

Louise

BY J. H. SPEENHOFF

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH BY A. V. C. P. HUIZINGA
AND PIERRE LOVING.

PERSONS

LOUISE. VAN DER ELST [*Notary*].

VENNEMA [*Louise's Father*].

SOPHIE [*Serving Maid*].

LOUISE

A PLAY BY J. H. SPEENHOFF

[SCENE: *A large fashionably appointed room with few decorations on the walls. The latter are papered in yellow with large black lilies. To the right, a tall broad window with heavy brown curtains. To the left, an old gold harp with a little footstool. Behind, to the right, a door with brown portières, affording a view of a vestibule and banister. To the left, down front, a broad couch with black head cushions. Next to it the end of a heavy broad oaken table, with the side turned toward the couch. Behind, the back wall has an open chimney with carved wood and ornaments on it. Beside the chimney, on both sides, are two large comfortable chairs and two others by the table and window respectively. On the table are the remains of breakfast: fruit glasses and two empty champagne bottles.*

As the curtain rises Louise is discovered lying on the couch with her feet extended toward the audience. She lies quietly and gazes blankly in the distance. Closer scrutiny reveals that she is in the last stage of intoxication. On the whole, it is rather a lady-like inebriety and expresses itself now and again by way of a heavy sigh, looseness of limb, a languid flutter of the eyelids and a disposition to be humorous. It is about three in the afternoon. As for the tone of the room, there are a lot of yellows, blacks and browns; the light is quite subdued. Soon after the rise of the curtain, Louise begins slowly and dreamily to hum a melody. She stops for a while, gazes blankly around and

starts humming again. Then she raises herself, crosses her arms on the tables and rests her head on them. Her hair is loosely arranged--or disarranged. Her dressing gown is black and white.

A bell is rung downstairs. Louise does not seem to hear it. Another ting-a-ling. You can hear the maid going downstairs. The door opens and shuts. Two pairs of feet are heard climbing the stairs. The maid parts the portières, shows Van der Elst in and points Louise out to him, meanwhile remaining discreetly behind the portières.

The truth is that Sophie is very much embarrassed. She looks as if she has been called away from her proper duties. She is a healthy maid, with tousled blond hair, cotton dress, blue apron, maid's cap and is in her stocking feet. She goes toward Louise, then stops confusedly at a little distance from her. She moves a chair needlessly, in timid embarrassment, and wipes her lips with her apron.]

SOPHIE. Here's a gentleman to see you--to see--you, madam.

[Louise doesn't hear.]

SOPHIE *[approaches the end of table]*. A gentleman has come--come to see--you.

LOUISE *[raising herself on her elbows; with her head on her hands]*. What are you doing?

SOPHIE *[confusedly]*. I--madam? Why, nothing. But there's a gentleman ... you see....

LOUISE. A gentleman? Very well, you may go. *[She closes her eyes.]*

SOPHIE. But ... but ... he wishes to speak to you. A gray-haired gentleman. He is standing by the portières ... over there. *[Indicates Van Elst.]*

[Louise does not pay any attention to Sophie or Van Elst, but composes herself for another nap on the couch.]

SOPHIE. May he come in? [*A long pause.*] May he...? [*Louise does not answer. Sophie waits a bit, then she beckons Van Elst into the room.*] She won't answer, sir. Maybe you'd better come back in an hour or so....

VAN ELST. Hm! No. That's impossible. [*Looks at Louise.*] What's the matter with madam? Is she asleep?

SOPHIE. No ... you see ... she is, you know....

VAN ELST [*approaching*]. What?

SOPHIE. She isn't well....

VAN ELST. Ah, not well?

SOPHIE. Yes, from.... [*Hesitates.*]

VAN ELST [*spying the bottles on the table*]. Has madam consumed those?

SOPHIE. Yes, yes. It's awful. [*Pause.*]

VAN ELST. Does this happen very often?

SOPHIE. Yes. Oh, yes, quite often.

VAN ELST. Indeed!

SOPHIE. Hadn't you better go until ... for a while?

VAN ELST. No, no. I shall....

SOPHIE. Very well, sir, you know best. [*Sophie goes out of the room on tiptoe.*]

[*Now that Sophie is out of the room, one has an opportunity to scrutinize Van Elst more closely. He is a prosperous-looking country gentleman about fifty years old. He wears a shining top hat, white vest with a gold chain across his stomach, tight-fitting blue trousers, low*

shoes, white socks and a short blue coat. He is clean-shaven and when he removes his hat, one observes that his hair is close-cropped. His walking-stick, contrary to expectations, is light and slim. He takes a chair near the window, directly behind the harp, puts his hat, cane and gloves beside him on the floor and looks around. He glances at Louise, shakes his head solemnly, coughs, wipes his forehead, puts his handkerchief carefully away, coughs again, moves his chair and after some signs of nervousness, says]:

VAN ELST. Miss ... may I have a word with you? [*Louise doesn't hear.*]

VAN ELST [*with growing embarrassment*]. I ... I should like to speak to you.

LOUISE [*a little wildly*]. Are you there?

VAN ELST [*taken aback*]. Yes ... no ... yes.... I.... Whom do you mean?

LOUISE. Come here beside me.

VAN ELST [*astonished*]. Certainly, but....

LOUISE [*sighing*]. Come ... come.

VAN ELST. Aren't you making a mistake? I'm not....

LOUISE [*raising herself halfway, left elbow on table, head on hand, the other arm outstretched on the table. She looks unseeingly at him*]. Don't you want to?

VAN ELST. But I'm not ... how shall I put it? I've come to speak with you very seriously.

LOUISE [*has seated herself in the middle of the couch. She extends her arms with a smiling invitation*]. Don't you dare?

VAN ELST [*very considerably embarrassed by this time. He coughs and mops his face*]. It isn't quite necessary. We can talk this way.

LOUISE [*smiling*]. I will come to you, you know. Ah, you don't realize....

VAN ELST [*rising, disturbed*]. No. Please stay where you are. Don't trouble yourself. I can hear you from where you are, and you can hear me.

LOUISE [*ignores his words completely, gets up dizzily and gropes with the aid of the table toward the chair. She leans on the arm of the chair and looks at Van Elst. She points out the small chair*]. Come here.

VAN ELST [*after some deliberation, sits at her side*]. We had better.... [*His voice dies in a mutter.*]

LOUISE [*insistent*]. No. Here at my side. Sit close to me, then I'll be able to hear you better.

VAN ELST [*pulling his chair closer*]. I don't see why....

LOUISE. Don't you think I'm very beautiful and wise?

VAN ELST. I have very serious things to discuss with you. Will you listen to me? [*He assumes an important pose.*]

LOUISE. Why do you take on such a severe tone? You must be more gentle--very gentle.

VAN ELST. Hm! Very well. First let me tell you who I am. My name is Van der Elst. I'm the new attorney back home, and I am a friend of your father's.

LOUISE. Well?

VAN ELST. I think a lot of your father. As you know, Mr. Degudo was your father's lawyer; but he's gone away and I've taken his place.

LOUISE. Why am I honored with these confidences?

VAN ELST. You ought to know who I am.

LOUISE. Well, what's your name?

VAN ELST [*angrily*]. I told you that my name is Van der Elst, attorney-at-law.

LOUISE [*smiling vapidly*]. Have you any bonbons with you?

VAN ELST. What sort of a question is that, madam? You're not listening to me. [*He gets up angrily, about to collect his effects prior to leaving.*]

LOUISE. Are you leaving me so soon? If I were you, I wouldn't leave.

[*Van Elst walks back and forth in annoyance, muttering all the while.*]

LOUISE. What are you muttering about? Come here and sit by my side. Last week I received flowers from an old gentleman, an old gentleman. At least that is what the girl said. He sent them for my shoulders, mind you. You see, he had seen my shoulders. Please sit down. That's why he sent me flowers--[*extending her hand*] and this ring came with them. Look! [*Van der Elst has taken a seat. She thrusts her hand before his face.*] It's the thin one.

VAN ELST. Madam, I didn't come for this frivolity.

LOUISE. What would you give if you could kiss me?

[*Van Elst coughs and fumbles with his handkerchief.*]

LOUISE. Do you know what I suspect? I suspect that you are the old gentleman in question.

VAN ELST [*getting up in high dudgeon*]. Madam, I consider that accusation entirely improper, in view of the fact that I am a respectable married man. I want you to know that I keep out of these things. My reputation is above reproach. Do you intend to listen to me or not?

LOUISE. Don't shout so.

VAN ELST. Do you talk this way always? You amaze me.

LOUISE [*smiling*]. I suspect you are the gentleman with the pretty touch about my shoulders. Well, sit down. Is he gone? Are you gone?

VAN ELST [*stepping forwardly boldly*]. I am still here. This is positively the last time I'll ask you to listen to me. I assure you, my patience is nearly exhausted. Your father and mother, your family have asked me to bring the following to your notice. Your present conduct has caused a great scandal. You've left your family for a man who is too far above you socially ever to make you his wife. Consequently, you have become his mistress.

LOUISE. Eh?

VAN ELST. I'm not through yet. Your father and mother have requested me to ask you to come back home. They await you with open arms.

LOUISE. Don't be silly. Sit down.

VAN ELST. Oh, it's useless.

LOUISE [*incoherently*]. Will you promise to tell me?

VAN ELST. I suppose I'll have to wait. [*He sits down in utter despair.*]

LOUISE [*goes up to him unsteadily, groping for the arm of the chair. With a laugh*]. Tell me, which one was it. This shoulder or this one? Ah, aren't you clever! You're the old gentleman, aren't you, you old duck?

VAN ELST. A useless commission. Poor parents!

LOUISE. What's that? The joke's on me.

VAN ELST. Next she'll ask me to dance with her, I suppose.

LOUISE. Dance? No dancing. Don't get up. You needn't get up. I don't mean it ... really, I don't.

[Louise sits in front of the harp and runs her fingers idly over the strings. Then slowly, she plays the same melody she hummed previously. She hums it again dreamily. The music grows softer and softer. She sighs, stops playing, her head drops to her hands and she falls limply to the floor.]

VAN ELST. Good God, what's this? It wasn't my fault. I suppose I was cruel to her. *[Walks excitedly back and forth. Sophie enters.]*

SOPHIE. What's the matter?

VAN ELST. Look at your mistress. I can't make out what's wrong with her.

SOPHIE. Oh, that's nothing. It happens every day. Just a fainting fit.

VAN ELST. What a life! What a life! Why don't you do something? She can't be allowed to lie there that way.

SOPHIE. Just a minute. *[She seizes Louise by the waist and lifts her from the floor. Van Elst assists her.]*

SOPHIE. Nothing to worry about *[arranging Louise's clothes]*. Now you lie here and you'll be quite all right in a very short while. She gets that way quite frequently.

VAN ELST *[sinks into a chair]*. This is frightful.

SOPHIE *[confidentially]*. Madam drinks heavily in the afternoons and in the evening, too, when the master is here. Yes, and then they sing together and madam plays on that thing there. *[Points to the harp.]* It's very nice sometimes.

VAN ELST. Who is the master?

SOPHIE. I don't know, sir. But that's what I've been told to call him.

VAN ELST. Are they happy together? Or do they sometimes quarrel?

SOPHIE. I don't know. I don't think so, for he's very good and likes her very much.

VAN ELST. Madam never weeps or is sad? I ask these questions for madam's sake.

SOPHIE. Oh, yes, she weeps sometimes. But it's mostly when she hasn't had a drink and feels out of sorts. But it's soon cured when I fetch the wine.

VAN ELST. Then she occasionally thinks of her home. That may help us.

SOPHIE. May I suggest something, sir? [*She busies herself clearing off the table.*] If I were you, I should go away quietly.

VAN ELST. Go away?

SOPHIE. For madam can't bear men folks around her when she sobers up. If I were you, I'd go away.

VAN ELST. No, I'll stay. If she's sober after a while, perhaps she'll be able to talk to me coherently.

SOPHIE. You must know best. But I warn you, madam can't bear to have anybody else with her.

VAN ELST. What! Do you think I came for that purpose?

SOPHIE. Of course. You're not trying to tell me that you came to read the newspaper with her.

VAN ELST. You keep your mouth shut. I've come to ask madam to return to her parents.

SOPHIE. Oh, that's it, is it? You're from the family. I see. Of course ... but she won't go with you.

LOUISE [*dreaming aloud*]. William, William! He's bolting. Help! Help! Oh, the brown mare! Look! [*Sighs.*]

SOPHIE. She's delirious again. She goes on like that a lot. She was in a carriage with the master the other day, when the horse bolted. That's what she always dreams about these days.

LOUISE. Ah, wait. I left my earrings at the doctor's. Mother, mother, I love you so. [*She sighs heavily. A ring is heard below.*]

VAN ELST. Ah, that's Mr. Vennema. Open the door for him. It's her father.

SOPHIE. Ought I let him in? He mustn't see her in that condition.

VAN ELST. Please open the door.

SOPHIE. Oh, all right. [*She goes out.*]

[*Van der Elst listens.*]

LOUISE. Hopla, hopla, hopla....

[*Vennema and Sophie mount the stairs.*]

SOPHIE [*to Vennema behind the portières*]. Come this way, sir. You may come in.

[*Vennema comes in hesitating and stops at the door. He is a kindly country parson type, wholly gray, with a gray beard and mustache. He is wearing an ecclesiastical hat, a black coat and black trousers. He gazes about anxiously and finally his eyes light on Van der Elst. Van der Elst beckons to Vennema and indicates Louise on the couch. Sophie goes out.*]

VAN ELST. There she is.

VENNEMA. Is she ill?

VAN ELST. No, that isn't it. She's dreaming. She's very nervous. She was quite agitated a moment ago.

VENNEMA. What did she say?

VAN ELST. She wouldn't listen to me. She insisted on speaking of other things. As a matter of fact; she acted very queerly.

LOUISE. First prize ... splendid.

VENNEMA. What's the matter with her?

VAN ELST. I don't know. Nerves perhaps.

VENNEMA. Has she had a fainting spell?

VAN ELST. Don't worry about it. She'll be better in a little while.

VENNEMA [*noticing the bottles*]. Is she...?

VAN ELST. I don't know.

VENNEMA. Couldn't you tell? You may tell me.

VAN ELST. Yes; I think a little.

VENNEMA. That hurts. I never thought she would allow herself to get into such a state. Has she been this way for a long time?

VAN ELST. About ten minutes, I should say. But she'll be quite all right in a little while.

VENNEMA. I can't help being distressed over it. That she should have descended to this!

VAN ELST. Do you know what the maid told me? She said that they are happy together, and that he is truly in love with her.

VENNEMA. Yes. But why did he allow her to go this far?

VAN ELST. She won't see anybody.

VENNEMA. Not even me? Her father?

VAN ELST. Perhaps you.

VENNEMA. What do you think? Will she come home with us? Have you found out?

VAN ELST. She didn't pay any attention to me. She didn't quite understand my mission. I don't know. Perhaps you had better speak to her.

LOUISE [*calling*]. I.... Oh.... Help! [*She sits up in the middle of the couch, with her hands to her face. She droops and seems to fall asleep in a sitting posture.*]

VENNEMA. Is she...?

VAN ELST. Yes, she's coming to.

LOUISE [*wakes with a start*]. Bah! [*She looks around, does not recognize Van der Elst and Vennema. Then, peering closer, she registers surprise, sudden fright and finally anger. Van der Elst is about to speak, but she interrupts him.*]

LOUISE. Who are you? [*Coughs.*] Who are you and what is your business here? Go away.... Go away.

VAN ELST. Madam.... I....

VENNEMA. Let me speak. [*He goes toward Louise.*] Louise ... it is I. Don't you recognize me? [*After a pause.*] Louise!

LOUISE [*after a pause*]. Father!

VENNEMA. Aren't you glad to see your father?

LOUISE [*in a low tone of voice*]. Oh, father.

VENNEMA. You are not ill, my child?

LOUISE. No. Why have you come?

VENNEMA. I wanted to speak to you.

LOUISE. Why did you come? Why?

VENNEMA [*seating himself beside Louise on the couch*]. Listen to me, my dear.

LOUISE. Yes.

VENNEMA. I came to find out whether you are happy or not.

LOUISE. I don't know. Happy ... that's a strange word.

VENNEMA. Why strange? Are you happier here than--with us.

LOUISE [*leaning forward on her hands*]. Than with you? [*Looking up.*] I prefer to be here.

VENNEMA. Don't you miss us all, just the least little bit?

LOUISE. Sometimes, when I'm alone. All the same, I'd rather be here.

VENNEMA. Aren't you deluding yourself? Wasn't your life with us at home better?

LOUISE. Better? What do you mean, better?

VENNEMA. You know what I mean. Don't you regret running off with ... him ... and spreading sorrow in our hearts?

LOUISE. I loved him. And then I yearned for freedom, for the pleasures of life and travel. At home everything was so dull and monotonous. I couldn't stand the smug people at home. Their life is one round of lying and gossiping, of scolding and backbiting.

VENNEMA. But what of this sort of existence? You don't quite appreciate the damage you have done. How you have stained the fair reputation of your parents. I wonder whether that has ever occurred to you? You say that you do not like the people who are our neighbors back home, but it is these very people who make and unmake reputations. We must live with them. Can't you realize that?

LOUISE. Father, I'm sorry, but I couldn't go back to them. The commonplace tattlers with their humdrum, uneventful lives scarcely exist for me.

VENNEMA. They don't exist for you, you say. But, remember, that they despise you. They and their contempt do not reach you, but they reach us.

LOUISE [*almost inaudibly*]. Yes.

VENNEMA. But your future? Have you thought of that? What will it be? Wretchedness and contempt. When I came in and saw you stretched out in that condition, I....

LOUISE. Father, I want to forget. I don't want to think of the past.

VENNEMA. In order not to think of the past, you resort to drink?

LOUISE. Sometimes it is hard to forget.

VENNEMA. Tell me, Louise: does he love you, and do you love him? And even if this be true, will he continue to love you always? Won't the time come when he will grow indifferent to you?

LOUISE [*getting up*]. Never ... never. Not he. You don't believe that such a thing is impossible? He cannot forget me. I have given him everything ... my love, myself ... all that is truly myself.

VENNEMA. Aren't you a little too optimistic?

LOUISE. Not when it concerns him. He knows what I have sacrificed. He knows what I have given him. There is no room for doubt, father.

VENNEMA. Very well, we will not speak of it again. But how about us, Louise? Don't you ever think of us? Don't you ever long to come back to us, to the old home where you were born? Wouldn't you like to see it again?

LOUISE [*sadly*]. Yes.

VENNEMA [*anxious and excited*]. Then come back with me. Come back to us. You know my motive for coming. Won't you come back home with me? Everything is in perfect readiness for you: your little room, the flowers, the trees ... everything. Louise....

LOUISE. Father, that can never be. Never.

VENNEMA. Why not? We have arranged everything. Nothing will be lacking for your welcome, your comfort.

LOUISE. Why should I bring misfortune to you? It would simply add to your unhappiness. Isn't it better now that I am away from home? Later on, perhaps.

VENNEMA. Later on? Did it ever occur to you that there may be no later on? You may not find us then. We are getting old, your mother and I.

LOUISE. Don't, please!

VENNEMA. Come, Louise. Come. Think of the happiness.

LOUISE. How about the townfolks? Would they accept me again, do you think?

VENNEMA. Don't think of them. Those who are sincerely friendly to us, will continue to be so. The rest don't count. Ah, if we only could have you back, my child!

LOUISE [*after a pause*]. Father, I cannot go back. Don't you see that it is utterly impossible? I am changed now. And then I am not strong enough. Life is so long and I cannot bear to face it alone.

VENNEMA. But you will have us. You belong to us, and your place, if you have a place in the world, is with your mother and father. Your old home is waiting for you with welcoming arms. Summer is coming and you know how splendid the garden and the orchard are when the lilac trees are in bloom. Do you remember the little tree you planted once? Doesn't your heart yearn to see the little flowers that have sprouted on its branches? Everything is just waiting for you to come home.

LOUISE [*dreamily*]. Everything....

VENNEMA. You will come, won't you?

LOUISE. I cannot. I simply cannot. It is your happiness that I am thinking of. The intrusion of my life would spoil everything. Everybody will blame you.

VENNEMA. My child, I have long ago put behind me what the world says.

LOUISE [*suddenly*]. And William? What about William? What about him when I go back? No, I can't do it. I cannot leave him.

VENNEMA. What about your mother, Louise? She is waiting for you. She will be at the window to-night, waiting and peering out. Your chair is ready for you and she herself will open the door to greet you, to take you to her heart again. Do you know, Louise, she has been getting very gray of late. Come.

LOUISE. Mother isn't ill?

VENNEMA. Your mother wants to see you before she....

LOUISE [*rising to her feet*]. I ... I will do it.

VENNEMA. Thank you, my child. [*He embraces her*]. We shall go at once.

LOUISE. Ring for Sophie, please. Yes, we will go at once. [*Close to him.*] Mother is not seriously ill?

VENNEMA. I am sure, your return will be her cure.

VAN ELST [*who has listened attentively throughout the whole conversation*]. Madam, permit me also to thank you for this resolve to return home. You are going to make many hearts joyful because of your decision.

LOUISE. I hope so.

SOPHIE [*enters*]. Is there anything you wish, madam?

LOUISE. Pack my traveling bag. Get my black hat and gray coat. I am leaving at once.

SOPHIE. Very well, madam, but....

LOUISE. Lose no time about it. I'm in a hurry.

SOPHIE. A lady called to see, madam, and I told her you were engaged.

LOUISE. What did she want? Did she say?

SOPHIE. She said she would come back. She insisted on speaking with you.

LOUISE. Do you know the lady?

SOPHIE. Yes ... no. That is, I don't know. I believe I've seen her before.

LOUISE. Didn't she say what her errand was?

SOPHIE. No, madam, but she said she would come back soon.

LOUISE. When she comes, show her into the drawing room.

SOPHIE. Yes, madam.

LOUISE. Have everything ready at once.

SOPHIE. Yes, madam. [*She goes out.*]

LOUISE. You will excuse me. I must change my clothes. I shall put my old ones on. You see, I kept them. Then I must write to him. I must tell him why I am going away. [*She goes out by the side door.*]

VENNEMA. I feel as if I have never been as happy as this before.

VAN ELST. It will help your wife to get well. She hasn't been very well these last few weeks.

VENNEMA. Yes, I know it will do her heaps of good. I am quite happy.

VAN ELST. Don't excite your wife unnecessarily to-night. Any shock may be too much for her.

VENNEMA. Yes, we will postpone our rejoicing until to-morrow. You must come to-morrow, but alone. Bring your wife Sunday evening. The process of acclamation will be slow, of course. There is a train about six, I believe.

VAN ELST. Yes, at five forty-five. We have an hour yet.

VENNEMA. The sooner the better. She must have a change at first. I thought it mightn't be a bad idea if we paid my brother a visit at Frazier. It might do her a lot of good. Yes, I think what she needs is a change of scene.

VAN ELST. If I were you I would stay home the first week.

VENNEMA. We'll attend to that later. It is terrible when you think of the condition she was in when we arrived.

VAN ELST. The maid said that it happened quite often, too.

VENNEMA. What do you think he will do when he learns that she is gone?

VAN ELST. If he is anything of a man, if he is a man of honor, then he will stay away. If not, there is the law. But I believe it can be arranged although she loves him very much.

VENNEMA. Let's not speak of it any more. She will change slowly, and so the past will be forgotten.

SOPHIE [*enters with a traveling bag*]. Oh, isn't Madam here?

VENNEMA. She will be back very shortly.

SOPHIE. Here's the bag. Everything is ready. [*Puts Louise's things on the table.*]

LOUISE [*enters very simply dressed with a letter in her hand*]. Here I am. [*To Sophie.*] Have you packed everything?

SOPHIE. Yes, everything is ready.

LOUISE. Help me then.

[*Sophie helps Louise with her coat.*]

LOUISE. Mail this letter for me. [*The bell rings downstairs.*] Go and see who it is. I am not at home to anybody now.

SOPHIE. It may be the lady who was here before.

LOUISE. Heavens, I had almost forgotten her. If it's the lady--

SOPHIE. Yes?

LOUISE. See who it is.

SOPHIE [*going*]. Yes, madam.

VENNEMA. What is it, Louise? What does the lady wish?

LOUISE. Nothing, father [*with a forced laugh*]. Nothing at all.

VENNEMA. Must you see her? Can't you say that you are about to go away on a trip and that you cannot see her? Say that, and let us go.

LOUISE. Oh, it's nothing. I will just speak to her, and then we will go at once. [*She laughs again in a forced manner.*]

VENNEMA. But why are you so excited?

SOPHIE [*entering*]. Madam, the lady has gone away. She left this. [*She extends a visiting card.*] But--

LOUISE. What is it, Sophie?

SOPHIE. She told me to tell you that you must think of the bay mare. Here is her card.

LOUISE [*excitedly*]. Oh, a card [*tries to restrain herself*]. Give it to me.

SOPHIE. Then she said nothing about Elsa and the race.

[*Louise takes the card and goes a little to the side.*]

VENNEMA. What's the matter, Louise? What ails you?

LOUISE [*deeply affected*]. Father, father! [*She looks from the card to her father with tears in her eyes; then she goes mutely toward the couch, sits down, and stares blankly in front of her.*]

LOUISE [*sobbing*]. I can't do it!

VENNEMA [*takes the visiting card from her hands*]. Must you pay all that? Have you lost all that money?

LOUISE. Yes.

VENNEMA. Through gambling?

LOUISE. Yes.

VENNEMA. Good God! Gambling, too? And to-night you must pay all that money.

SOPHIE [*entering excitedly with a small bunch of flowers*]. Madam, Madam.

LOUISE [*looks up slowly and sees the flowers*]. What is it?

SOPHIE. These are the compliments of Mr. De Brandeis.

LOUISE. Mr. De Brandeis?

SOPHIE. The gentleman is waiting below in a carriage.

VENNEMA. Tell that gentleman to go away.

LOUISE. It was too beautiful, too good to be true. Now it will never be.

VENNEMA. Why not? I shall give you the money.

LOUISE. Father, I tell you it can never be.

VENNEMA. What do you mean? What are you going to do, Louise?

LOUISE. Father, I can't go back home with you. [*To Sophie.*] Take the flowers and tell Mr. De Brandeis that--that--

[*Vennema sinks into a chair. Sophie stands at the door with the flowers. Van der Elst stands listening anxiously.*]

LOUISE [*with a sob in her throat*]. Tell him, that I am going to stand by him.

[*She stands looking at the door, twitching her handkerchief nervously.*]

[*Curtain.*]

