbut of Satan, and he plays it with strokes of his tail. Come out of this house, Lucifer, I conjure thee!"

"Who is the other player?" shouted two or three persons in the crowd.

Rosalie leaned over the bar, and quietly stroked threads of hair back from her eyes. She smiled before she spoke, a contemptuous smile. "I am the other player," she said. "And now go home, you noisy, idle people, before the Duke hears of it and sends his halberdiers to fetch you."

"It was you who was playing that zither, Rosalie?" said Bibianne, just under the window.

"Yes, I," replied her sister, rather shyly. She had not noticed Bibianne's presence till that moment.

"You cannot play two notes on any instrument in the world, you, Rosalie!"

Narcisse appeared at the window, behind the girl, and she made way for him to stand beside her. He looked even paler than usual, but quite calm and resolved. The crowd hissed and yelled at him.

"Go away, Rosalie," some shouted, "that we may pelt him."

Narcisse, too, urged her to go in; for all

answer she took his hand in hers and held it openly, gazing down at the crowd.

Waving his arm for silence, Narcisse waited till the shrieks and cat-calls were over. The people listened. In a few words, he told them that there was no sorcery in the case; that he had made an image with his own hands, since, as they all knew, it was his business to make images for the glory of God, and for the pleasure of the Duke and his other honourable patrons; that this figure was just now completed; and that it was so made that it played music of itself. He went on to say that as the sacristan seemed to be the leader of the mob, he might come up and inspect the figure for himself, and tell the rest of them about it.

Accordingly, Narcisse went down and unbolted the door; after a little hesitation, urged on by the others, the sacristan ventured in, and the door was rebolted. The sacristan was a grim and unsavoury creature, very thin and leathery, with eyes out of which all the colour seemed

to have been soaked. From the long habit of wandering about in the gloom of the church, he had become unaccustomed to strong daylight, and peered and winked like an owl in the sunshine. He came up sulkily and circumspectly after Narcisse, with a face committed to nothing. This man was famous for his superstitious zeal and his hatred of the black magic. He was no lover of Narcisse, whose presence in the little workshop under St. Maze was a constant source of offence to him, since he wished for that Naboth's vineyard for the use of his own daughter's husband, who was a blacksmith. He was exceedingly cruel and credulous, and would have been constantly embroiling the town with his accusations if the priests had not kept him in some sort of check.

Narcisse could not but feel the absurdity of his own disappointment. He had planned to keep his skeleton closely within the bounds of distinguished society, to play it first in public

before the Duchess and her son, and only gradually to admit to his circle of auditors the wealthy burgesses and the nobles in the Rue des Ducs. And now, by a tiresome accident, the cause of which he could not divine, his earliest public performance had to be made for the benefit of this horrible scarecrow, who had no civil word for man or beast, and who was scarcely tolerated in the street. He did not speak to the sacristan on the stairs, and he silently motioned him to follow him into the room. Rosalie still stood near the window which overlooked the street. Narcisse had thrown a sheet over the main part of his skeleton, and he saw no need to disrobe her for the sake of the new visitor, who kept close to the door, furtively crossing himself, in visible perturbation. Narcisse removed the cloth from the hands and zither, and was about to begin.

"Saint Ignatius and Saint Hippolytus, preserve me! holy saints of my dedication, hold me in your hands!" murmured the sacristan; and then,

in a snappish tone of voice, to Narcisse, "What is under that sheet? Unveil! disrobe! expose!"

Narcisse bit his lip with annoyance at being ordered, in his own house, by such a loathsome being, to carry out what seemed a profanation of his Maiden. Rosalie, at her window, stamped with rage. But the sacristan, after his kind, represented the town itself, the superstitious town wakened to suspicion and demanding a full disclosure. The sacristan had been invited in as an ambassador, and must receive the honours and privileges of an envoy. Narcisse removed the sheet, and exposed the delicate white bones of sycamore-wood. He set the apparatus in order, and, turning his back to the sacristan, began his duet with the skeleton. Rosalie, however, kept her eye on the visitor, and watched with astonishment and alarm the horror that grew upon his features. When he perceived that the figure was a skeleton, he started and crossed himself hurriedly, but when he further saw the fluttering movement in the bosom, the

unfamiliar instrument held in the bony arms, the white fingers moving in cadence, his whole frame was convulsed with agitation, and he grew sickly pale, steadying himself with his hand against the post of the door.

Rosalie, seeing this effect upon their unwelcome and unlovely guest, would have stopped Narcisse, but it was too late. At the earliest shrill note of the flute between the lips of Narcisse, the slender finger-ends of the skeleton touched the strings of the zither in absolute unison, and the tune began. Beads of anguish stood on the brows of the sacristan, he trembled so exceedingly that he could scarcely stand, and, before a single bar was concluded, feeling his way with his hands like a blind man, he had tottered from the room, and was heard rolling, rather than running, down the resounding staircase. He had scarcely power to open the door, but, after a long fumbling, he flung himself at last into the street.

The situation was now very serious. Narcisse's first act was to dart downstairs, and

push back the heavy iron bolt. Outside, the crowd was gathering close about the sacristan, who had recovered all his volubility, and who, with arms thrown up to heaven and appeals to all his patron saints, was giving an excited and a highly embroidered account of the scene he had just survived. For a while, absorbed in the relation of this old man, the crowd ceased from all their noises. Neither Narcisse nor Rosalie, hidden in the embrasure of the window, could hear what he said, but presently they perceived that he had finished his story and was urging his audience on to action. Several of the youths rushed to the door, but were foiled by finding it barred. Wooden shutters, nailed across the lower windows of the house, made those entrances also impossible, and a regular siege began. As stones and rubbish were flung at the upper window, Narcisse quickly closed the lattices and barred them. The raging crowd, now perfectly crazed with superstition and alarm, was, at all events for a few moments, kept at bay.

When Narcisse turned from the street, Rosalie had disappeared. He flew to the other window, and saw her deftly descending the great vine, which swang and started with her weight, but made a perfectly safe ladder. Arriving noiselessly on a bed of herbs, she paused and looked up. His pale face bent towards her, and she made a final dumb appeal to him to fly with her. She held the key of the physic garden in her hand, and she motioned to him to join her. But it was impossible to induce him to leave his image, and, besides, he could not have escaped unseen. He gesticulated to her to hide herself in the bower, not to attempt to leave the garden, and, to satisfy him, she pretended to do so, while he turned back into the room. But in reality she stole to the gate as noiselessly as possible, turned the key in the lock, and stood in the archway. The crowd's attention was concentrated in thundering upon the stout door of Narcisse's house, and, without being seen, Rosalie darted out of the

court, and round a corner. Narcisse might have escaped, after all, she reflected.

Meanwhile, beleaguered in his castle, Narcisse was alone with his White Maiden. He lost none of his serenity at this fatal moment. In a corner of the room lay the armour which Rosalie had brought, and had thrown upon the floor. The crowd was yelling and hammering in the street below, the old empty house throbbing with the violence of the shocks. Narcisse stripped off his doublet, and the close jerkin underneath it; then he carefully fitted the chain-mail over his shirt and put the doublet on again, flinging the jerkin on to his bed. The sleeves were cumbersome, and he could not pull the arms of his tight doublet over them, so he plucked them off, and discarded them. The mail-shirt alone was discommoding enough to him.

Outside, the howling and the clattering continued. The sacristan was now supported by his son-in-law, the blacksmith, who had brought his hammer with him, and another man

had armed himself with a bar of iron. Several of the youths had bludgeons, and the rest shouted to keep up the others' courage. Blow upon blow fell on the old tough oak of the door. That was the smith's work, Narcisse was sure, from the steady and workmanlike sound of it. At last there was a horrid crash, a scream of splitting wood, and the door had partly given way. It was now possible to push a hand in and pull the bolt back, and after a little delay, caused by the fact that the violent blows had twisted the bolt, this was achieved, and the foremost members of the crowd, who were pressing upon the door, were precipitated forwards by its opening inward.

But, having accomplished their purpose, the invaders were in no haste to make use of their victory. They gathered on the ground-floor, and Narcisse could hear them, suddenly subdued in spirits, discuss what should next be attempted. The sacristan, in a high moaning whisper, proposed this course and the other, but

they all were conscious that in forcing their way with violence into a man's house, they had acted with more zeal than wisdom. Nothing but the detention of an indubitable wizard would justify such a tampering with the rights of property, and how were they, having gone so far, to go further and prove satanic possession? Into those who, scared to find themselves in this quandary, were proposing to slink home again, the sacristan was pouring courage by describing the horrors of the scene upstairs, yet instead of this being an incentive, it was rather a deterrent. At last, five or six men—with the hideous old sacristan, armed with a drawn knife, at their head—ventured, in a compact and silent phalanx, up the stairs.

Narcisse heard them coming and threw his body against the door of the room, bringing the onset to a temporary pause. Outside the door the half-dozen were breathing heavily; inside it one desperate man, with the moisture beaded on his pale forehead, and his lips tightly pressed

together, stood with his strong shoulder forming a buttress of vain defence. The invaders summoned their spirits to their help again, and rushed upon the door. Narcisse, flung down on the ground at full-length, made the rafters ring with the shock of his weight, while the sacristan, at the head of the little army, burst in confusion into the middle of the room.

A scene of the most senseless riot then ensued. Stricken with panic, and no longer recognising one another in their horrible dread of the satanic forces supposed to be in action in this place, the invaders fell upon one another with shrieks and groans, giving Narcisse time to roll to the wall and recover himself. The sacristan, with a yell of fury, rushed at him, holding his knife ready to stab. He struck a violent blow directed at the heart of Narcisse, whose doublet was ripped open with a hissing noise, but the weapon turned on the chain-mail, and left the old man in the power of Narcisse. Taking him by the ribs in the grip of his two strong hands, the

sculptor lifted his assailant and flung him to the opposite corner of the room. The sacristan, descending on his flank and elbow, stretched his length on the floor, and bumped his bald head against the wall. The trampling and struggling had, by this time, raised a dust so thick that it half concealed the combatants from one another. The sacristan coughed as though his end were near, until his son-in-law, with the help of a lad, lifted him on to his feet again and shook him into life.

Dazed still and sore with his fall, Narcisse looked round at the rest of the attacking party. He saw that they had discovered the Musical Skeleton.

"Here is the devil's dam!" said one; "here is the wickedness the beast hath cut out by Satan's aid!"

"Say rather," cried another, "the shameful thing Beelzebub has brought out of hell to seal his pact in blood. Take care! Its arm moved! It is, without doubt, Satan himself."

The poor Musical Skeleton, fair and glossy in its bones of sycamore-wood, had dropped one of its arms to its side, the ruffian who tore off its covering having touched a spring unwittingly. The men all darted back and observed it. It stood there, waiting patiently for its master, with its other hand still bent over the chords of the zither. The sacristan at this moment rushed forward, and commanded the lads to drag the unholy thing out, and into the street, but none of them was willing to touch it again. In a blind fury, the old man made a rush at it, and plucked the hand of the skeleton. This gave to the mechanism the start which it required, and the white fingers began to descend rhythmically on the strings, producing the familiar tune in stately cadence. Yelling with terror, the men flung themselves to the further extremity of the room, several of them falling on their knees, and crossing themselves with fervour. Narcisse advanced to his beloved and outraged creation. Pressing the spring which regulated the music,

he stopped the tune, and threw the cloths again over the skeleton. He then turned and faced the cowardly group of his assailants.

The concealment of the skeleton and the cessation of the music restored to the invaders their courage. If Narcisse had been willing to allow the docile figure to continue the tune, in open day, it would have been long before those trembling lads and their fanatical leader would have called up heart enough to come forward. But the sculptor preferred depriving himself of protection to witnessing and permitting the degradation of his White Maiden. He felt a burning anger at the notion of his sacred and divine figure being made a spectacle for the passions of a handful of brutes and clowns. He declined her protection. It was for him to guard her, not for her to bewitch these swine into abandoning him. He stood by the side of his draped companion, and with a howl of rage the sacristan and his lads leaped upon her and upon him. Narcisse struck out gallantly to right

and left, but they overpowered him, and dragged him down into the street, the poor skeleton, huddled in its sheet, being drawn ignominiously in a clattering bundle from stair to stair behind him.

Rosalie, in escaping, had fled towards the castle, and, happening to meet the trumpeter, had told him, in a few words, the position of events. Consequently, by the time that the unequal struggle was completed, and Narcisse and the skeleton were captured, the trumpeter, with a handful of halberdiers, was at the door. The soldiers roughly hustled the sacristan and his man aside, and took Narcisse under their protection. In vain, however, did the trumpeter urge that his friend should be restored to his house, and permitted to bring his suit against the impudent destroyers of his peace. The halberdiers had heard the story of the witchcraft, and realised only too clearly the awful nature of the accusation. Their captain raised Narcisse to his feet, and civilly enough corrected the disorder

of his clothing, but he would not allow him to re-enter his house. He left two of his men to guard the deserted room, secured the skeleton in a sack, and then marched the sculptor, in company with his figure, off to the town jail, in the name of the sovereign Duke.

VII

ON the third day afterwards a miserable morning broke in flying sheets of rain. The soft moisture gathered on the rusty bars of the cold den in which Narcisse was imprisoned, and, gathering in little oozy pools, dropped inwards, plap, plap, plap. He wakened, stiff with dampness, and from his bed of reeds watched the smoke-like puffs of rain flying across the narrow gridiron of his window. Poor Narcisse! It was a new thing to him to suffer thus. The vague sense of anxiety and discomfort was presently transformed into a positive feeling of rage and despair—rage against the fools and bigots who had accused him of the most shameful of offences, who had broken down the barrier

of artistic satisfaction, who had outraged his hearth and his work; despair of ever regaining the position so suddenly lost, of making himself intelligible to a people so savage and so densely prejudiced, of restoring to his soul that placidity which it needed for its labours. He knew not, except from the shrieks of the crowd, of what he was accused. He had been dragged away and thrown into prison, without further communication with the world. His window looked out upon a bye-street, and it would not be impossible for a person outside to communicate with him, deep as his cell was, since the pavement was on a much higher level than the floor. No one had come, however, except to throw a little coarse food into the cell. Not even a boy had given him the distraction of a curious glance. He was forgotten.

At this moment, in the grey light, a sort of shadow seemed to cross his bars, and in another instant a face and shoulders, closely muffled up, appeared at the window, peering in, but saying

nothing. Narcisse sat up, and was silent also, waiting to see if this was friend or foe.

"Master Gerbillard!" said the hooded figure dubiously.

"Ah, trumpeter, it is you!" cried the prisoner in a paroxysm of joy.

But as he rose to greet him, the apparition at the window vanished. There was a silence once more, and the grey puffs of rain went wandering by. Suddenly the hooded face returned.

"Hush!" it said, "I must not be seen talking here. I have been searching for you since daybreak: all that I could discover was that your cell was on the street somewhere. It was by chance at last that I found you."

"How much longer am I to be here?" asked Narcisse.

"You will be tried to-day. The priests have been seeking to get you transferred to their custody. Perhaps it would be better for you in their hands. But it would be slower. All

I know is, the parliament will not let you go, and will try you this forenoon."

It was a relief. Better a sharp end, than many more days of this solitude and darkness, this wet and musty cell, with its foul corners and its horrible inhabitants. He looked up again to ask the trumpeter another question, but he had gone. Narcisse settled down once more, brooding, but now less utterly miserable, on his reed-bed. A few minutes passed and the apparition was at the bars again, with bread and meat, and a small flask of wine; this last was cracked as it passed through, and added a red tributary to the cold stream from the window. The prisoner amused himself with what was left, and found several draughts of the wine in broken fragments of the bottle.

"Where is Rosalie?" he said, his mouth full of meat, and his veins already glowing with a sprightlier flood. But the trumpeter was gone.

Three hours later, marching between halber-

diers through the dense rain, Narcisse trudged up the shining wet Place to the court of the parliament. A few people gathered to see him go by; the Mercillats were at their door, all save Rosalie. The gunsmith turned away, shamefaced, as the soldiers passed, but Bibianne, with her bold eyes and cheeks, stood out in the rain on tip-toe to see the prisoner go by. Narcisse could but turn a look of anger on her, and she rewarded him by putting out her tongue. His latest impression of the town into which three years before, a stranger, he had come to claim hospitality, was this childish figure of Bibianne, with black hair untied, hands on hips, gibbering at him with the gesture which was at once an outrage and a curse.

He let his head sink on his breast, and through the soaking rain, splashing up the mud as they went, they ascended the street to the doors of the parliament court. Once there, the degree in which he had suddenly sunken in popular esteem was patent to him at once. Men were passing

in and out who had never crossed in front of his booth without a courteous greeting. To-day they took no notice of him, or, for very shame of their incivility, nodded and gave him a wide berth. Inside the doors there was a lawyer who owed Narcisse money for work done long ago in his new house in the Rue des Ducs, and the sculptor, rejoicing to see there one on whom he had a claim, called out to him. The lawyer came slowly, awkwardly, conscious that all eyes were upon him, but when Narcisse explained that he desired him to undertake his defence, he roughly refused.

"The presumption of sorcery," he said, "is in itself enough to exclude you from the protection of the law. I cannot help you;" and he passed away into the court.

A sort of panic had taken the town. All business was to be put aside until this terrible case had been settled. Those who had accompanied the sacristan into the house of Narcisse had circulated everywhere an account of what

they had seen, or thought they saw. Embroidered with abominable exaggerations, these narratives had sufficed to send the whole town mad with apprehension. The devil, with his hoof and claw, had closed the door against the invaders, and it was not until the sacristan had sprinkled holy water on the lock that it had given way. Inside the room a most horrible skeleton had been found, dancing with Narcisse Gerbillard, and through the ribs of it the devil had been seen, in the guise of a black monkey, carrying a heathenish instrument, and playing upon it with his paws. When Narcisse had caught up the sacristan, which he did with superhuman power, his fingers had singed the old man's clothes wherever they touched them, and had filled the room with a smell of burning. When Narcisse was finally overpowered, the devil, changed into a large red bird, had been seen to fly out over the physic garden. Such were a few of the fables, founded on very simple facts, which were repeated in the taverns, and

afterwards sworn to in the courts. And there was the horrible instrument of satanic power, the wicked Musical Skeleton itself, safe in the guard-room of the court, to witness whether all these credible housebreakers were telling the truth or no.

All this and more had been sworn to by witnesses in court. On Saturday and Sunday, the throng had been so dense that the judge was with difficulty conducted through the people up to his seat. The boy who thought he had seen Narcisse crawl down the steeple of St. Maze on all-fours like a lizard, was almost certain of that experience on Saturday, and on Sunday, at his own earnest request, was brought back into court to swear to it. The dwellers in the gaunt, grey houses whose narrow windows looked down upon the physic garden, gave evidence that often, in the dusk of the evening, they had seen Narcisse walking with the devil between the beds of thyme and basil. This testimony was weakened at first by the explanation of

those who knew that Rosalie was wont to stroll there under the wing of the mantle of Narcisse. But many of these neighbours, even when that was said, continued to assert that though this might explain much, it did not account for all.

Finally, Rosalie was examined, and this was the most captivating moment of the whole trial, in the sense of the general public. But, although she was wheedled and harangued, and though the judge himself undertook to browbeat her, very little of any importance was obtained from Rosalie. She insisted that she had never heard Narcisse blaspheme, and that he had certainly never tried to teach her to adore Satan. As to his creeping down the steeple like a lizard, she declared that she knew that boy well, and that he was a little liar. Finally, the judge asked her whether she had heard the Musical Skeleton play, and whether she could explain that. At this Rosalie, after having bravely endured the long cross-examination, broke down and was led out of court violently sobbing.

It was around the Musical Skeleton, in fact, that the really important evidence centred. The other stories were of no positive value, except as supporting the general thesis of sorcery. Even at Bar, in the middle of the sixteenth century, no decent citizen would be condemned because a wretched boy said that he had seen him crawl down a church tower, or because a parcel of gossips thought that he walked in a garden with the devil. But all this sensational testimony had its cumulative value when it supported a charge originally based on evidence so damning as that of a skeleton which had, at noonday, been seen and heard to play music though no one was touching it. The judge ordered the partial clearing of the court, it being very dangerous to expose these matters in the presence of unknown persons, who might be sorcerers themselves, and might confuse the course of justice. In the midst of a slender circle of gowned lawyers and servants of the court, the skeleton was dragged in to be examined.

It was well for Narcisse that he was spared the extreme mortification of seeing his precious creature maltreated. The poor white skeleton was hauled out of a sack, into which it had been hastily thrust. The delicate sycamore-wood was unprepared for such violence, and several joints of it were broken. The left arm was split across, and several of the tapering cylindrical fingers over which Narcisse had expended his most exquisite labour, were found to have been snapped off, and fell about the floor when the sack was turned inside out. One of the feet was half wrenched away from the basis, and, in dragging the poor figure over the stones, the nice parqueting of the skull had become disjointed, and a fracture yawned in it. Nevertheless, infinitely dejected in its air of patient suffering, comic and tragic at once, it was propped up against a tall chair facing the judge.

A heart of stone might have been moved to hysterical laughter and tears to see the miserable thing so pitiful, so ridiculous, so deserted. In

spite of all its injuries, the mechanical part of the invention remained on the whole intact, and after long and vain fumbling at the machinery, the right spring was at length touched by accident. The zither, held tightly between the breastbone of the figure and its right wrist, had not been dislodged, and the fingers descended upon such of the strings as were not broken. A plaintive discord rose in the silence of the court-room, as pathetic and as blood-curdling as the broken singing of an idiot—a meaningless noise, piercing even to the division of the bones and marrow. Without any notion of sorcery, it would have been poignant to listen to that crazy music; with the notion that it was Satan in person who was vivifying the strange white mystery, it was terrible enough to make one mad. The judge sank back in his chair, and covered his eyes with one hand while he motioned with the other that the horrible thing should be destroyed. Conquering their extreme terror and revulsion, two or three of the servants thrust the ruined

skeleton back into its sack. In doing so, the fingers of its right hand caught in the folds of the sacking, and the strain broke the central spring of the machinery. There was one loud ringing note from the corner where the sack was ignominiously thrown, and the heart of the Musical Skeleton was broken.

The court had by this time made up its mind. It was expressly laid down in the code that a magician could be condemned on conjectures and presumptions alone. It was not needful to go further, and indeed the behaviour of the skeleton had offered a great deal more than mere presumption. Still, for form's sake and judicial decency, the prisoner himself should be examined. If he could be brought to confess, so much the more salutary the example. An order was issued that the accused man should be confronted with the judge alone, the clerk being concealed behind a screen to take down the questions and replies. The judge, a harsh old pedant, stuffed like an intellectual ortolan with useless and misleading

knowledge, yet underneath it all as superstitious as the most ignorant peasant of the Barrois, drew the folds of his rich cloak of vair more closely about him, as the dreadful wizard was introduced. In a manuscript note-book at his side were jotted down headings of procedure in cases of sorcery, and the judge glanced at these as he directed his inquiry. His code told him to attend sharply to the demeanour of the accused, to observe whether he shed tears, whether he looked upon the ground, whether he shuddered, whether he blasphemed.

None of these indications were able to help him in the case of the prisoner, Narcisse Gerbillard. The poor sculptor was weary even to apathy; his hair, in which he took so much pride, was matted and unkempt; his cheeks, always pale, were almost green with cold and privation; and his serene eyes had lost their limpid self-possession. When the judge stormed at him and scolded him, however, he neither wept nor hung his head. He endeavoured to

show a courteous attention, but his ideas were growing confused, and he hardly knew what the grotesque old lawyer was saying. He gazed at the window, at the broad delicious light, the soft blue sky that had now succeeded the rain, and as he looked the blue was reflected once more in his bloodshot eyes. He felt like some winged creature that has been stunned within a room; if he could only collect his thoughts, it seemed to him that he could lift his arms and soar out of that distressful place into the light. Alas! that was, of all adventures, the one most frequently laid to the charge of sorcerers. Could it be that he was really in Satan's service, after all, without knowing it? He shuddered slightly, pulled himself together, and gave a closer attention to the gesticulations of the old man upon the daïs.

The shudder had not escaped the notice of the judge, and he redoubled his efforts. Shame alone, he assured Narcisse, prevented the sorcerer from making a full avowal. But no

other person was now present to embarrass him ; let him make a clear breast of the matter. When had he first received the visits of the devil ? Had he originally repulsed them, and had he been over-persuaded ? By what promises of reward, by what aid given at a moment of despair, had he been drawn into the snare of the Evil One ? In his prison Narcisse had been subjected to the outrageous insult of an enforced examination of his body by the judge's surgeon, who searched him narrowly for signs of diabolic possession, the scars of red-hot needles, the peculiar marks which were supposed to follow from the abhorred touch. As a matter of fact the surgeon had examined the young and healthy frame of Narcisse without finding anything, even a birth-stain, which could be interpreted as being a mark of the devil. In the criminal practice of the lawyers of that age, however, all means were justified by a godly end, and the judge, finding the prisoner getting obdurate, thought to force him into confession by telling him that the

surgeon had found all that was necessary for his condemnation—namely, the little blue moon-shaped scar of Satan's claw-mark. Under this mode of terrorising, Narcisse began to grow nerveless and apathetic. His brain could not cope with these suggestions. He did not know what the judge meant.

But when his tormentor passed from this order of ideas, which, as he perceived, were leading him towards no valuable results, and began to speak of the Musical Skeleton, a sudden change came over the prisoner's demeanour. Narcisse, who had hitherto been desultory in his replies and vacant in his expression, wandering about wearily and vaguely in uncertainty and bewilderment, woke up with a sudden start. He realised, as one sees clearly under a starlit sky when all has seemed to the dazed eyesight a mere wilderness of obscurity, what the real meaning of this dreadful inquiry was. He understood at last that his very existence was at stake, and he pulled his spirits together to fight

for his life. He became voluble, and almost eloquent, in explaining the mechanism of the skeleton to the impassive judge, who seemed to shrink slowly in bulk as he crouched before him in his chair of state. Narcisse exhausted his ingenuity of language, enforced his southern tongue to an extreme simplicity and reserve, in describing with what innocent rivalry of his master, Ligier Richier, he had determined to make this figure, how long he had been occupied in carving it out of pieces of white wood, what had led him to select sycamore instead of any other timber, and what difficulties he had met with in his adventure. He dwelt with adroitness on the mechanical side of the whole matter, carefully eschewing all figurative reference to the skeleton as a living being, cunningly insisting on the fact that he had chosen certain motives and rejected others, for reasons wholly connected with his convenience as a workman.

At last he stopped abruptly, or he saw that he was gaining nothing by his repetitions. A

cold stream passed through his veins, as though they had been stricken by the frost of the unyielding eyes that gazed on him, eyes in which intelligence, sympathy, rectitude were alike subordinated to superstitious horror. The judge waited till Narcisse was silent, and then, summoning the warders, bid them take the prisoner back to his cell. When Narcisse had disappeared, the judge turned to the clerk who had been concealed at his side, and bid him write in the judicial record these words:

"Found guilty of black magic. The same day, strangled and burned."

No thought of hope, no glimmer of relief, lightened the innocent and unhappy mechanic back to his prison. What his sentence was he did not know, nor was he aware that the Duke, anxious, if it were possible without scandal, to save the life of a creditable craftsman, had sought in vain to protect him. But he gathered accurately enough what was the general tendency of

the trial, and the eyes of the judge left him no illusion regarding his fate.

During these three dreadful days Rosalie had kept herself well informed of all that had been going on. Across her ill-trained mind strange successive tempests of passion had been raging. She could but recollect the extreme terror with which she had herself listened to the Musical Skeleton, and in spite of the explanation of its structure which Narcisse had given to her, the conviction that there was something supernatural and satanic about the figure would force itself in upon her thoughts. At these moments, in the fevered tension of her nerves, she was ready to wish that she had never seen Narcisse. And then, through these tumultuous imaginations, would rise into her spiritual view the vision of those lucid eyes, that broad and serene forehead, that beautiful mouth with the fair lines round it, the mouth that could not have made any foul pact with Satan. So driven up and down, like a straw in an eddy, by revolving currents of fear

and love and shame, she became so weary in her soul that she could almost have killed herself, to be at rest. If she could have been sure of anything, sure that she had been right in her anger, sure that her anger had not directly and singly led to these terrific results, sure that Narcisse was a sorcerer, sure that he was not—she could have suffered firmly, based on that conviction. But she was sure of nothing, and she tossed in an agony of indecision.

She heard, however, of his conviction, for she was waiting near the door. She saw her bruised and shaken lover, degraded by three days of prison—dirty, dishevelled and ragged, yet still dignified in the serenity of his patience—led back to his cell by the halberdiers, and she was told that he had but three hours more to live. She was conscious of a cowardly wish that she did not know this fact. It was terrible, the idea of the necessity of a last meeting with him, and yet to fail in this supreme duty also was impossible. By her rough code of honour, it would

have been an act unpardonably shameful to have let him die without a word of farewell. She longed and yet feared to see him. She wished that he could suddenly pass out of the world, and her duty be dispensed with; she dreaded to discover that his cell had been changed, and at the same moment hoped that it had been, and that she would not succeed in finding him. The trumpeter had told her into what court the blind barred window of the prison opened. She waited till his warders must certainly have turned the key upon him, and then she warily betook herself to that quarter of the town. As she turned up the street, she dreaded to find a crowd of idlers peering down through the bars. She held herself back for a moment, and a tumultuous longing seized her to be with Narcisse once more alone. She turned the corner, and her heart leaped to her mouth, for the street was empty. Yet she could scarcely drag her feet to the window.

She clung to the bars, and looked in. Her

eyes, accustomed to the light outside, saw nothing but a vague grey gloom. "Narcisse!" she whispered. There was a rustle of straw, and out of the greyness there appeared the white oval of her lover's face, peering up at her with blinking eyes. He said nothing, and she said nothing; an intolerable burden seemed to weigh upon the tongue of each, which neither had the power to throw off. However, time was short, and something must be spoken.

"Can I do anything for you, Narcisse?" she asked.

"No," he said; "no, you can do nothing."

She could not bring herself to ask for his forgiveness, because that would have been to confess her fault. Yet she longed to possess his pardon, and she would filch it from him against his will.

"Why are you angry with me?" she asked.

"Angry, child?" he repeated. "How could I be angry with you?" And they were silent again.

"Is my booth broken up yet?" he asked at last.

"The house by the physic garden is stripped of everything," she answered, "but they have not yet thought of opening the booth. It stands there locked up. The sacristan was outside this morning, tapping the shutters with his knuckles."

"His daughter's husband can have it now," said Narcisse. "But here is the key of it. Would you like to give it to the sacristan, Rosalie?"

"No," she said vehemently, "I would gladly crack his skull with it."

"Take the key, child;" and he stretched up on tip-toe till she secured it. "On the ledge under the table where I sat, if you go in at night and feel with your hand, you will find the wax sketch I made of the trumpeter's head. If you are not afraid to do that, get it out and give it to him. He liked it."

Neither of them could approach the subject

uppermost in their minds. At length Narcisse said: "Do you know all?"

"All what?" she asked evasively.

"All about me."

"Yes, I suppose so," she said; "is there anything you do not know?"

"It is to be, is it not, Rosalie?"

"Yes, Narcisse, it is to be."

"When?" he asked.

"To-day."

There was a long pause, during which the white face seemed to grow very old and wasted, and the hollow eyes to be gazing past and through Rosalie into the blank sky.

"Do you believe it?" he said.

"Believe what?"

"That I am a—that this accursed thing is true?"

"No!" she said, "I do not believe it. But is it not partly true? True without your knowing it? Oh, Narcisse!" she ran on in a terrified whisper, "cannot a man be possessed

by Satan without his wishing to be? Cannot the devil have been in your fingers though he was not in your heart?"

"Yes," he said, "I suppose so. As I have lain here night after night pondering it all, I have come to think that I may have been—what they say I am. But, oh! Rosalie, I never knew it, never would have lent myself to it. If I am—that, it is best that I should die. Yet, after I think such thoughts, here in my loneliness, I remember the figure that I made out of the sycamore-wood. Rosalie, it was no wizard that carved the White Maiden. It was a workman who knew his craft, who was trained by the great Ligier Richier. What was it that the old Earl down in Italy said—*Qualis artifex pereo!* The devil may do his worst and his best, he cannot make a man a better craftsman than his fellows. Rosalie, I have one request to you before I die. By bribe or by trick, buy or steal away the sack that holds the Musical Skeleton?"

"Yes!" she said falteringly, "I will."

"And send a trusty man with it over the hills to Master Richier in his house at St. Mihiel, and tell him my story. He will know and understand, and he will put up my maiden in a chamber of his palace, and honour her, and speak well of his dead pupil at last. Will you, Rosalie?" he said eagerly.

"Yes!" she answered, almost inaudibly.

"Lean very close to the bars that I may try to touch your mouth with my fingers," he said.

She pressed her lips as far as she could through the perpendicular bars, but his fingers could not quite reach her. She was glad inwardly, for though she loved the man, she did not wish the sorcerer to touch her.

"Ah! well," he said, "no matter. You will save the Musical Skeleton, at least, as you have said? Swear it, Rosalie, that I may have comfort in my death!"

The tears rained down her cheeks in a tempest. She could scarcely speak.

"Good-bye, Narcisse, good-bye!"

"Ah! but swear first, dear child. Swear that you will save my White Maiden, and send her away to St. Mihiel."

"Oh! Narcisse," she blurted out, "I cannot. It has been broken up and burned."

The white face disappeared; the prisoner had sunken on his straw without a word. Rosalie, in a passion of distress, shook the bars and called on him by name, over and over again. There was no answer, but presently the loud grating of the lock told her that the warder was opening the cell. She fled from the window, blind with terror and sorrow, and sought to gain her house. But a procession filled the Rue Chavée. It was Monday evening once more, and up the steep and narrow street the dowager Duchess was performing her weekly pilgrimage, her tall figure shrouded in the long and flowing robes of black, on which were embroidered white death's-heads and hearts pierced through by arrows. The Ducal

chamberlain strode beside her, the indifferent pages followed, as she passed on her self-inflicted mission to weep and pray at the tomb of her husband. At length the portals of St. Maze were flung open, the procession was received within the church, and the street once more left desolate.

Rosalie paused for a moment to see whether her father's doorway was empty, and then disappeared within it.

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