



adelma von vay



Caroline Corner

## A PSYCHOLOGICAL REMINISCENCE

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Prispevki k odkrivanju zgodovine ezoteričnih tradicij - v izvorniku

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In the winter of 18 —, the old-fashioned town of L——, in —— shire was aroused from its lethargic slumbers. The memorable and auspicious occasion was that of a subscription fund and ball in aid of the distressed agriculturalists of the county. My uncle (to whose guardianship I was entrusted), belonging to one of the best families of the place, was elected treasurer of the charitable scheme, and in that capacity received and rendered an account of the munificent donations to the satisfaction of all, which is saying no little in his favour, for people who have least to think about are by no means the most easy to please.

Everything was arranged and carried out *pro forma*. The Town Hall was agreed upon as most befitting; an efficient band was engaged from the metropolis; the *crème de la crème* for once descended the social ladder to mix amongst those who could not boast of so lengthened a line of ancestry; the illustrious scion of a noble house permitted his name to appear as president, in extra large type, upon the numerous announcements of the forthcoming event; and the day preceding was dedicated to decorating with floral and tasteful ornaments, the principal rooms of the ancient Elizabethan building.

Finally all was in readiness. The gala day arrived, and the evening drew nigh. The young ladies had for the past fortnight talked of nothing else; indeed, they had worked themselves up into a frenzy at the glad anticipation, for their lives were no whirligig of fashion, and a ball — such a ball as this — was an episode deserving of the attention and patronage it received.

To say that I was an exception to the rule would be incorrect. To me the idea was fraught with inexpressible delight. It would be my first taste of gaiety. Doubtless the charm lay in the novelty, for never since has anything of the kind made such an impression upon me as did that ball.

At nine o'clock precisely the brougham awaited to convey my aunt — a maiden lady arrayed in rich black satin brocade an yellowed with age — and myself, a vision of tulle and flowers, — at that time a tall, slim girl of eighteen, with dark eyes and wealth of bronzen hair which had already gained for me many admirers, — to the scene of mirth and brilliancy.

Even at this remote period I can distinctly remember the sensation that took possession of my susceptible organism as I entered the ball-room with my *chaperone*. Familiar faces met my enraptured vision, turn which side I might. Certain effects which I had intended especially to remark, details which I had deemed momentous, impressions which would, under ordinary conditions, have been striking, were now neglected, forgotten, unobserved. Everything swam in an ocean of light, or whirled in a maze of colour. The band struck up — a first-rate military band, such as I had never heard before — and, strange to relate, involuntarily I shrank, and would fain have stolen into some out-of-the-way corner to sit alone.

Was this to be the termination of my dreams by night and day for weeks, and if so, would the realisation equal the idealistic conception? I believe a sigh escaped my breast at this moment, and in my countenance there must have been portrayed an expression of my inward state, that communion with self which brings sweet sadness along with it. My reverie was brought to an abrupt conclusion by a voice falling upon my ear to the following effect: —

“Have you no word of welcome, no smile of recognition even, for an old friend, Miss Courtney? I have waited in vain for a sign of recognition. Can you entirely forget old times, when I was a raw Etonian, and you — ahem!”

“Hugh! I — I was not aware of your arrival! When did you get home?”

I had recognised the voice immediately, if not the frank, good-looking face, and was rejoiced at the unexpected *rencontre*; so put forth my hand with undisguised pleasure, and, the memory of those “old times” full upon me, addressed him familiarly, as I had been accustomed to do. This seemed to reinstate the young gentleman in the position he had held prior to his leaving England on a tour in foreign lands. When he spoke again, I could perceive he was the same genial-natured Hugh Mannersley he had ever been, so I willingly gave permission to his ignoring the rules of etiquette by pencilling his initials upon my programme for four dances. “But then he is an old friend, Aunty,” I afterwards half-apologetically explained.

The evening wore on. There was no scarcity of partners, neither were they wanting in those qualities that tend to charm the fair sex.

Nevertheless, from my own point of feeling, there was something lacking, which could not be supplied by those who courted my society, and vied with one another in lavishing attention.

It was amusing to indulge in a little, light flirtation, gratifying to listen to the diversity of flowery compliments, pleasant to “talk over old times” with Hugh Mannersley, and last, but not least, satisfactory to find oneself the acknowledged belle. And yet — there was a vacuum, a void in my breast that neither admiration, compliments, nor vanity could fill.

“Halloa! I do declare it’s Ned Westcott! Who in the world would have expected to see him here to-night? Such a hum-drum place as L—— too! Ho always was an inexplicable problem; do you know him, Lucie?”

It was Hugh who spoke. I answered evasively, though I know not why, contemning myself afterwards for the folly of allowing my voice to quiver when “there was neither occasion for. Nor reason in it.”

“Yes no — that is I — oh yes, I know Mr. Westcott — a little.”

“Humph! he is coming this way. I shall be *de trop* — I’ll go.” And with this, to my relief I admit, my “old friend” withdrew.

“Miss Courtney, I am late: not *too* late, I trust. Your programme? Ah, the fates are with me. You are at liberty for the next — the *valse* before supper — may I have the pleasure?”

Edric Westcott stood before me, pencil and card in hand. Hogging permission, he fastened his eyes — handsome eyes they were — upon me. I felt my cheek burn, my heart bound and flicker, and to me it was as though that empty space were filled at once.

This was what I had imagined the ball should be; this certainly did equal my loftiest anticipation, I was thinking, as I felt the support of a strong, firm arm around my waist preparatory to floating away in the dance.

The picture now opening to my retrospective view is one confused medley of beings, infinitely inferior to the one who alone stood out in super-human prominence. The entrancing strains of *Dinorah* again resound in my ears, thrilling with that same rapture, as I span the gap of years, and once more revel in this, my first love-dream.

The music ceases; the final chord dies away lengthened and slow; spite of myself, the chill again unnerves me, and I hearken to that voice, subdued, yet laden with tenderest solicitude, while a hand — *his* hand — is engaged in drawing my cloak inure closely around me.

“You shiver — you are not well — faint, perhaps; the *valse* has been too long for you. Fresh air will revive you best of anything. May I ho your escort, Miss Courtney?”

The next scene now revives in vivid distinctness before me; a young girl, ethereal in her attire, standing in the moonbeams, and listening to the old, old story — so old, so oft repented, useless were it to recapitulate the outpouring of love, passionate, supplicating, and earnest, I verily believe. Each word went direct to my newly-awakened self, and the wonder I then experienced that I could have lived — aye, and contentedly — thus undeveloped, unloved, recurs to me now though years have panned away.

Did I love him? The question was more than answered by the upturned glance, unflinching, all-encouraging.

Would I be his wife — his, for ever and aye? *Would I!*

At this juncture the wind rose high; a bleak blast came between us, and every likelihood of a sudden tempest was manifest. The moon hid behind a purple cloud; in the distance, approaching rumblings of thunder recalled me ruthlessly from my Elysian flight; and the lightning’s glare, vivid and forked, discovered to my sight the shadowy outline of a man wearing a long, loose cloak, with hood, which might serve as a disguise or protection from the storm. He brushed passed me so noiselessly I did not hear a footfall, yet the power that man, or spectral figure, possessed over me, was magical; it revolutionised my whole feelings, changed my entire nature; no longer did I entertain one sentiment of regard for him — Edric Westcott — who had nobly acknowledged his love, honourably besought to make me his bride. I could look up into his face now without even a faint reflection of the warm light that beamed from his hopeful and loving eyes.

With scarce a shade of pity I rejected his suit, declined his proffered love, and, most curious anomaly of all, dismissed him in the belief that his regard, his esteem, were unreciprocated, despised.

The remainder of the evening is a blank to me; all that I can recollect is Aunt Maria's persistent precautions against catching cold, and irritating dissertations on the degeneracy of the times compared with those of her day and generation, interspersed with frequent allusions to the ungallant conduct of Mr. Westcott in taking his abrupt departure without paying duo *devoirs* to the good lady herself. Still more amazed was Aunt Maria upon ascertaining next day that Edric Westcott had left the town for an indefinite term of absence.

“Well, I did entertain a high opinion of that young man, but I must say such behaviour as this surprises me. — He comes of a good stock, too; it's unreasonable, unmeaning. I wonder at you, Lucie, being utterly indifferent to the loss of so agreeable a friend; he certainly was an acquisition to L ——.”

Did I not wonder at myself also, though not after the same manner as Aunt Maria?

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Up to this time I had been blessed with a remarkably good constitution and temperament lively and sanguine. Now both were fated to undergo a thorough and perceptible transformation. Week after week found my cheek more pale, my countenance wan and smileless, my very gait constrained and not as it used to be. My kindly considerate aunt did not need the counsel of friends to perceive all this; no mother could have concerned herself more than did Aunt Mari. The medical practitioners of the place failing to effect any immediate good results, further advice was procured; yet notwithstanding half-an-hour's personal interview with one of the most eminent of the faculty, no satisfactory conclusion was arrived at. A vocabulary of hard names was exhausted, the fee pocketed, and the treatment I was then receiving pronounced to be correct.

Spring came, and my uncle — an old bachelor, consequently fussy and impatient — determined upon our going up to London for a week or two.

“You see yourself, Maria, physic's no earthly use — throw it to the dogs and let us try something else. Sight-seeing, change of air and society, that's what she wants, and if that doesn't do, why, I'll move heaven and earth to find something that does.

Never had uncle John been more determined; even Aunt Maris, who cherished an innate horror of the metropolis, dared not oppose; so, to London we all three went.

We had been in town about a week, when uncle John declared his intention of taking us to the theatre to see a popular and favourite drama, for which he had already secured a private box. Again Aunt Maria held up both mittened hands, protesting against such an infringement of her puritanical rules of propriety; again the well-meaning old lady was over-ruled by her equally well-meaning brother, and to the play we went.

The piece was melodramatic in the extreme; and I being young and impressionable, it seized upon my sensibility and excited my emotions.

The fourth and last act had little more than commenced when I turned my regards for one moment from the stage. Mechanically my eyes were raised, and a power I cannot define compelled my attention in the direction opposite. It was as though some magnetic force drew me in spite of my will and inclination. In less time than it takes to tell, the problem was solved, — to me, at least — for there, in the

box immediately *vis-à-vis* to our own, stood the figure of that same man, — long, loose coat, and hood shading the head and greater part of the face, just as I had seen him the night of the ball.

“That man! That man!” I remember to have cried hysterically. Then follows a blank. I suppose I must have fainted, for I can recollect no more until finding myself in bed; my aunt, good soul, piteously declaiming against pernicious actions which in the order of things must bring forth evil. Both she and her brother emphatically declared, in response to my constant inquiries, that no person whatever had occupied the aforesaid box on that particular evening, — “much less a person such as you describe, my dear. Why, little as I know, and less I desire to know, concerning such places, the idea seems preposterous, according to my way of thinking. What say you, brother John?”

“To be sure — to be sure, my dear. Say no more about it — it’s a mistake,” was the answer, knitting his brows, and placing one finger on his shaven lip to enjoin silence on that score; then *sotto voce* — “It’s a delusion; poor child, she is weak; it’ll pass away — only wait — you’ll see, Maria.”

I was supposed to be slumbering, but, irrespective of my unenviable condition, I could not forbear a smile: *I know it was no delusion.*

This shock to my nervous system (for, whatever it may have been, it was that) served to undo the trilling good which had resulted from my uncle’s plan. For a fortnight I was confined to my room, and at the end of that term I arose more like one from the grave than the sprightly young girl of six months previous.

I was so exceptional a patient that I baffled all medical skill. At times I would behave in so extraordinary a manner (as I learned many years subsequent) that my nearest relations could scarcely credit it was myself. It really appeared as though something obsessed me; some strange element held sway over my actions, rendering my individual will of no avail.

Sometimes I would present the appearance of one excited, and exclaim loudly in a foreign tongue; anger would flash from my eyes, and I would heap fury upon any individual who might come nigh. Then followed an expression of gloating greed, such as a miser might wear whilst reckoning his golden hoard, and I would lie back on my couch to hug my supposed possessions to my breast. Presently doubt would creep in, and the caution engendered was insufficient to banish anxiety, fear, alarm. Stealthily a hand was employed in search beneath the pillows, meanwhile a furtive, yet keen, glance was maintained on all sides, and at the slightest movement or sound my quickened perceptions were arrested. A gleam of satisfaction was ample to indicate that the search was profitable. My countenance presented a spectacle entirely at variance with what was natural or engaging: and to judge from appearances, it was as though I revelled in the perpetration of some foul deed — some atrocious crime. This would pass away, and dejection, despair, set in. A more pitiable sight ’twere difficult to conceive. A hopeless, abandoned wretch, I lay and groaned as in abject remorse: then upon my lips stern resolution fixed itself, and the next moment I lay cold and stiff as in death.

Many would have pronounced this insanity; not so my devoted uncle. There were lucid and rational intervals, and on these he grounded his hopes for my recovery.

The physicians themselves could not conscientiously pronounce me insane, for upon most subjects my intellect was far superior to that of the generality of my age and sex, — indeed, it had enlightened considerably during the period of my indisposition. Not caring, therefore, to acknowledge their dilem-

ma, they exchanged significant nods and undertones, and unanimously advised “complete change of air and scene,” strongly recommending the German spas.

Once more Aunt Maria was fated to combat with her violent prejudices. She had inherent abhorrence of foreigners, holding an implacable theory in reference of their absolute incomprehension of the word “honesty”. Once more dear old lady was overruled, and the next week found us *en route* to the Fatherland.

In the course of a few weeks I had so far recovered as to enjoy the fragrant and life-giving air of early summer at one of the German watering places.

The worst was over; the delusion (no-called) had left me, and all that now remained to bear testimony to my late sufferings was intense weakness. With care (which, Heaven knows, I had), nourishing food, and everything extant in the way of imparting strength, I was on the sure road to health and vitality, such as had formerly been mine.

It was my custom to “take the waters” every morning, and for this purpose a *chaise longue*, drawn by a pretty, dapple pony had been procured for my accommodation, comfort, and ease.

A very short time served to elicit the sympathy of the visitors in my behalf. Doubtless the picture I portrayed of a fair and fragile young creature was sufficient for this. However it was, I became an object of interest, and received tokens of kindness and regard from the great and nobly born, as well as devotion and respect from those less favoured.

One fine, sunny day I was feeling wonderfully better, so had prevailed upon my aunt to stay another half-hour in order to listen to the music in the *Kurhaus* gardens.

The weather was delightful; everything was looking so bright; the people so happy. I no longer was in pain, but felt the same light-hearted girl I had been of yore.

The military band broke out into a lively, inspiriting galop. I scarcely could withstand breaking from my bondage to indulge in a brisk and animated dance. Had it not been for Aunt Maria’s restraining influence, I believe I should have done something equally as desperate.

With this feeling full upon me, the music ceased; applause followed; then a pause; after which the band recommenced.

This time the strain was totally opposed. A few low-toned chords introduced the *aria*. It fell so sweetly upon the soft, warm air, that the attention of the entire audience was enlisted. To me it brought something more than a soothing charm. There was a spell in those gentle sounds that seized upon me as the reminiscence of a hidden, though never-to-be-forgotten dream.

Where had I heard that air before? What could it be? “Ah! *Dinorah, Dinorah.*” A murmur reached me from a passer-by.

The flood-gates of memory were thrust back, and the night of the L— ball, with its all-important incidents in singularly minute precision, flowed in with the tide of remembrance.

I hearkened again to the avowal of eternal love, experiencing that same delight — only intensified, it seemed to me — and raised my drooping lids to meet the gaze of those earnest, speaking eyes. Every trilling detail was recapitulated, and my heart beat in gladness, as, in fancy, I heard that momentous question put; the tone, the inflexion, synonymous with that of four long months ago.

At this juncture, my reverie was cut short by an unaccountable proceeding on the part of the pony. Something must have occurred to disturb its usual equanimity, for it started, reared, plunged, and the next instant took off at tremendous speed. I hold a very hazy reminiscence of the consternation that ensued. For my own part, I was incapable of being much concerned, and was only aware of the great danger which had threatened, after all was over.

The first sensation I experienced was similar to that occasioned by an electric shock. I opened wide my eyes, and took in a full survey of my preserver; then relapsed with a sigh into his powerful arms, as naturally as if we had been on intimate terms of relationship heretofore. It was not that I recognised his features, but his *influence* was so familiar; more than that, it was overpowering, and I fell into a sound sleep.

No serious nor permanent effects resulted from this catastrophe. Aunt Maria was the one who was physically most affected, for she in her devotedness, had clung to the *chaise* and been drawn along for some fifty yards. Fortunately Uncle John had been out of the way, or he, being, I repeat, a bachelor, fat and fussy, would have done something of the sort and suffered accordingly.

When tranquility was restored, and no alarming results were ascertained to have accrued the affair was discussed, and inquiries made for my deliverer. To obtain the name and certain particulars proved an easy matter. My uncle, it was decided, should call upon the gentleman. He did so, but finding him not at home, left his address-card with the desire of being permitted the opportunity of rendering due thanks and praise.

Count Adalbert readily accorded permission, courteously declining to see that he merited such gratitude, and conducting himself with the ease of a refined and large-hearted gentleman.

If Uncle John was pleased, Aunt Maria was trebly so, and when the handsome Hungarian pressed her hand (mittened, of course) to his lips, she was transported.

“People may talk about equality, but in my opinion there’s nothing like birth. Who could not perceive at a glance that our friend is a nobleman born?”

Irrespective of Uncle John’s concurring in this my aunt’s favourable opinion, I entertained grave doubts concerning our newly-found friend. I combated against these suspicious as groundless and unjust; nevertheless they persisted in annoying and render in me sorely perplexed.

The Count became a frequent visitor and often played the role of cavalier to myself and aunt when my uncle was unable or disinclined to accompany us, and, I must acknowledge, a more agreeable or entertaining escort we could not possibly have had.

Although when alone I was distressed strangely and unaccountably; upon the approach of the Hungarian this unpleasant and undefinable sensation left me, and in its stead a quiescent languor, agreeable and soothing, stole upon me. Immediately his hand came into contact with mine a thrill pervaded my system: my heart flickered, then became unnaturally calm; my pulse in like manner throbbed, then gradually became enfeebled, until the strength which had been mine was exhausted, overpowered, subdued. Sometimes during still hours I was awakened from a frightful nightmare, ever the same, and presented in strikingly realistic colours.

The scene was that of a gaming-saloon with its accessories and throng of eager, anxious faces, with eyes concentrated upon the green cloth. Two figures riveted my attention: one, in particular conveying

a species of familiarity and imprinting a deep and lasting impression upon my abnormal senses. A restlessness would come over me, and sleep be wooed in vain for the remainder of the night. The morrow's light brought little relief, but no sooner did my preserver pay his customary call than instant calm was accorded. So long as he remained by my side, doubts, irritability, and unrest ceased to trouble and perplex. The wide gulf of difference of opinion which necessarily two such opposite natures must have maintained, and which was so palpable to my understanding in his absence, was bridged over, so that the ideas of the one became ideas of both. Had I paused to analyse, I should have found that *his* was the dominating principle, and not mine. But I was satisfied, and content, when listening to his fluent conversation (invariably addressed to others, rarely to myself), to penetrate no deeper into the problem of why and wherefore.

Week after week glided by without anything worthy of remark occurring. We still lingered at the German Spa. Count Adalbert had become as one of ourselves. Uncle John could never sufficiently repay him for his gallant service, and Aunt Maria was more enthusiastic than ever on her pet theory of inherent nobility; everything was so pleasant we did not care to move on, as had been our intention.

One day it so happened that the count and myself were unavoidably left alone; unavoidably, not from any lack of confidence in or respect for him, but because I was deemed incompetent in my poor state of semi-convalescence to observe the rules of hospitality; consequently my uncle or aunt had always arranged to be present to take the burden upon themselves, leaving me a silent yet attentive listener.

After the conventional remarks and regards in answer to my excuses for the absence of my relatives, the Hungarian expressed his regrets and prepared to take his departure. My heart sank weightily at the prospect. A bright flush had suffused my cheek upon his entrance, my eyes glistened feverishly, and my pulse throbbed tumultuously.

A perceptible alteration took place in my countenance now. Useless was it to attempt to hide disappointment; my emotions vanquished my sounder judgment, and in words that were scarcely my own, I besought him to stay. He smiled placidly at in vehemence, and took a seat close by my couch. Then in his usual way he talked of common-place topics in such a manner that to me no melodrama could possibly have been more absorbing. His eyes never for an instant relinquishing their steady gaze, were so penetrating, I felt there was no secret in my inmost breast that was not shared by him; and yet I neither shrank nor wished to be delivered from this tribunal.

How it came about I know not, but so it was. From an insecure anchorage our fragile bark drifted on to the vast ocean of love; alas! not to glide smoothly on untroubled waters, but to founder and wreck upon a quicksand, the terrible issue of one fatal night.

Bending low, so that his warm breath fanned my hair, he reverentially acknowledged the tender feelings which he cherished for me. No outburst of passion: only a calm and undisturbed avowal. Then, laying his hand with tenderness, bordering on veneration, upon my arm, he looked deep into my wondering eyes, and asked me to be his bride.

A vision, dim and far distant, rose up before me — the scene, without the threshold of the old Town Hall of L——, but it vanished entirely when he bent still lower and pressed his lips upon my brow. That kiss appeared to me to seal my fate. No response was required; my glance was all-sufficient. He was satisfied, and I — ah! *I* was satisfied because *he* was; whatever sensation he experienced I experienced also. Even as he regarded me in the light of a superior being, so did I him; but, he possessing



the more powerful will, all originated in him, and I was the willing recipient, willing yet impotent. He swayed my affections even as he would direct and govern a piece of mechanism in his employ to the bent of his will and inclination. Thank heaven it was no worse! bad is it was to be thus obsessed by another human spirit, it might have been worse. I tremble to think what might have been the consequence of this strange psychological fact, and, in spite of what followed, adhere to the belief that Count Adalbert, as in most others, there were sparks of a pure and divine nature smouldering beneath the crust of ashes which circumstances had ruthlessly heaped upon him.

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The gorgeous saloon of the *Kurhaus* was resplendent with fashion and glitter. An immense crowd of human beings had assembled within the artistically-enamelled walls; some occupying the oriental divans, and engaged in low and earnest converse to the monotonous waving of the ladies' large Spanish fans; others speechless and all-intent on the spectacle before them, their faces alternately clouding with disappointment and brightening with success. The centres of attraction were the three long tables covered with green baize upon which was heaped gold and silver in abundance. The nearer one approached these tables, the more intense interest and suppressed excitement were depicted on the countenances of the thronging multitude. The heat occasioned by the enormous concourse, breathless atmosphere, and profusion of lamps, was only exceeded by that provoked by inordinate mental anxiety. Engrossment to the one passion excluded all else. The world was forgotten; its classes and distinctions lost; its ties and sympathies spurned.

On the *croupiers* right at the *roulette* table is seated an individual conspicuous in his disguise: a well-built man wearing a dark grey cloak, with hood that enshrouds the greater portion of his features. A pile of bank-notes lies beside him, from which he makes frequent drawings. His neighbour in a spare, sallow-complexioned Russian. As the play goes on, this one repeatedly passes his handkerchief across his brow, and watches each action of the hooded man narrowly and with nervous zest. This scrutiny is in no wise calculated to disturb the equanimity of the latter. He proceeds calm and unconcerned, saving once when his right hand supporters cold and clammy fingers perchance come into contact with his own in the transfer of some coins, — then and then only in the impassive unknown observed to flinch. But he speedily regain his composure, and with it a propitious change of luck. The exhausted flock of notes is replenished, and fortune henceforth loads him with her bounteous favours. From ashen pale, the lips of the Russian are transformed to purple-blue, and that trick of his with the handkerchief is called into constant requisition.

Times wears on; the evening shadows deepen and wane into night — a night o'erhanging with clouds. Still that round is kept up; *rouge-et-noir*, *roulette*, *trente-et-quarante* — *trente-et-quarante*, *roulette*, *rouge-et-noir*; no variation, yet all absorbing, and never wearying; heart-sickening, nerve-straining, maddening, yet marvelously fascinating beyond all things. Some quit the heated saloon to take in a life-giving breath from terrace outside; but invariably quickly return, for the charm of the blossoming groves, with their cool and balmy atmosphere imbued with fragrant perfume, is tame and unendurable to the habitu  of the *kursaal*. An insidious and irresistible force lures him in again, and he resumes with fresh energy and more ardent spirit of hope.

Meanwhile the crisp bank-notes, the property of the man in disguise, have accumulated into a small volume, which the owner carelessly pockets. Then, with the utmost *nonchalance*, proofs of his being no tyro, the fortunate possessor prepares to take his departure. A hundred curious eyes are turned towards him, yet his gait is steady, his bearing easy and unrestrained. A buzzing murmur reaches his ear; he knows he is observed of all observers; nevertheless, neither the voices congratulatory and envious, nor inquisitive gaze, have power to affect him. He draws one long breath when he gains the terrace, and turns, his face upwards so as to meet the huge splashes of falling rain. Then, assuring himself of the safety of what lies concealed at his breast, and drawing his cloak more closely around him, he leaves the gardens and proceeds in the direction of the neighbouring woods.

The tall pines and graceful lindens with their nourishing foliage contribute to the gloom abroad; so that the darkness necessitates extreme caution in selecting the way. At intervals he pauses, glances penetratingly before, behind, and around, then takes in their safe retreat a packet of notes amounting to a fabulous sum. These he retains but a minute or two prior to reinstating them in their former hiding-place; but to recapitulate the performance again and again. Finally, ere they can be restored, a pair of hands from behind pinion the arms of the owner. A grip, almost super-human in its might, renders resistance vain. Futile are all efforts to release himself. Powerful as he is, he is at a disadvantage now, and his strength avails him but little. A short, demoniac cry pierces the air as the notes are wrenched from his hand, swiftly followed by a blow, severe and skillfully dealt upon his temple. Spontaneously physical force is released from its unfair thralldom, and the next moment finds him grappling with his adversary — the spare, sallow-complexioned Russian. The contest is savage and brutal; the blood of each boiling; the fury of the one equaled by the greed of the other. Presently the lightning's glare illumines the features of the Russian; his brow is spotted with beads of perspiration; froth oozes from his nostrils and lips, and he succumbs to the superior strength of his opponent. One frantic effort more, and a hand is raised; no light is there now by which to discern the steel that is flourished in the midnight air. The blade descends with well-poised aim, and the broad-shouldered man in disguise staggers and falls mortally wounded at the other's feet. But a fiendish yell of exultation serves to quicken his enfeebled pulse. Vengeance must be his; vengeance at any price. His enemy shall not live to triumph with the spoil. The whole force of his fleeting vitality is summoned in order to avenge his wrong. From his belt, concealed beneath the huge hanging cloak, a richly jewelled revolver is drawn forth, cocked, and pointed. A loud and vibrating report rends the atmosphere, echoing and re-echoing throughout the forest with ominous pertinacity; and the night-wind arising bears along with it a wail that death alone can interpret. The prize is gained, but the purpose vanquished; for the Russian, with that one long wail of anguish, has fallen to the earth a corpse. A few minutes' agony, regrets, and remorse, and his foe with blood-stained hands — the man in disguise — lies by his side, cold and stiff in death.

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The morrow's dawn revealed the scene of a fearful tragedy; how perpetrated 'twas never known. Numerous papers contained lengthened and sensational reports of the shocking discovery of two dead bodies; and many conjectures were made, but the truth was never arrived at. Only one certainty was there for discussion, apart from the terrible affair itself, and that was the personality of one of the enactors. For several seasons public curiosity had been baffled as to the individuality of "the man in dis-

guise” by which name he had become known. Now that mystery was unraveled; the “man in disguise” was proved to be none other than Count Adalbert, the Hungarian, who had some years previously gained for himself notoriety as an adept in the occult sciences, and in his new *rôle* of late had been so fortunate an habitu  of the gaming saloons. Truly was he an extraordinary man, a character to be studied, not harshly judged and contemned.

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Since that night when this explanation was revealed to me in a dream I have never experienced anything of a like nature. My health improved; I gave up dreaming and lived, and was no more subject to either fanciful delusions or psychological obsessions. Indeed, it is only now that I am a grandmother — prosaic and beyond the age of romance — that I can be induced, at the urgent request of my husband, Edric Westcott, to make a full confession of a curious incident which occurred in my early life.

With verity it may be said that truth is stranger than fiction, and destiny is the will of God.