

MABEL STANHOPE

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A Story.

BY

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THE LAST DAYS OF THE EMPIRE"



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MABEL STANHOPE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was towards the end of September, a little past noon. The proud old chestnuts in the Tuileries Gardens were gathering rich autumn tints that harmonized softly with the fading green. The fountains were still playing, rippling, and gurgling, and splashing their silver spray up into the sunlight.

A travelling carriage, which had excited the admiration and curiosity of the strollers in the Champs Elysées, drew up before the gateway of a large square building on the sunny side of the broad promenade.

“Here we are!” exclaimed the footman, and jumping from his seat he summoned the porter with such a sonorous clang at the bell as only an English flunky can give.

The carriage step was lowered, and a gentleman alighted, and assisted his companions to descend.

The first was a lady of apparently forty years of age, fair and dignified, with the slow, *nonchalant* step that generally betokens indolence or delicate health. The second was a young girl, whom her father rather lifted than handed from the carriage. The three walked in through the courtyard to the front door, where the female Cerberus was waiting to receive them.

The gentleman handed his card to the woman, who with a variety of dips and smiles showed the travellers into the *parloir*.

“Donnez-vous la peine, Mesdames,” she said; and placing chairs for the ladies, she tripped out of the room.

When the door closed, the young girl drew her chair closer to her mother's.

“Dear mamma, I feel so frightened,” she whispered.

“You silly child,” returned her mother, who seemed quite as agitated as her daughter; “what is there to be frightened at? Madame St. Simon is no doubt as kind as your good Mademoiselle Rosalie, whom you loved so much, and who took such care of you for the last four years.”

“Oh, but then I was at home, mamma.”

Sir John Stanhope busied himself examining the drawings on the walls of the reception-room. They were signed by pupils of the establishment, and supposed by uninitiated visitors to be the bona-fide productions of the young ladies.

“My dear Mabel,” observed Sir John, “I hope you may, on leaving this distinguished institution, be able to show something as creditable to yourself and your teachers as some of the specimens before us.”

“I hope so, dear papa,” replied his daughter, with a nervous glance at the opening door. It was the parlor-maid, to say that “Madame priait ces dames de passer chez elle.”

Sir John looked undecided; he felt inclined to express his private opinion on the coolness of the French school-dame, summoning *his* wife to an audience, somewhat after the fashion in which he admitted one of his tenants to the same honor.

Lady Stanhope guessed what was passing in her husband's mind, and to prevent any awkwardness she rose and followed the servant across the vestibule.

To Sir John this forced march looked like a compromise of dignity; but before he had arrived at any satisfactory decision as to the manner of protesting against it the door was thrown open, and the three travellers were in presence of the *maîtresse de pension*.

If they expected (as one of the party decidedly did)