A picture containing sky, outdoor, red, road

Description automatically generatedthe little ivory ball, in its frenzied dance

around the table, had been bewitched, magnetized by this feverish

gambler, and obeyed his will. With a few bold strokes he had won back

the bundle of bank-notes which he had lost in the early part of the

evening. Then he staked two and three hundred louis at a time, and

as his fantastic luck never failed him, he soon won back the whole

capital that had constituted his inherited fortune.

In his haste to begin the game he had not even thought of taking off

his fur-lined coat, the great pockets of which were now swollen with

the rolls of bank-notes, and heavy with the weight of the gold. Not

knowing where to put the money that was steadily accumulating before

him, he stuffed it away in the inside and outside pockets of his

coat, his vest, his trousers, in his cigar-case, his handkerchief.

Everything became a recipient. And still he played and still he won,

his brain whirling the while like that of a drunkard or a madman. It

was amazing to see him stand there throwing gold on the table by the

handful, with that haughty gesture of absolute certainty and disdain.

But withal there was a gnawing at his heart, something that felt like

a red-hot iron there, and he could not rid himself of the vision of

the child asleep in the snow,--the child whom he had robbed.

"In just a few minutes," said he, "I will go back to her. She must

be there in the same place. Of course she must be there. It is no

crime, after all. I will make it right to her,--it will be no crime.

Quite the contrary. I will leave here in a few moments, when the

clock strikes again, I swear it. Just as soon as the clock strikes

again I will stop, I will go straight to where she is, I will take

her up in my arms and will carry her home with me asleep. I have done

her no harm; I have made a fortune for her. I will keep her with me

and educate her; I will love her as I would a child of my own, and I

will take care of her,--always, as long as she lives!"

But the clock struck one, a quarter past, half-past, and Lucien was

still there. Finally, a few minutes before two the man opposite him

rose brusquely and said in a loud voice,--

"The bank is broken, gentlemen; this will do for to-night."

Lucien started, and wedging his way brutally through the group of

gamblers, who pressed around him in envious admiration, hurried out

into the street and ran as fast as he could toward the stone bench.

In a moment he saw by the light of the gas that the child was still

there.

"God be praised!" said he, and his heart gave a great throb of joy.

Yes, here she was! He took her little hand in his. Poor little

hand, how cold it was! He caught her under the arms and lifted her.

Her head fell back, but she did not awake. "The happy sleep of

childhood!" thought he. He pressed her close to his breast to warm

her, and with a vague presentiment he tried to rouse her from this

heavy sleep by kissing her eyelids. But he realized then with horror

that through the child's half-open lids her eyes were dull, glassy,

fixed. A distracting suspicion flashed through his mind. He put his

lips to the child's mouth; he felt no breath.

While Lucien had been building a fortune with the louis stolen from

this little one, she, homeless and forsaken, had perished with cold.

Lucien felt a suffocating knot at his throat. In his anguish he

tried to cry out; and in the effort which he made he awoke from

his nightmare, and found himself on the leather lounge in the

gambling-room, where he had fallen asleep a little before midnight.

The \_garçon\_ of the den had gone home at about five o'clock, and out

of pity had not wakened him.

A misty December dawn made the window-panes pale. Lucien went out,

pawned his watch, took a bath, then went over to the Bureau of

Recruits, and enlisted as a volunteer in the First Regiment of the

Chasseurs d'Afrique.

Lucien de Hem is now a lieutenant. He has not a cent in the world but

his pay. He manages to make that do, however, for he is a steady

officer, and never touches a card. He even contrives to economize, it

would seem; for a few days ago a comrade, who was following him up

one of the steep streets of the Kasba, saw him stop to lay a piece

of money in the lap of a little Spanish girl who had fallen asleep

in a doorway. His comrade was startled at the poor lieutenant's

generosity, for this piece of money was a gold louis.

[Illustration]

A CHRISTMAS SUPPER IN THE MARAIS.

From the French of ALPHONSE DAUDET.

M. Majesté, a seltzer-water manufacturer of the Marais, has just

indulged in a little Christmas supper with a few friends of the Place

Royale, and walks home humming. The clock at St. Paul's strikes two.

"How late it is!" thinks the good man as he hurries along. But the

pavement is slippery, the streets are dark, and then, in this devil

of an old neighborhood which belongs to the time when carriages were

scarce, there are the greatest number of turns, corners, steps, and

posts in front of the houses for the accommodation of horsemen, all

of which are calculated to impede a man's progress, particularly when

his legs are heavy and his sight somewhat blurred by the toasts of

the Christmas supper. M. Majesté reaches his destination at last,

however. He stops before a great doorway above which gleams in the

moonlight the freshly gilded coat-of-arms, the recently retouched

armorial-bearings which he has converted into a trade-mark.

Former

Hôtel de Nesmond.

MAJESTÉ, JR.,

Seltzer-water Manufacturer.

The old Nesmond coat-of-arms stands out, resplendent, on all the

siphons of the factory, on all the memoranda and letter-heads.

The doorway leads directly to the court,--a large, sunny court which

floods the narrow street with light even at noon, when the portals

are thrown open. Far back in this court stands a great and ancient

structure,--blackened walls covered with lace-work and embroideries

of stone, bulging iron balconies, stone balconies with pilasters,

great high windows crowned with pediments, and capitals rearing

their heads along the upper stories like so many little roofs within

the roof, then above it all, set in the very slate, the mansard

dormer-windows, like the round mirrors of a boudoir, daintily framed

with garlands. From the court to the first story rises a great stone

stairway gnawed and worn green by the rains. A meagre vine dangles

along the wall, lifeless and black like the rope that swings from

the pulley in the attic; and the whole has an indescribable air of

sad grandeur and decay.

This is the ancient Hôtel de Nesmond. In the broad light of day it

has quite a different aspect. The words "Office," "Store," "Entrance

to the work-rooms," in bright gilt letters, seem to rejuvenate

the old walls and infuse a new life into them. The drays from the

railroad shake the iron portals as they rumble through, and the

clerks step out on the landing to receive the goods. The court is

obstructed with cases, baskets, straw, wrappers, and pack-cloth. One

is conscious of being in a factory. But at night, in the death-like

stillness, with the winter moon casting and tangling fantastic

shadows through the confused intricacy of all these roofs, the old

dwelling of the Nesmonds resumes its lordly air. The court of honor

seems to expand; the wrought-iron of the balconies looks like fine

lace; the old stairway is full of shadows in the uncertain light, of

mysterious recesses like those of a cathedral; there are empty niches

and half concealed steps that suggest an altar.

On this particular night M. Majesté is deeply impressed with the

grandeur of his dwelling. The echo of his own footsteps startles

him as he crosses the great deserted court. The stairway seems even

broader than usual, and peculiarly heavy to climb. But that is the

Christmas supper, no doubt. At the first landing he stops to take

breath; he leans on one of the window-sills. So much for living in

a historic mansion! M. Majesté is certainly not a poet, oh, no! and

still as he gazes around him at this lordly old place, which seems to

be sleeping so peacefully under its benumbed, snow-hooded roofs, as

he looks down into this grand, aristocratic old court which the moon

floods with a bluish light, weird fancies flash through his brain.