

THE BLACK ROSE

By Countess Loveau de Chavanne

IT was the night of the Arch-Chancellor's ball, given in great splendor at his *hôtel* on the Champs Élysées. The brilliance of the display, the beauty of the women and their exquisite toilettes combined to render the affair one of uncommon grandeur and magnificence.

The attention of many present was attracted to a couple arriving late. The gentleman was a distinguished Colonel in the French army, the lady a stranger and a woman of singular beauty. She was dressed in black silk, overdressed with gossamer of the same hue and adorned with a profusion of costly lace—a toilette that was a perfect triumph of art. A black pearl of uncommon size and great value was set in the diamond ornament that fastened the luxuriant masses of her black, wavy hair.

The exceeding beauty of the stranger was such as to rivet attention and excite curiosity. The women regarded her jealously. Question followed question, and it was soon circulated that she was known in Paris as "The Black Rose." The stranger remained but an hour, and having accompanied the lady to her carriage, Colonel du Près returned to the ball-room.

"You are highly favored, Colonel," exclaimed one of the guests, as he re-entered. "You have discovered the beauty who is driving all Paris wild. Will you not have pity and relieve our minds by telling us the name of 'The Black Rose,' the beautiful unknown?"

"Certainly," replied Henri du Près. "The lady in question is the Princess Olga de Vianzone. She is

an Italian by birth, a daughter of the Duchess de Ferrare."

"You are her friend?"

"I have the honor to claim that distinction," responded du Près, smiling.

"Happy man! But tell me why she made choice of so singular a costume for a ball—was it from habit or coquetry?"

"I should say habit, as the Princess never wears anything but black. The choice is the result of a tragic adventure."

"Ah! do tell us about it."

"With pleasure, my dear Rousset, but not here," replied Colonel du Près. "Dine with me to-morrow, and you shall know all."

On the following day, at the hour appointed, du Près met his friend at the Palais Royal, and they proceeded to enjoy a good dinner.

"You have heard of the Count de Poyen, have you not?" inquired du Près, as he handed Rousset a cigar. "The question is, however, useless," he continued, "as all Paris has become familiar with both his name and his youthful indiscretion in speaking of the intrigue of two of his acquaintances. A duel followed, and the husband of the lady in question was killed. The Count, owing to this fact, took an oath never to speak another word for ten years."

"Did he keep his oath?" questioned Rousset. "That part of the story, *mon ami*, I never heard before."

"For one year he kept his oath scrupulously. It was at the end of the time named that the Princess de Vianzone met the Count in society. She was then only twenty-two and a

widow; moreover, a woman of poetical and romantic character. The Princess had heard de Poyen's story, and determined to make him break his oath——"

"Just like a woman!" interrupted Rousset, smiling cynically.

"This resolution," continued du Près, "was strengthened by a singular interest he had awakened in the Princess. One evening, as de Poyen was entering his *hôtel*, he was seized suddenly by several men and forced into a carriage in waiting. So quickly was he made a prisoner that he had no time to defend himself, and true to his vow, he dared not speak. At length the equipage, which was most luxurious, halted, and he was conducted in a mysterious manner into a room lighted only by a lamp suspended from the ceiling. The case-ment was open, and the evening breeze filled the apartment with the most intoxicating perfume.

"De Poyen gazed round the room, and at once observed evidences of luxury and taste. But a few moments elapsed when a silken rustle was heard, and the Princess de Vianzone entered. On seeing her the Count sprang to his feet, both surprised and irritated, and could scarcely restrain a gesture of impatience. What annoyed him most was the iron band that bound him to silence, and he walked to and fro, his eyes riveted to the floor.

"The Princess Olga had meanwhile seated herself on a divan, assuming both astonishment and fear at the presence of the stranger. Although her head was bowed, her large dark eyes from beneath their fringed lashes watched his every movement. Passion without provocation, like a fire without fuel, cannot last. Gradually de Poyen grew calm, and at length approached his fair companion and for the first time gazed at her fixedly. You have seen Olga de Vianzone and know how beautiful she is. The full force of her wondrous loveliness, heightened by the mellow light and the soft, clinging folds of her garments, that displayed

to perfection her exquisite form, fascinated de Poyen, and his eyes met hers with a look that eloquently expressed the admiration she had excited.

"Rising slowly, she crossed the room and drew aside the drapery that hid from view the door leading into the adjoining apartment.

"'All I have heard of you,' she said, in a musical voice, 'inspired me with an ardent desire to know you. I find that in many respects I was deceived. I can only beg that you will accept my regret for what I have done, and allow me to tell you that you are free to go.'

"As she ceased speaking she smiled. It is needless to say that de Poyen did not avail himself of the permission to depart. Under the seductive influence of her charms he saw only the woman's exquisite beauty, and failed to dread her power. Taking her small, jeweled hand the Count led his hostess to the couch from which she had risen. In low, soft tones the Princess told him of the deep interest his story had awakened. Enraptured, he listened mutely, by look and sign expressing the feeling she had called forth.

"'I understand you,' said Olga de Vianzone; 'silently you express your admiration, but if I am to believe you I must hear you speak. Even then I will not say that I may not doubt; I can only bid you speak.'

"Pale and troubled, but without hesitation, de Poyen rose instantly, and taking his hat, turned toward the door.

"'I hope we shall meet again,' said the charming Princess, as he stood on the threshold. 'Believe me,' she added, 'you will always receive a welcome.'

"For a moment de Poyen lingered, his eyes resting fondly on her expressive face, then, with a low bow, he left the room.

"Eight days passed and de Poyen did not leave his *hôtel*. The impression made on his sensitive nature by his interview with the Princess Olga

had become all-absorbing. That she loved him he believed, but to win from her an avowal of that love he must break his vow; and the struggle between passion and duty became intense.

"Woman's love, you know, Rousset, is a strange thing at best, ever fitful and fickle as the wind; nevertheless, with some it is an abiding sentiment of the heart, fed by the imagination, and can exist even isolated from the object of its love. With man, the one hope, the one thought of possession absorbs all others.

"The eighth day de Poyen voluntarily entered the boudoir of the Princess Olga, and although received with every expression of favor, he still refused to speak. After fruitless efforts to persuade him to express himself in audible language the Princess became annoyed.

"'Unless you are willing to yield to my request to speak I must bid you adieu,' she said at last.

"De Poyen lingered, but at length took his departure, more in love than ever, and filled with despair; nevertheless, with his vow unbroken. Unwilling to break his oath, yet desirous of winning the Princess, he determined on making another effort.

"There is, you will remember, a beautiful old castle situated a few miles distant from St.-Cloud, and the drive not being much frequented, the castle had become an almost daily resort of the fair Italian.

"One morning, having grown weary of driving, the Princess failed on her return to observe the route taken by the coachman. Absorbed in meditation, she was at length surprised to find herself in the courtyard of an *hôtel* not her own. On hearing the porter's gate close on her entrance she called to her coachman; the man descended from the box, and to her astonishment she discovered that he was unknown to her.

"'Who are you?' demanded the Princess.

"'A domestic in the employ of the Count de Poyen.'

"'Where is your master?' inquired the Princess.

"'He awaits you, madame,' replied the man, bowing respectfully.

"At this instant a valet appeared, and bidding him lead the way, the Princess ascended the steps and entered the *hôtel*. In a moment more she found herself in a richly furnished library, the walls of which were hung with costly tapestry. The Count was seated before a desk writing, but rose at once to greet his visitor. The scene was much the same in character as that which had transpired but a short time before in the boudoir of the lady. It was a complete *coup de théâtre*. At first the Princess appeared confused, but soon recovered her composure.

"'Do you not think it ungallant, Count de Poyen, to force a visit from a lady?' she inquired, contemptuously. 'Having acknowledged your courtesy I will now retire, as I am expected elsewhere.' And she turned toward the door.

"De Poyen intercepted her. His manner was determined and his look was sufficient to intimidate any woman less courageous than Olga de Vianzone.

"'To keep me here by force would be disloyal,' she said, haughtily. 'Moreover, if it be for revenge for my conduct toward you, believe me, it is, to say the least, in bad taste. What I did was wrong, but such an act as this, on your part, is infamous, and were it known in society, those who now pronounce you to be the soul of honor would soon accuse you of base cowardice.'

"The Count realized the justice of her reproach and had not the courage to detain her, still less to follow her as she swept from the room.

"Two hours later the Princess reached her home and entered her boudoir. Her cheeks were flushed with emotion. Seating herself on a couch she burst into tears. The pride that had sustained her in the presence of the man she loved gave way in the solitude of her own home. Suddenly and noiselessly a man entered the

room; it was de Poyen. Crossing softly to the couch, he knelt beside the Princess and gently raised her hand to his lips.

"'You here?' she exclaimed.

"'Yes,' responded de Poyen. 'Yes, Olga, for I have come to tell you that I love you.'

"'Love me!' she murmured, as her dark eyes flashed the contempt and doubt her voice expressed.

"'Yes, you and only you,' he continued, ardently. 'I have come to tell you that I love you, to ask to be forgiven.'

"A new light came into her eyes. 'I forgive you,' she whispered, placing her hand on his bowed head. 'I love you, Armand.'

"'I have said I love you,' continued de Poyen. 'For the sake of that love I have forgotten all else, have broken my vow to give it utterance. I am yours, Olga; do with me as you will.' As he spoke de Poyen embraced her, and yielding, her head sank on his breast. 'Have I hoped in vain?' whispered the Count, 'or is the boon of your love all my own?'

"The hand he held clung to his, and bending down he heard her whisper, softly, 'Yes.'

"The hour was very late when de Poyen left the *hôtel* of the Princess de Vianzone. There was a look of perfect happiness on his face as he hurriedly went his way homeward.

"The following day, as de Poyen was seated in his library arranging some papers, a note was brought him from the Princess. It contained, essentially, these words:

"MY DEAR ARMAND:

"Women, you know, are called the daughters of Eve. What name should we give men, who are termed our masters?—masters who by non-resistance prove themselves little better than slaves. How can man be the master of woman while he fails to resist her? But even while I ask the question I can hear you reply that it is man's non-resistance of woman that in the end renders her his slave, and so in truth it is. While we of the fair but frail race of beings hold ourselves proof against your lure of love, our triumph is complete;

but let one hour of weakness come, and yours is the victory. You are my conqueror, for I have confessed my love for you. The avowal from your lips, like a fairy charm, woke the inmost impulses of my heart. Like Pygmalion, you have animated your statue. In the marble veins flows new life, called forth by your gaze, your touch; and as Pygmalion of old knelt before his work and worshipped its wondrous beauty, so did you kneel at my feet and pour out your love, each word of which found its echo in my soul.

"I love you, my Armand, and know that the proof given me of your devotion was great. Fidelity shall recompense you. I, too, can be silent. No one shall know that you have broken your vow, but come to me, that in the quiet of my home I may again hear your voice and listen to your words of love.

"OLGA.

"De Poyen hesitated for a moment, then, after pressing the perfumed letter to his lips, he thrust it in his breast and wrote as follows:

"OLGA:

"I love you. This time I write the words that tell you my heart is all your own. I have been unfaithful to my oath, my beloved, and I will expiate my fault. Our destiny is such that all great happiness often becomes a fatality. I counted no cost too dear for the purchase of your love, and now that my life must pay the forfeit I bow submissively. I hold no regret in parting with life, save in separating myself from you. The poor gift of my existence I voluntarily bestow for the joy of your love. You knew not, my beloved, that as I held you to my heart and pressed my lips to yours my hours were numbered, that I, loving you with all the strength of a man's truest and most ardent passion, had sworn to sacrifice my life for the happiness of avowing my love. If our souls are immortal, so must memory be, as the rich gift emanates from the divine hand. On earth remember me, that in the great hereafter that lies beyond mortal sight we may be reunited. When you read these lines I shall have ceased to exist. With my last breath I will exclaim, 'Olga, I love you!' Adieu.

"ARMAND DE POYEN.

"Having finished the perusal of the letter the Princess at once ordered her carriage and drove with all speed.

to the Count's *hôtel*. Without a word of explanation she passed the servant who answered her summons, and at once hastened to the library. It was empty. She quickly crossed the room toward an adjoining apartment, and at that moment the sharp report of a pistol was heard. She flung open the door, and on the floor lay Armand de Poyen; in one hand he held a pistol, the other clasped a miniature. It was a picture of the Princess de Vianzone. His eyes were half-open, but in their sightless depths there was no recognition of the fair face that bent over him, and his white lips gave no answer to the voice that repeated again and again his name.

"Armand de Poyen had broken his oath, but by death he had redeemed, through endless silence, his dishonor.

"From that hour Olga de Vianzone pledged herself to perpetual mourning. Five years have passed, and still the somber garments adorn her lovely person. I have fulfilled my promise, and you now know why the Princess de Vianzone is called 'The Black Rose,'" said du Près, throwing away his cigar.

"An odd story," said Rousset, thoughtfully.

"True," continued du Près. "It may be that de Poyen carried his scruples too far, and yet, who may judge! To many, such an idea of honor may appear exaggerated, but with Armand it was not. It was in harmony with every trait of his character. I knew them both intimately, and may judge. The Princess you have seen, and can fancy her power. De Poyen was, in the full sense of the word, a man of chivalric honor; such a one, I freely grant, as is not often seen."

"Well, at all events, the costume of

the Princess is divinely becoming," responded Rousset. "But tell me, *mon ami*, do you really think her love was worth the sacrifice of life?"

"My dear fellow," continued du Près, "Olga de Vianzone is, I may say, one woman in ten thousand—such love is a very dream. Moreover, you must not forget that you are addressing a man to whom the risking of life has become habitual. I may be a poor judge. It appears to me, however, that to die for the full and perfect satisfaction of a great love is about as agreeable as any other kind of death."

"Why not live for that love?" urged Rousset.

"There's the rub," mused his listener. "Life teaches the sad experience that mortals may die for love, but if they persist in loving, they are too often punished by seeing love die. So which is better? For life without love is like a world without a sun. Give me plenty of love, and I will take my chances in the next life."

"What do you think of the sentiment that induced de Poyen to commit suicide?"

"Think! I think simply this, that moralists with a code about as frigid as the North Pole would blame him. But a true sense of honor, let it come in whatever shape it may, is, in these days, rare, so rare, indeed, that de Poyen has immortalized his name." As Colonel du Près uttered these words he descended the steps of the restaurant

"Where are you going?" inquired Rousset.

"To call on the Princess de Vianzone."

"So she loves you?"

"No, it is I who love her, my dear Rousset. Good-bve," he said, as he waved his hand in adieu.



THE MATINÉE GIRL

OLD MAN—Do you think you will be able to support my daughter?
 SUITOR—I do. It couldn't cost any more than courting her.

BACK IN TOWN

“THE melancholy days have come”—so sings the poet-fellow
 Who loafs about the dreary woods to watch the leaves turn yellow.
 Ah, foolish poet, while you prate of Autumn bare and brown,
 You miss the best thing of the year—the girls’ return to town!

The liberty of men is gone; their car-seats now they offer,
 And maids accept, sometimes with thanks, the courtesy they proffer.
 But still the men are mighty glad, although they swear and frown,
 That Autumn’s here and that the girls are once more back in town.

At every corner now one hears the merry maidens chatter
 Of gowns and men and frills—and *men*—how subtly women flatter!
 If you had walked Fifth Avenue, you stupid poet-clown,
 You ne’er would dub the Autumn sad; it brings the girls to town!

ELISABETH R. FINLEY.



STILL A FEW SPECIMENS

PARVENU (*proudly*)—I have every variety of cattle to be found in the world on my estate.

WITLEIGH—Not the Irish bull?

“Save that. I endeavored to secure it, but was told the only ones in existence were extinct.”



LAUDABLE AMBITION

SHE—Why is Grace going to marry Mr. Muchwed? He has already had three wives.

HE—I don’t know. I suppose she’s marrying him to reform him.



ACCORDING TO HABIT

BROWN—Can you tell me how your impecunious friend, Lord Deasy, can stand the expense of owning and running one of those electric vehicles?

SMYTHE—Same old way; has it charged.