

THE CHILD.

After having sworn many a time he would never marry, Jacques Bourvilliere suddenly changed his mind. This happened one summer's day at a seaside resort.

He was lounging *nonchalantly* on the sand, when the tiny foot of a female bather caught his eye. The owner of it was carefully muffled up in a white flannel wrapper, so that only her head and feet were visible.

Jacques was a sensualist. He was captivated at first, therefore, only by the girl's external charms; but, later on, came under the fascinations of her soft gentle mind, as fresh and sweet as her rosy lips.

Having got an introduction to the family, he soon fell madly in love with her. When, in the distance, he beheld Bertha Lamis strolling along the beach, a cold shiver would run through his frame. By her side he was dumbfounded; nothing occurred to his mind to say to her. His heart throbbed violently; a buzzing noise filled his ears—in a word, he was completely overwhelmed by her presence.

"Is this love?" thought he. He knew not; but be it what it might, he had firmly made up his mind she should become his wife.

The parents hesitated long before giving their consent, being aware of the reckless life he had been living. Besides, he was known to have a *liaison* of long standing—one of those old ties that are never completely done away with.

Of late, however, he had changed his habits of life, and had broken with the past. Every week he continued to get a letter from the abandoned one, and every week when his eyes ran over her almost illegible handwriting, his anger waxed greater as he impatiently tore up the importunate missive and consigned it to the flames.

In spite of all this, no one took him *au sérieux*. Throughout the long winter months he persevered in his attentions, and when spring came was finally accepted by the family.

The marriage ceremony was performed in Paris in the early part of May. It was decided the young couple would not undertake the time-worn honeymoon trip. After an informal reception, during which dancing was indulged in by a few intimates only until about 11 o'clock, the young people were to retire and spend the night under the paternal roof. The following day they were to leave for the seashore, where they first met and loved. While dancing was in progress, they both stole quietly away to the Japanese boudoir, hung round with gay-colored silks, hardly lit up by the softened rays of a lamp depending from the ceiling.

Hand in hand they sat speechless, absorbed in thought. Her eyes were gazing vaguely into space, with an expression of amazement at the sudden change wrought in her girl's life. She was half-smiling, half-weeping, ready so swoon in his arms with overflowing bliss, yielding herself up to that undefinable and delicious sensation of mental and physical lassitude.

He contemplated her with something like a smile. Several attempts to utter a word proved fruitless, for he could find absolutely nothing to say. To the ardor boiling within him, he occasionally gave vent by clasping her hands within his own. He would whisper her name gently, and provoke a look full of tenderness from those beautiful black eyes, which immediately drooped as if shrinking away with shyness.

Suddenly, a door was opened, admitting a footman bearing a letter on a tray. Jacques seized it with trembling hand. He instinctively felt that something had gone wrong, and his whole frame shook with fear.

For a long time he gazed at the superscription, not recognizing the handwriting. He hesitated before breaking the seal and thought for a moment that to-morrow would do—to-morrow when he would be far off with his bride and free from care. Two words in the corner of the envelope, "Very important," frightened and dismayed him, and he asked his wife's permission to peruse its contents. He read, grew ghastly pale, and again went over the lines slowly, as if spelling each word to himself. When he raised his head, all his strength seemed to have left him. He gasped out to his wife, "My darling, a dreadful accident has befallen a friend. He needs my assistance at once. It is a matter of life and death. Pardon me if I leave you a short while, I shall return presently."

She dared not inquire into the matter any further, feeling her new position as wife of too recent date to demand more minute particulars. He left her listening absent-mindedly to the music in the adjoining room.

The letter he held crumpled in his hand as he rushed wildly through the streets, ran thus:

Dear Sir: Miss Ravet, with whom, it appears, you have had very intimate relations lately, has just

given birth to a child, whom she claims to be yours. She is dying and begs you to come to her side. I take the liberty of writing this to ask you if you will grant a last interview to one most wretched and worthy of your compassion.

Respectfully, DR. BONNARD.

When he entered her room he found the woman in her last agony. Two candles flickered in a corner and near the unfortunate creature was a cradle, from which the piercing shrieks of a child were heard. She recognized Jacques, and tried to stretch out her poor, emaciated hands to him. He knelt down beside her and held one hand in his, frantically pressing it to his lips. With what voice was left to her, she said: "I am going to die, darling; promise me you will remain until all is over."

She was exhausted and paused awhile, then continued: "The child is yours, I swear it before God. On my soul, I speak the truth. I have never loved another. Promise me you will never abandon our little one."

He attempted to lift her in his arms, and kissing her forehead swore he would raise the child and love it.

She looked at him tenderly and asked to have the child placed between them. A few hours passed thus, and the rays of the sun were already beginning to filter through the hangings. Aroused from a quiet slumbering, she threw out her arms so violently that the child was almost precipitated to the ground. Her throat rattled; she turned on her back and breathed her last.

He cast a last look on the woman he had loved, and with the child in his arms fled from the house like a madman.

His young bride had waited for him some time in the boudoir, but she soon wearied and joined the others in the drawing-room. She showed no signs of internal commotion, and was perfectly calm and self-possessed. To her mother, who inquired for Jacques, she replied that he was in his room and would return soon.

After an hour's waiting, however, being harassed by questioning from all sides, she confessed the truth; the mysterious letter addressed to her husband, the peculiar agitation into which it threw him and his disappearance.

All the guests now departed save a few near relatives. At midnight, the bride, in tears, betook herself to her lonely chamber, and her mother and aunts seated near her listened to her sobs. At five o'clock a slight sound was heard in the hall, a door was opened and closed gently, a shrill cry only disturbing the stillness. All the women were on foot in a twinkling, and Bertha, in spite of her mother's pleadings, rushed to the front.

Jacques appeared on the scene with the baby in his arms. The four women gazed at him in amazement. Bertha ran toward him, crying: "What has happened; speak out, I beseech you?"

He looked at her wildly and stammered: "The mother has died and I took her child."

Without uttering another word, she seized the little one in her arms, kissed it and pressed its frail body to her breast. Then raising her eyes filled with tears. "The mother is dead, you say; well, we shall raise the poor little creature she has left behind."

Translated from the French of Guy de Maupassant (for THE WAVE) by M. T.