

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer Bebel Proust
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke George
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Schilling Kralik Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Lons Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
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Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht Ringelnatz
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz
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Serge Panine –Volume 04

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BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE UNIVERSAL CREDIT COMPANY

The banking-house of Cayrol had not a very imposing appearance. It was a narrow two-storied building, the front blackened by time. There was a carriage gateway, on the right-hand side of which was the entrance to the offices. The stairs leading to the first floor were covered by a well-worn carpet. Here was a long corridor into which the different offices opened. On their glass doors might be read: "Payments of dividends." "Accounts." "Foreign correspondence." "General office." Cayrol's own room was quite at the end, and communicated with his private apartments. Everything breathed of simplicity and honesty. Cayrol had never tried to throw dust into people's eyes. He had started modestly when opening the bank; his business had increased, but his habits had remained the same. It was not a difficult matter to obtain an interview, even by people not known to him. They sent in their cards, and were admitted to his sanctum.

It was amid the coming and going of customers and clerks that Prince Panine came the following day to find Cayrol. For the first time Serge had put himself out for the banker. He was introduced with marks of the most profound respect. The great name of Desvarenes seemed to cast a kind of halo round his head in the eyes of the clerks.

Cayrol, a little embarrassed, but still resolute, went toward him. Serge seemed nervous and somewhat abrupt in manner. He foresaw some difficulty.

"Well! my dear fellow," he said, without sitting down. "What are you up to? I have waited since yesterday for the money you promised me."

Cayrol scratched his ear, and felt taken aback by this plain speaking.

"The fact is —" stammered he.

"Have you forgotten your engagement?" asked Serge, frowning.

"No," replied Cayrol, speaking slowly, "but I met Madame Desvarences yesterday."

"And what had that to do with your intentions?"

"Zounds! It had everything to do with them. Your mother-in-law made a scene, and forbade my lending you any money. You must understand, my dear Prince, that my relations with Madame Desvarences are important. I hold a great deal of money of hers in my bank. She first gave me a start. I cannot, without appearing ungrateful, act contrary to her will. Place yourself in my position, and judge impartially of the terrible alternative between obliging you and displeasing my benefactress."

"Don't cry; it is useless," said Serge, with a scornful laugh. "I sympathize with your troubles. You side with the money-bags. It remains to be seen whether you will gain by it."

"My dear Prince, I swear to you that I am in despair," cried Cayrol, annoyed at the turn the interview was taking. "Listen; be reasonable! I don't know what you have done to your mother-in-law, but she seems much vexed with you. In your place I would rather make a few advances than remain hostile toward Madame Desvarences. That would mend matters, you see. Flies are not to be caught with vinegar."

Serge looked contemptuously at Cayrol, and put on his hat with supreme insolence.

"Pardon me, my dear fellow; as a banker you are excellent when you have any money to spare, but as a moralist you are highly ridiculous."

And, turning on his heel, he quitted the office, leaving Cayrol quite abashed. He passed along the corridor switching his cane with suppressed rage. Madame Desvarences had, with one word, dried up the source from which he had been drawing most of the money which he had spent during the last three months. He had to pay a large sum that evening at the club, and he did not care to apply to the money-lenders of Paris.

He went down the stairs wondering how he would get out of this scrape! Go to Madame Desvarenes and humble himself as Cayrol advised? Never! He regretted, for a moment, the follies which had led him into this difficulty. He ought to have been able to live on two hundred thousand francs a year! He had squandered money foolishly, and now the inexhaustible well from which he had drawn his treasure was closed by an invincible will.

He was crossing the gateway, when a well-known voice struck his ear, and he turned round. Herzog, smiling in his enigmatical manner, was before him. Serge bowed, and wanted to pass on, but the financier put his hand on his arm, saying:

"What a hurry you are in, Prince. I suppose your pocketbook is full of notes, and you are afraid of being plundered."

And with his finger, Herzog touched the silver mounted pocketbook, the corner of which was peeping out of the Prince's pocket. Panine could not control a gesture of vexation, which made the financier smile.

"Am I wrong?" asked Herzog. "Can our friend Cayrol have refused your request? By-the-bye, did you not quarrel with Madame Desvarenes yesterday? Whoever was it told me that? Your mother-in-law spoke of cutting off all your credit, and from your downcast look I guess that fool Cayrol has obeyed the orders he has received."

Serge, exasperated and stamping with rage, wanted to speak, but it was no easy matter interrupting Herzog. Besides, there was something in the latter's look which annoyed Serge. His glance seemed to be fathoming the depths of Panine's pockets, and the latter instinctively tightened his arms across his chest, so that Herzog might not see that his pocketbook was empty.

"What are you talking about?" asked Serge, at last, with a constrained smile.

"About things which must greatly interest you," said Herzog, familiarly. "Come, be sincere. Cayrol has just refused you a sum of money. He's a simpleton! How much do you want? Will a hundred thousand francs do just now?"

And writing a few words on a check, the financier handed it to Serge, adding:

"A man of your position should not be in any difficulty for such a paltry sum!"

"But, sir," said Serge, astonished, and pushing away Herzog's hand.

"Accept it, and don't feel indebted to me. It is hardly worth while between you and me."

And taking Panine's arm Herzog walked on with him.

"Your carriage is there? all right, mine will follow. I want to talk to you. Your troubles cannot last. I will show you the means of extricating yourself and that without delay, my dear sir."

And without consulting Panine he seated himself beside him in the carriage.

"I told you once, if you remember," continued the financier, "that I might prove useful to you. You were haughty, and I did not insist; yet you see the day has come. Let me speak frankly with you. It is my usual manner, and there is some good in it."

"Speak," answered Serge, rather puzzled.

"You find yourself at this moment, vulgarly speaking, left in the lurch.

Your wants are many and your resources few."

"At least—" protested Serge.

"Good! There you are refractory," said the financier, laughingly, "and I have not finished. The day after your marriage you formed your household on a lavish footing; you gave splendid receptions; you bought race-horses; in short, you went the pace like a great lord. Undoubtedly it costs a lot of money to keep up such an establishment. As you spent without counting the cost, you confounded the capital with the interest, so that at this moment you are three parts ruined. I don't think you would care to change your mode of living, and it is too late in the day to cut down expenses and exist on

what remains? No. Well, to keep up your present style you need at least a million francs every year."

"You calculate like Cocker," remarked Serge, smiling with some constraint.

"That is my business," answered Herzog. "There are two ways by which you can obtain that million. The first is by making it up with your mother-in-law, and consenting, for money, to live under her dominion. I know her, she will agree to this."

"But," said Serge, "I refuse to submit."

"In that case you must get out of your difficulties alone."

"And how?" inquired the Prince, with astonishment.

Herzog looked at him seriously.

"By entering on the path which I am ready to open up to you," replied Herzog, "and in which I will guide you. By going in for business."

Serge returned Herzog's glance and tried to read his face, but found him impenetrable.

"To go into business one needs experience, and I have none."

"Mine will suffice," retorted the financier.

"Or money," continued the Prince, "and I have none, either."

"I don't ask money from you. I offer you some."

"What, then, do I bring into the concern?"

"The prestige of your name, and your relations with Madame Desvarenes."

The Prince answered, haughtily:

"My relations are personal, and I doubt whether they will serve you. My mother-in-law is hostile, and will do nothing for me. As to my name, it does not belong to me, it belongs to those who bore it nobly before me."

"Your relations will serve me," said Herzog. "I am satisfied. Your mother-in-law cannot get out of your being her daughter's husband,

and for that you are worth your weight in gold. As to your name, it is just because it has been nobly borne that it is valuable. Thank your ancestors, therefore, and make the best of the only heritage they left you. Besides, if you care to examine things closely, your ancestors will not have reason to tremble in their graves. What did they do formerly? They imposed taxes on their vassals and extorted money from the vanquished. We financiers do the same. Our vanquished are the speculators; our vassals the shareholders. And what a superiority there is about our proceedings! There is no violence. We persuade; we fascinate; and the money flows into our coffers. What do I say? They beseech us to take it. We reign without contest. We are princes, too princes of finance. We have founded an aristocracy as proud and as powerful as the old one. Feudality of nobility no longer exists; it has given way to that of money."

Serge laughed. He saw what Herzog was driving at.

"Your great barons of finance are sometimes subject to executions," said he.

"Were not Chalais, Cinq-Mars, Biron, and Montmorency executed?" asked Herzog, with irony.

"That was on a scaffold," replied Panine.

"Well! the speculator's scaffold is the Bourse! But only small dabblers in money succumb; the great ones are safe from danger. They are supported in their undertakings by such powerful and numerous interests that they cannot fail without involving public credit; even governments are forced to come to their aid. One of these powerful and indestructible enterprises I have dreamed of grafting on to the European Credit Company, the Universal Credit Company. Its very name is a programme in itself. To stretch over the four quarters of the globe like an immense net, and draw into its meshes all financial speculators: such is its aim. Nobody will be able to withstand us. I am offering you great things, but I dream of still greater. I have ideas. You will see them developed, and will profit by them, if you join my fortunes. You are ambitious, Prince. I guessed it; but your ambition hitherto has been satisfied with small things—luxurious indulgences and triumphs of elegance! What are

these worth to what I can give you? The sphere in which you move is narrow. I will make it immense. You will no longer reign over a small social circle, you will rule a world."

Serge, more affected than he cared to show, tried to banter.

"Are you repeating the prologue to Faust?" asked he. "Where is your magical compact? Must I sign it?"

"Not at all. Your consent is sufficient. Look into the business, study it at your leisure, and measure the results; and then if it suit you, you can sign a deed of partnership. Then in a few years you may possess a fortune surpassing all that you have dreamed of."

The financier remained silent. Serge was weighing the question. Herzog was happy; he had shown himself to all Paris in company with Madame Desvarences's son-in-law. He had already realized one of his projects. The carriage was just passing down the Champs Elysees. The weather was lovely, and in the distance could be seen the trees of the Tuileries and the different monuments of the Place de la Concorde bathed in blue mist. Groups of horsemen were cantering along the side avenues. Long files of carriages were rolling rapidly by with well-dressed ladies. The capital displayed at that hour all the splendor of its luxury. It was Paris in all its strength and gayety.

Herzog stretched out his hand, and calling the Prince's attention to the sight, said:

"There's your empire!"

Then, looking at him earnestly, he asked:

"Is it agreed?"

Serge hesitated for a moment, and then bowed his head, saying:

"It is agreed."

Herzog pulled the check-string communicating with the coachman and alighted.

"Good-by," said he to Panine.

He slipped into his own carriage, which had followed closely behind, and drove off.

From that day, even Jeanne had a rival. The fever of speculation had seized on Serge; he had placed his little finger within the wheels and he must follow—body, name, and soul. The power which this new game exercised over him was incredible. It was quite different to the stupid games at the club, always the same. On the Bourse, everything was new, unexpected, sudden, and formidable. The intensity of the feelings were increased a hundredfold, owing to the importance of the sums risked.

It was really a splendid sight to see Herzog manipulating matters, maneuvering with a miraculous dexterity millions of francs. And then the field for operations was large. Politics, the interests of nations, were the mainsprings which impelled the play, and the game assumed diplomatic vastness and financial grandeur.

From his private office Herzog issued orders, and whether his ability was really extraordinary, or whether fortune exceptionally favored him, success was certain. Serge, from the first week, realized considerable sums. This brilliant success threw him in a state of great excitement. He believed everything that Herzog said to him as if it were gospel. He saw the world bending under the yoke which he was about to impose upon it. People working and toiling every day were doing so for him alone, and like one of those kings who had conquered the world, he pictured all the treasures of the earth laid at his feet. From that time he lost the sense of right and wrong. He admitted the unlikely, and found the impossible quite natural. He was a docile tool in the hands of Herzog.

The rumor of this unforeseen change in Panine's circumstances soon reached Madame Desvarennés's ears. The mistress was frightened, and sent for Cayrol, begging him to remain a director of the European Credit, in order to watch the progress of the new affair. With her practical common sense, she foresaw disasters, and even regretted that Serge had not confined himself to cards and reckless living.

Cayrol was most uneasy, and made a confidant of his wife, who, deeply troubled, told Panine the fears his friends entertained on his account. The Prince smiled disdainfully, saying these fears were the effect of plebeian timidity. The mistress understood nothing of great speculations, and Cayrol was a narrow-minded banker! He knew

what he was doing. The results of his speculations were mathematical. So far they had not disappointed his hopes. The great Universal Credit Company, of which he was going to be a director, would bring him in such an immense fortune that he would be independent of Madame Desvarences.

Jeanne, terrified at this blind confidence, tried to persuade him. Serge took her in his arms, kissed her, and banished her fears.

Madame Desvarences had forbidden her people to tell Micheline anything of what was going on, as she wished her to remain in perfect ignorance. By a word, the mistress, if she could not have prevented the follies of which Serge was guilty, could, at least, have spared herself and her daughter. It would have only been necessary to reveal his behavior and betrayal to Micheline, and to provoke a separation. If the house of Desvarences were no longer security for Panine, his credit would fall. Disowned by his mother-in-law, and publicly given up by her, he would be of no use to Herzog, and would be promptly thrown over by him. The mistress did not wish her daughter to know the heartrending truth. She would not willingly cause her to shed tears, and therefore preferred risking ruin.

Micheline, too, tried to hide her troubles from her mother. She knew too well that Serge would have the worst of it if he got into her black books. With the incredible persistence of a loving heart, she hoped to win back Serge. Thus a terrible misunderstanding caused these two women to remain inactive and silent, when, by united efforts, they might, perhaps, have prevented dangers.

The great speculation was already being talked about. Herzog was boldly placing his foot on the summit whereon the five or six demigods, who ruled the stock market, were firmly placed. The audacious encroachments of this newcomer had vexed these formidable potentates, and already they had decided secretly his downfall because he would not let them share in his profits.

One morning, the Parisians, on awakening, found the walls placarded with notices advertising the issue of shares in the Universal Credit Company, and announcing the names of the directors, among which appeared that of the Prince. Some were members of the Legion d'Honneur; others recent members of the Cabinet Coun-

cil, and Prefets retired into private life. A list of names to dazzle the public, but all having a weak point.

This created a great sensation in the business world. Madame Desvarences's son-in-law was on the board. It was a good speculation, then? People consulted the mistress, who found herself somewhat in a dilemma; either she must disown her son-in-law, or speak well of the affair. Still she did not hesitate, for she was loyal and honest above all things. She declared the speculation was a poor one, and did all she could to prevent any of her friends becoming shareholders.

The issue of shares was disastrous. The great banks remained hostile, and capitalists were mistrustful. Herzog landed a few million francs. Doorkeepers and cooks brought him their savings. He covered expenses. But it was no use advertising and puffing in the newspapers, as a word had gone forth which paralyzed the speculation. Ugly rumors were afloat. Herzog's German origin was made use of by the bankers, who whispered that the aim of the Universal Credit Company was exclusively political. It was to establish branch banks in every part of the world to further the interests of German industry. Further, at a given moment, Germany might have need of a loan in case of war, and the Universal Credit Company would be there to supply the necessary aid to the great military nation.

Herzog was not a man to be put down without resisting, and he made supreme efforts to float his undertaking. He caused a number of unissued shares to be sold on 'Change, and had them bought up by his own men, thus creating a fictitious interest in the company. In a few days the shares rose and were at a premium, simply through the jobbery to which Herzog lent himself.

Panine was little disposed to seek for explanations, and, besides, had such unbounded faith in his partner that he suspected nothing. He remained in perfect tranquillity. He had increased his expenditure, and his household was on a royal footing. Micheline's sweetness emboldened him; he no longer took the trouble of dissimulating, and treated his young wife with perfect indifference.

Jeanne and Serge met every day at the little house in the Avenue Maillot. Cayrol was too much engaged with the new anxieties which Herzog caused him, to look after his wife, and left her quite

free to amuse herself. Besides, he had not the least suspicion. Jeanne, like all guilty women, overwhelmed him with kind attentions, which the good man mistook for proofs of love. The fatal passion was growing daily stronger in the young woman's heart, and she would have found it impossible to have given up her dishonorable happiness with Panine. She felt herself capable of doing anything to preserve her lover.

Jeanne had already said, "Oh! if we were but free!" And they formed projects. They would go away to Lake Lugano, and, in a villa hidden by trees and shrubs, would enjoy the pleasures of being indissolubly united. The woman was more eager than the man in giving way to these visions of happiness. She sometimes said, "What hinders us now? Let us go." But Serge, prudent and discreet, even in the most affectionate moments, led Jeanne to take a more sensible view. What was the use of a scandal? Did they not belong to each other?

Then the young woman reproached him for not loving her as much as she loved him. She was tired of dissimulating; her husband was an object of horror to her, and she had to tell him untruths and submit to his caresses which were revolting to her. Serge calmed her with a kiss, and bade her wait awhile.

Pierre, rendered anxious on hearing that Serge had joined Herzog in his dangerous financial speculations, had left his mines and had just arrived. The letters which Micheline addressed to the friend of her youth, her enforced confidant in trouble, were calm and resigned. Full of pride, she had carefully hidden from Pierre the cause of her troubles. He was the last person by whom she would like to be pitied, and her letters had represented Serge as repentant and full of good feeling. Marechal, for similar reasons, had kept his friend in the dark. He feared Pierre's interference, and he wished to spare Madame Desvarences the grief of seeing her adopted son quarreling with her son-in-law.

But the placards announcing the establishment of the Universal Credit Company made their way into the provinces, and one morning Pierre found some stuck on the walls of his establishment. Seeing the name of Panine, and not that of Cayrol, Pierre shuddered. The unpleasant ideas which he experienced formerly when Herzog

was introduced to the Desvarences recurred to his mind. He wrote to the mistress to ask what was going on, and not receiving an answer, he started off without hesitation for Paris.

He found Madame Desvarences in a terrible state of excitement. The shares had just fallen a hundred and twenty francs. A panic had ensued. The affair was considered as absolutely lost, and the shareholders were aggravating matters by wanting to sell out at once.

Savinien was just coming away from the mistress's room. He wanted to see the downfall of the Prince, whom he had always hated, looking upon him as a usurper of his own rights upon the fortune of the Desvarences. He began lamenting to his aunt, when she turned upon him with unusual harshness, and he felt bound as he said, laughing, to leave the "funereal mansion."

Cayrol, as much interested in the affairs of the Prince as if they were his own, went backward and forward between the Rue Saint-Dominique and the Rue Taitbout, pale and troubled, but without losing his head. He had already saved the European Credit Company by separating it six weeks before from the Universal Credit Company, notwithstanding Madame Desvarences's supplications to keep them together, in the hope that the one would save the other. But Cayrol, practical, clear, and implacable, had refused, for the first time, to obey Madame Desvarences. He acted with the resolution of a captain of a vessel, who throws overboard a portion of the cargo to save the ship, the crew, and the rest of the merchandise. He did well, and the European Credit was safe. The shares had fallen a little, but a favorable reaction was already showing itself. The name of Cayrol, and his presence at the head of affairs, had reassured the public, and the shareholders gathered round him, passing a vote of confidence.

The banker, devoted to his task, next sought to save Panine, who was at that very moment robbing him of his honor and happiness in the house of the Avenue Maillot.

Pierre, Cayrol, and Madame Desvarences met in Marechal's private office.

Pierre declared that it was imperative to take strong measures and to speak to the Prince. It was the duty of the mistress to enlighten

Panine, who was no doubt Herzog's dupe.

Madame Desvarences shook her head sadly. She feared that Serge was not a dupe but an accomplice. And what could she tell him? Let him ruin himself! He would not believe her. She knew how he received her advice and bore her remonstrances.

An explanation between her and Serge was impossible, and her interference would only hurry him into the abyss.

"Well, then, I will speak to him," said Pierre, resolutely.

"No," said Madame Desvarences, "not you! Only one here can tell him efficaciously what he must hear, and that is Cayrol. Let us above all things keep guard over our words and our behavior. On no account must Micheline suspect anything."

Thus, at the most solemn moments, when fortune and honor, perhaps, were compromised, the mother thought of her daughter's welfare and happiness.

Cayrol went up to the Prince's rooms. He had just come in, and was opening his letters, while having a cigarette in the smoking-room. A door, covered by curtains, led to a back stair which opened into the courtyard. Cayrol had gone up that way, feeling sure that by so doing he would not meet Micheline.

On seeing Jeanne's husband, Serge rose quickly. He feared that Cayrol had discovered everything, and instinctively stepped backward. The banker's manner soon undeceived him. He was serious, but not in a rage. He had evidently come on business.

"Well, my dear Cayrol," said the Prince, gayly, "what good fortune has brought you here?"

"If it is fortune, it is certainly not good fortune," answered the banker, gravely. "I wish to have some talk with you, and I shall be grateful if you will listen patiently."

"Oh! oh!" said Serge. "How serious you are. You have some heavy payments on hand, and want a little help, eh? I will speak to Herzog."

Cayrol looked at the Prince in amazement. So he did not suspect anything? Such carelessness and negligence frightened him. The banker resolved to proceed clearly, and without beating about the bush; to do away with such blind confidence a thunderbolt was necessary.

"I have not come about my business, but yours," returned Cayrol. "The Universal Credit Company is on the eve of disaster; there is still time for you to withdraw safely and soundly from the sinking wreck. I bring you the means."

Serge laughed.

"Thank you, Cayrol; you are very kind, my friend. I know your intentions are good, but I don't believe a word you are saying. You have come from Madame Desvarenes. You are both agreed that I shall give up the Universal Credit, but I will not yield to any pressure. I know what I am doing. Be easy."

And quietly lighting another cigarette, he gracefully puffed the smoke toward the ceiling. Cayrol did not trouble to argue, but took a newspaper from his pocket and handed it to Panine, simply saying, "Read!"

It was an article in a reliable financial paper prophesying the failure of the Universal Credit Company, and basing its statements on irrefutable calculations. Serge took the paper and looked over it. He turned pale and crushed it in his hand.

"What infamy!" cried he. "I know our adversaries are enraged. Yes, they know that our new company is destined to crush them in the future, and they are doing all they can to run us aground. Jealousy! Envy! There is no other foundation for these rumors, and they are unworthy a serious man's attention."

"There is neither envy nor jealousy. All is true," said Cayrol. "You will admit that I am your sincere friend? Well, I swear to you that the situation is terrible, and you must resign your directorship of the Universal Credit without loss of time. There's not a moment to lose. Sit down and write your resignation."

"Do you think I am a child to be led by the nose like that?" asked the Prince, in a passion. "If you are sincere, Cayrol, as I wish to believe,

I also think you are a fool. You don't understand! As to drawing out of the company, never! I have a lot of money invested in it."

"Well, lose your money, Madame Desvarences will pay you back. At least you can save your name."

"Ah, I see you are conniving with her!" exclaimed the Prince, loudly. "Don't tell me another word, I don't believe you. I shall go straight to the office, and I will speak to Herzog. We will take measures to prosecute the papers for libel if they dare to publish these untruths."

Carrol saw that nothing would convince Panine. He hoped that an interview with Herzog would enlighten him. He left the matter to chance, as reasoning was of no avail, and went down to the mistress.

Serge drove to the Universal Credit Company. It was the first day in the new offices. Herzog had furnished them splendidly, thinking that this would give the shareholders a high opinion of the undertaking. How could they have any doubts when they saw such splendid furniture and large offices? How could they refuse to place their money in the hands of speculators that could cover their floors with such soft carpets? The porters, with their dark blue and red cloth liveries, and buttons with the company's monogram on them, answered inquiries with haughty condescension. Everything foretold success. It was in the air. You could hear the cashier shovelling heaps of gold. The people who had placed the Universal Credit Company on such a footing were either very powerful or very impudent.

Serge walked in, as he would have done at home, with his hat on, amid a number of small shareholders, who had come full of anxiety after reading the accounts in the newspapers, and who felt full of confidence after seeing the splendor of the place. Panine reached Herzog's office, but when about to open the door, loud voices struck his ear. The financier was arguing with a director, and Panine listened.

"The speculation is safe and sure," Herzog was saying. "The shares are low, I know, because I have ceased to keep them up. I have given orders in London, Vienna, and Berlin, and we are buying up all shares that are offered in the market. I shall then run the shares up again, and we shall realize an enormous sum. It is most simple."

"But it is shady," said the other voice.

"Why? I defend myself as I am attacked. The great banks seek to deteriorate my stock. I buy in, and take it out of my adversaries. Is it not just and lawful?"

Panine breathed freely and felt reassured. The depreciation was caused by Herzog; he had just said so. There was nothing to fear then. It was just a trick of Herzog's, and the company would come out brighter than ever.

Serge went in.

"Oh! here's Prince Panine," said Herzog. "Ask him what he thinks of the matter. I defer to his judgment."

"I don't want to know anything," said Serge. "I have full confidence in you, my dear manager, and our business will prosper in your hands, I am sure. Besides, I know the manoeuvres of our opponents, and I think every financial means justifiable to answer them."

"Ah! What did I say to you a few minutes ago?" cried Herzog, addressing his questioner in a tone of triumph. "Let me act and you will see. Besides, I don't want to keep you against your will," he added, harshly. "You are at liberty to withdraw from us if you like."

The other protested that what he had said was for the best interests of all concerned. He did not dream of leaving the company; on the contrary, they might rely on him. He appreciated the experience and ability of Herzog too well to separate his fortune from his friend's. And, shaking hands with the financier, he took his leave.