

Ryan Marah Ellis

# The Bondswoman



Marah Ryan  
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### CHAPTER I

Near Moret, in France, where the Seine is formed and flows northward, there lives an old lady named Madame Blanc, who can tell much of the history written here—though it be a history belonging more to American lives than French. She was of the Caron establishment when Judithe first came into the family, and has charge of a home for aged ladies of education and refinement whose means will not allow of them providing for themselves. It is a memorial founded by her adopted daughter and is known as the Levigne Pension. The property on which it is established is the little Levigne estate—the one forming the only dowery of Judithe Levigne when she married Philip Alain—Marquis de Caron.

There is also a bright-eyed, still handsome woman of mature years, who lives in our South and has charge of another memorial—or had until recently—a private industrial school for girls of her own selection. She calls herself a creole of San Domingo, and she also calls herself Madame Trouvelot—she has been married twice since she was first known by that name, for she was never the woman to live alone—not she; but while the men in themselves suited her, their names were uncompromisingly plain—did not attract her at all. She married them, proved a very good wife, but while one was named Johnson, and another Tuttle, the good wife persisted in being called Madame Trouvelot, either through sentiment or a bit of irony towards the owner of that name. But, despite her vanities, her coquetries, and certain erratic phases of her life, she was absolutely faithful to the trust reposed in her by the Marquise; and who so capable as herself of finding the poor girls who stood most in need of training and the shelter of charity? She, also, could add to this history of the woman belonging both to the old world and the new. There are also official records in evidence of much that is told here—deeds of land, bills of sale, with dates of marriages and deaths interwoven, changed as to names and places but—

There are social friends—gay, pleasure-loving people on both sides of the water—who could speak, and some men who will never forget her.

One of them, Kenneth McVeigh, he was only Lieutenant McVeigh then!—saw her first in Paris—heard of her first at a musicale in the salon of Madame Choudey. Madame Choudey was the dear friend of the Countess Helene Biron, who still lives and delights in recitals of gossip belonging to the days of the Second Empire. The Countess Helene and Mrs. McVeigh had been school friends in Paris. Mrs. McVeigh had been Claire Villanenne, of New Orleans, in those days. At seventeen she had married a Col. McVeigh, of Carolina. At forty she had been a widow ten years. Was the mother of a daughter aged twelve, and a six-foot son of twenty-two, who looked twenty-five, and had just graduated from West Point.

As he became of special interest to more than one person in this story, it will be in place to give an idea of him as he appeared in those early days;—an impetuous boy held in check, somewhat, by military discipline and his height—he measured six feet at twenty—and also by the fact that his mother had persisted in looking on him as the head of the family at an age when most boys are care-free of such responsibilities.

But the responsibilities had a very good effect in many ways—giving stability and seriousness to a nature prone, most of all, to pleasure-loving if left untrammelled. His blue eyes had a slumberous warmth in them; when he smiled they half closed and looked down on you caressingly, and their expression proved no bar to favor with the opposite sex. The fact that he had a little mother who leaned on him and whom he petted extravagantly, just as he did his sister, gave him a manner towards women in general that was both protecting and deferential—a combination productive of very decided results.

He was intelligent without being intellectual, had a very clear appreciation of the advantages of being born a McVeigh, proud and jealous where family honor was concerned, a bit of an autocrat through being master over extensive tracts of land and slaves by the dozen, many of them the descendents of Africans bought into the family from New England traders four generations before.

Such was the personality of the young American as he appeared that day at Madame Choudey's; and he looked like one of the pictured Norse sea kings as he towered, sallow and bronzed, back of the vivacious Frenchmen and their neighbors of the Latin races.

*The solo of the musicale had just ended. People were thronged about the artiste, and others were congratulating Madame Choudey on her absolute success in assembling talent.*

"All celebrities, my lad," remarked Fitzgerald Delaven as he looked around. The Delavens and the McVeighs had in time long past some far-out relationship, and on the strength of it the two young men, meeting thus in a foreign country, became at once friends and brothers;—"all celebrities and no one so insignificant as ourselves in sight. Well, now!—when one has to do the gallant to an ugly woman it is a compensation to know she is wondrous wise."

"That depends on the man who is doing the gallant," returned the young officer, "I have not yet got beyond the point where I expect them all to be pretty."

"Faith, Lieutenant, that is because your American girls are all so pretty they spoil you!—and by the same token your mother is the handsomest woman in the room."

The tall young fellow glanced across the chattering groups to where the handsomest woman was amusing herself.

She certainly was handsome—a blonde with chestnut hair and grey eyes—a very youthful looking mother for the young officer to claim. She met his glance and smiled as he noticed her very courtier-like attendant of the moment, and raised his brows quizzically.

"Yes, I feel that I am only a hanger-on to mother since we reached France," he confessed. "My French is of the sort to be exploited only among my intimates, and luckily all my intimates know English."

"Anglo-Saxon," corrected Delaven, and Lieutenant McVeigh dropped his hand on his friend's shoulder and laughed.

"You wild Irishman!—why not emphasize your prejudices by unearthing the Celtic and expressing yourself in that?"

"Sure, if I did I should not call it the Irish language," retorted the man from Dublin.

They both used the contested tongue, and were evidently the only ones in the room who did. All about them were the softened syllables of France—so provocative, according to Lord Lytton, of the tender sentiments, if not of the tender passion.

"There is Dumaresque, now," remarked Delaven. "We are to see his new picture, you know, at the Marquise de Caron's;—excuse me a moment," and he crossed over to the artist, who had just entered.

Kenneth McVeigh stood alone surveying the strange faces about. He had not been in France long enough to be impervious to the atmosphere of novelty in everything seen and heard.

Back of him the soft voice of Madame Choudey, the hostess, could be heard. She was frankly gossiping and laughing a little. The name of the Marquise de Caron was mentioned. Delaven had told him of her—an aristocrat and an eccentric—a philanthropist who was now aged. For years herself and her son had been the patrons—the good angels of struggling genius, of art in every form. But the infamous 2d of December had ended all that. He was one of the "provisionally exiled;" he had died in Rome. Madame La Marquise, the dowager Marquise now, was receiving again, said the gossips back of him. The fact was commented on with wonder by Madame Choudey;—with wonder, frank queries, and wild surmises, by the little group around her; for the aged Marquise and her son Alain—dead a year since—had been picturesque figures in their own circle where politics and art, literature and religion, met and crossed swords, or played piquet! And now she was coming back, not only to

Paris, but to society; had in fact, arrived, and the card Madame Choudey held in her white dimpled hand announced the first reception at the Caron establishment.

“After years of the country and Rome!” and Sidonie Merson raised her infantile brows and smiled.

“Oh, yes, it is quite true—though so strange; we fancied her settled for life in her old vine-covered villa; no one expected to see the Paris house opened after Alain’s death.”

“It is always the unexpected in which the old Marquise delights,” said big Lavergne, the sculptor, who had joined Sidonie in the window.

“Then how she must have reveled in Alain’s marriage—a death-bed marriage!”

“Yes; and to an Italian girl without a dot.”

“Oh—it is quite possible. The marriage was in Rome. Both the English and Americans go to Rome.”

“Italian! I heard it was an English or American!”

“Surely, not so bad as that!”

“But only those who have money;—or, if they have not the money, our sons and our brothers do not marry them.”

“Good!” and Lavergne nodded with mock sagacity. “We reach conclusions; the newly made Marquise de Caron is either not Anglo-Saxon or was not without wealth.”

“I heard from Dumaresque that she had attended English schools; that no doubt gives her the English suggestion.”

“Oh, I know more than that;” said another, eager to add to the knowledge of the group. “Between Fontainebleau and Moret is the Levigne chateau. Two years ago the dowager was there with a young beauty, Judithe Levigne, and that is the girl Alain married; the dowager was also a Levigne, and the girl an adopted daughter.”

“What is she like now? Has no one seen her?”

“No one more worldly than her confessor—if she possess one, or the nuns of the convent to which she returned to study after her marriage and widowhood.”

“Heavens! We must compose our features when we enter the presence!”

“But we will go, for all that! The dowager is too delightful to miss.”

“A religieuse and a blue stocking!” and the smile of Lavergne was accompanied by a doubtful shrug. “I might devote myself to either, if apart, but never to both in one. Is she then ugly that she dare be so superior?”

“Greek and Latin did not lessen the charm of Heloise for Abelard, Monsieur.”

Sidonie glanced consciously out of the window. Even the dust of six centuries refuses to cover the passion of Heloise, and despite the ecclesiastical flavor of the romance—demoiselles were not supposed to be aware—still—!

Lavergne beckoned to a fair slight man near the piano.

“We will ask Loris—Loris Dumaresque. He is god-son of the dowager. He was in Rome also. He will know.”

“Certainly;” and Madame Choudey glanced in the mirror opposite and leaned her cheek on her jeweled hand, the lace fell from her pretty wrist and the effect was rather pleasing. “Loris; ah, pardon me, since your last canvas is the talk of Paris we must perhaps say Monsieur Dumaresque, or else—Master.”

“The queen calls no man master,” replied the newcomer as he bent over the pretty coquette’s hand. “The humblest of your subjects salutes you.”

“My faith! You have not lost in Rome a single charm of the boulevardes. We feared you would come back a devotee, and addicted to rosaries.”

“I only needed them when departing from Paris—and you.” His eyes alone expressed the final words, but they spoke so eloquently that the woman of the world smiled; attempted to blush, and dropping her own eyes, failed to see the amusement in his.

“Your gallantry argues no lack of practice, Monsieur Loris,” she returned; glancing at him over her fan. “Who was she, during those months of absence? Come; confess; was she some worldly soul like the Kora of your latest picture, or was it the religieuse—the new marquise about whom every one is curious?”

“The Marquise? What particular Marquise?”

“One more particular than you were wont to cultivate our first season in Rome,” remarked Lavergne.

“Oh! oh! Monsieur Dumaresque!” and the fan became a shield from which Madame peered at him. Sidonie almost smiled, but recovered herself, and gave attention to the primroses.

“You see!—Madame Choudey is shocked that you have turned to saintliness.”

“Madame knows me too well to suppose I have ever turned away from it,” retorted Dumaresque. “Do not credit the gossip of Lavergne. He has worked so long among clays and marbles that he has grown a cold-blooded cynic. He distrusts all warmth and color in life.”

“Then why not introduce him to the Marquise? He might find his ideal there—the atmosphere of the sanctuary! I mean the new Marquise de Caron.”

“Oh!” Dumaresque looked from one to the other blankly and then laughed. “It is Madame Alain—the Marquise de Caron you call the devotee? My faith—that is droll!”

“What, then, is so droll?”

“Why should you laugh, Monsieur Loris? What else were we to think of a bride who chooses a convent in preference to society?”

“It was decided she must be very ugly or very devout to make that choice.”

“A natural conclusion from your point of view,” agreed Dumaresque. “Will you be shocked when I tell you she is no less a radical than Alain himself?—that her favorite prophet is Voltaire, and that her books of devotion are not known in the church?”

“Horror!—an infidel!—and only a girl of twenty!” gasped the demure Sidonie.

“Chut!—she may be a veteran of double that. Alain always had a fancy for the grenadiers—the originals. But of course,” he added moodily, “we must go.”

“Take cheer,” laughed Dumaresque, “for I shall be there; and I promise you safe conduct through the gates when the grenadier feminine grows too oppressive.”

“Do you observe,” queried Madame, slyly, “that while Monsieur Loris does speak of her religion, he avoids enlightening us as to her personality?”

“What then do you expect?” returned Dumaresque. “She is the widow of my friend; the child, now, of my dear old god-mother. Should I find faults in her you would say I am jealous. Should I proclaim her virtues you would decide I am prejudiced by friendship, and so”—with a smile that was conciliating and a gesture comprehensive he dismissed the subject.

“Clever Dumaresque!” laughed Lavergne—“well, we shall see! Is it true that your picture of the Kora is to be seen at the dowager’s tomorrow?”

“Quite true. It is sold, you know; but since the dowager is not equal to art galleries I have given it a rest in her rooms before boxing it for the new owner.”

“I envy him,” murmured Madame; “the picture is the pretty octoroon glorified. So, Madame, your god-mother has two novelties to present tomorrow. Usually it is so difficult to find even one.”

When Delaven returned he found Lieutenant McVeigh still in the same nook by the mantel and still alone.

“Well, you are making a lonesome time of it in the middle of the crowd,” he remarked. “How have you been amused?”

“By listening to comments on two pictures, one of a colored beauty, and one of an atheistical grand dame.”

“And of the two?”

“Of the two I should fancy the last not the least offensive. And, look here, Delaven, just get me out of that engagement to look at Dumaresque’s new picture, won’t you? It really is not worth while for an American to come abroad for the study of pictured octoroons—we have too many of the originals at home.”

## CHAPTER II

Whatever the dowager's eccentricities or heresies, she was not afraid of the sunlight, figuratively or literally. From floor to ceiling three great windows let in softened rays on the paneled walls, on the fluted columns of white and gold, and on the famous frescoes of the First Empire. She had no feeling for petite apartments such as appeal to many women; there must, for her, be height and space and long vistas.

"I like perspective to every picture," she said. "I enjoy the groupings of my friends in my own rooms more than elsewhere. From my couch I have the best point of view, and the raised dais flatters me with its suggestion of a throne of state."

She looked so tiny for a chair of state; and with her usual quaint humor she recognized the fact.

"But my temperament brings me an affinity with things that are great for all that," she would affirm. "One does not need to be a physical Colossus in order to see the stars."

The morning after her first reception she was smiling rather sardonically at a picture at the far end of the great salon—that of a very handsome young woman who laughed frankly at the man who leaned towards her and spoke. The man was Dumaresque.

"No use in that, Loris," commented his god-mother, out of his hearing. "It will do an artist no harm, but it will end nowhere."

Their attitude and their youth did make them appear sentimental; but they were not really so. He was only telling her what a shock she had been to those Parisians the day before.

"I understand, now, the regard of Madame Choudey and her pretty, prim niece, Sidonie. They will never forgive me."

"You, Madame!"

"Me, Monsieur. Their fondness will preclude resentment towards you, but against myself they will feel a grievance that I am not as they pictured me. Come; you must tell Maman."

The dowager nodded as one who understood it all.

"They will not forget you, that is sure," she said, smiling; but the girl—for she was only a girl, despite the Madame—shrugged her shoulders.

"Myself, I care little for their remembrance," she replied, indifferently; "they were only curious, not interested, I could see."

"You put my picture in the shadow at all events," protested Dumaresque, pointing to a large canvas hung opposite; "my picture over which art lovers raved until you appeared as a rival."

"How extravagant you are, Monsieur Dumaresque, a true Gascon! To think of rivaling that!"

As she faced the canvas the dowager watched her critically, and nodded her approval to Dumaresque, who smiled and acquiesced. Evidently they were both well satisfied with the living picture of the salon.

The new Marquise de Caron had lived, probably, twenty years. She was of medium height, with straight, dark brows, and dark, long-lashed eyes. The eyes had none of the shyness that was deemed a necessity to beauty in that era of balloon skirts and scuttle bonnets under which beauty of the conventional order hid.

But that she was not conventional was shown by the turban of grey resting on her waved, dark hair, while the veil falling from it and mingling with the folds of her dress, suggested the very artistic draperies of the nuns.

Not a particle of color was in her apparel, and but little in her face; only the lips had that thread of scarlet sung of by Solomon, and the corners of them curved upwards a trifle as she surveyed the canvas.

The turban was loosened and held in her hands as she stood there looking. The picture evidently attracted her, though it did not please. At last she turned to the artist.

“Why do you paint pictures like that?”

“Like that? Pouf! You mean beautiful?”

“No, it is not beautiful,” she said, thoughtfully, as she seated herself on the dais by the dowager’s couch. “To be truly beautiful a thing must impress one with a sense of fitness to our highest perceptive faculties. A soulless thing is never beautiful.”

“What then, of dogs, horses, lions, the many art works in metal or on canvas?”

“You must not raise that wall against her words, Loris, unless you wish to quarrel,” said the dowager in friendly warning. “Judithe is pantheist enough to fancy that animals have souls.”

“But the true artist does not seek to portray the lowest expression of that soul,” persisted Dumaresque’s critic. “Across the Atlantic there are thousands who contend that a woman such as this Kora whom you paint, has no soul because of the black blood in her veins. They think of the dark people as we think of apes. It is all a question of longitude, Monsieur Dumaresque. The crudeness of America is the jest of France. The wisdom of France is the lightest folly of the Brahims; and so it goes ever around the world. The soul of that girl will weigh as heavily as ours in the judgment that is final; but, in the meantime, why teach it and others to admire all that allurements of evil showing in her eyes as she looks at you?”

“Judithe!” protested the dowager.

“Oh!—I do not doubt in the least, Maman, that the woman Kora looked just so when she sat for the picture,” conceded the girl; “but why not endeavor to awaken a higher, stronger expression, and paint *that*, showing the better possibilities within her than mere seductiveness?”

“What fervor and what folly, Marquise!” cried Dumaresque. “It is a speech of folly only because it is I whom you ask to be the missionary, and because it is the pretty Kora you would ask me to convert—and to what? Am I so perfect in all ways that I dare preach, even with paint and brush? Heavens! I should have all Paris laughing at me.”

“But Judithe would not have you that sort of extremist,” said the dowager, laughing at the dismay in his face. “She knows you do well; only she fears you do not exert yourself enough to perceive how you might do better.”

“She forgets; I did once; only a few weeks ago,” he said briefly; and the girl dropped her hands wearily and leaned her head against the dowager’s couch.

“Maman, our good friend is going to talk matrimony again,” she said plaintively; “and if he does, I warn you, though it is only mid-day, I shall go asleep;” and her eyes closed tightly as though to make the threat more effective.

“You see,” said the old lady, raising one chiding finger, “it is really lamentable, Loris, that your sentimental tendencies have grown into a steady habit.”

“I agree,” he assented; “but consider. She assails me—she, a saintly little judge in grey! She lectures, preaches at me! Tells me I lack virtue! But more is the pity for me; she will not remember that one virtue was most attractive to me, and she bade me abandon it.”

“Tell him,” said the girl with her eyes still closed, “to not miscall things; no one is all virtue.”

“Pardon; that is what you seemed to me, and I never before fancied that the admirable virtues would find me so responsive, when, pouf! with one word you demolished all my castle of delight and now condemn me that I am an outlaw from those elevating fancies.”

He spoke with such a comical air of self-pity that the old lady laughed and the young Marquise opened her eyes.

“A truce, Monsieur Loris; you are amusing, but you like to pose as one of the rejected and disconsolate when you have women to listen. It is all because you are just a little theatrical, is it not? How effective it must be with your Parisiennes!”

“My faith!” he exclaimed, turning to the dowager in dismay; “and only three months since she emerged from the convent! What then do they not teach in those sanctuaries!”

The girl arose, made him a mocking obeisance, and swinging the turban in her hand passed into the alcoved music room; a little later an Italian air, soft, dreamy, drifted to them from the keys of the piano.

“She will make a sensation,” prophesied Dumaresque, sagely.

“You mean socially? No; if left to herself she would ignore society; it is not necessary to her; only her affection for me brings her from her studies now. Should I die tomorrow she would go back to them next week.”

“But why, why, why? If she were unattractive one could understand; but being what she is—”

“Being what she is, she has a fever to know all the facts of earth and all the guesses at heaven.”

“And bars out marriage!”

“Not for other people,” retorted the dowager.

“But to what use then all these accomplishments, all this pursuit of knowledge? Does she mean to hide it all in some convent at last?”

“I would look for her rather among some savage tribes, doing missionary work.”

“Yes, making them acquainted with Voltaire,” he said, laughingly. “But you are to be envied, god-mother, in having her all to yourself; she adores you!”

The dark old face flushed slightly, and the keen eyes softened with pleasure.

“It was Alain’s choice, and it was a good one,” she said, briefly. “What of the English people you asked to bring today?”

“They are not English; one is American and one is Irish.”

“True; but their Anglo-Saxon makes them all English to me. I hear there are so many of them in Paris now; Comtesse Biron brings one today; there is her message, what is the name?”

Dumaresque unfolded the pink sheet, glanced at it and smiled.

“My faith; it is the mother of the young lieutenant whom I asked to bring, Madame McVeigh. So, she was a school friend of the Comtesse Helene, eh? That seems strange; still, this Madame McVeigh may be a French woman transplanted.”

“I do not know; but it will be a comfort if she speaks French. The foreigners of only one language are trying.”

Mrs. McVeigh offered no linguistic difficulties to the dowager who was charmed with her friend’s friend.

“But you are surely not the English-Americans of whom we see so much these days? I cannot think it.”

“No, Madame. I am of the French-Americans—the creoles—hence the speech you are pleased to approve. My people were the Villanennes of Louisiana.”

“Ah! a creole? The creoles come here from the West Indies also—beautiful women. My daughter has had some as school friends; only this morning she was explaining to an English caller the difference between a creole and that personality;” and the dowager waived her hand towards the much discussed picture of Kora.

The fine face of the American woman took on a trace of haughtiness, and she glanced at the speaker as though alert to some covert insult. The unconsciousness in the old face reassured her, though she could not quite banish coldness from her tones as she replied:

“I should not think such an explanation necessary in enlightened circles; the creole is so well known as the American born of the Latin races, while that,” with a gesture towards the oriental face on the canvas, “is the offspring of the African race—our slaves.”

“With occasionally a Caucasian father,” suggested the dowager wickedly. “I have never seen this new idol of the ballet—Kora; but her prettiness is the talk of the studios, though she does not deny she came from your side of the sea, and has the shadows of Africa in her hair.”

“A quadron or octoroon, no doubt. It appears strange to find the outcasts of the States elected to that sort of notice over here—as though the old world, tired of civilization and culture, turned for distraction to the barbarians.”

“Barbarians, indeed!” laughed the Countess Biron—the Countess Helene, as she was called by her friends. She laughed a great deal, knew a great deal, and never forgot a morsel of Parisian gossip. “This barbarian has only to show herself on the boulevards and all good citizens crane their necks for a glimpse of her. The empress herself attracts less attention.”

The dowager clicked the lid of her snuff box and shrugged her shoulders.

“That Spanish woman—tah! As *Mademoiselle d’Industrie* I do not see why she should claim precedence. The blonde Spaniard is no more beautiful than the brown American.”

“For all that, Louis Napoleon has placed her among the elect,” remarked the Countess Helene, with a mischievous glance towards the Marquise, each understanding that the mention of the Second Empire was like a call to war, in that salon.

“Louis!” and the dowager shrugged her shoulder, and made a gesture of contempt. “That accident! What is he that any one should be exalted by his favor? *Mademoiselle de Montijo* was—for the matter of that—his superior! Her family had place and power; her paternity was undisputed; but this Louis—tah! There was but one Bonaparte; that subaltern from Corsica; that meteor. He was, with all his faults, a worker, a thinker, an original. He would have swept into the sea the envious islanders across the channel to whom this Bonaparte truckled—this man called Bonaparte, who was no Bonaparte at all—a vulture instead of an eagle!”

So exclaimed the dowager, who carried in her memory the picture of the streets of Paris when neither women nor children were spared by the bullets and sabres of his slaughterers—the hyena to whom the clergy so bowed down that not a mass for the dead patriots could be secured in Paris, from either priest or archbishop, and the Republicans piled in the streets by hundreds!

Mrs. McVeigh turned in some dismay to the Countess Helene. The people of the Western world, the women in particular, knew little of the bitter spirit permeating the politics of France. The United States had very knotty problems of her own to discuss in 1859.

“Tah!” continued the dowager, “I startle you! Well, well—it profits nothing to recite these ills. Many a man, and woman, too, has been put to death for saying less;—and the exile of my son to remember—yes; all that! He was Republican—I a Legitimist; I of the old, he of the new. Republics are good in theory; France might have given it a longer trial but for this trickster politician, who is called Emperor—by the grace of God!”

“Do they add ‘Defender of the Faith’ as our cautious English neighbors persist in doing?” asked the girlish Marquise with a smile. “Your country, Madame McVeigh, has no such cant in its constitution. You have reason to be proud of the great men, the wise, far-seeing men, who framed those laws.”

Mrs. McVeigh smiled and sighed in self-pity.

“How frivolous American women will appear to you, Madame! Few of us ever read the constitution of our country. I confess I only know the first line:—‘When in the course of human events it becomes necessary,’ but what they thought necessary to do is very vague in my mind.”

Then, catching the glance of the Marquise bright with laughter, she laughed also without knowing well at what.

“Well; what is it?”

“Only that you are quoting from the Declaration of Independence, and fancy it the constitution.”

“That is characteristic of American women, too,” laughed Mrs. McVeigh; “declarations of independence is one of our creeds. But I shall certainly be afraid of you, Marquise. At your age the learning and comparing of musty laws would have been dull work for me. It is the age for dancing and gay carelessness.”

The Marquise smiled assent with her curious, dark eyes, in which amber lights shown. She had a certain appealing meekness at times—a sweet deference that was a marked contrast to the aggressiveness with which she had met Dumaresque in the morning. The Countess Helene, observing the deprecating manner with which she received the implied praise for erudition, found herself watching with a keener interest the girl who had seemed to her a mere pretty book-worm.

“She is more than that,” thought the astute worldling. “Alain’s widow has a face for tragedy, the address of an ingenue, and the *tout en semble* of a coquette.”

The dowager smiled at Mrs. McVeigh’s remarks.

“She cares too little for dancing, the natural expression of healthy young animalism; but what can I do?—nothing less frivolous than a salon a-la-Madame D’Agoult is among her ambitions.”

“Let us persuade her to visit America,” suggested Mrs. McVeigh. “I can, at least, prescribe a change promising more of joyous festivity—life on a Carolina plantation.”

“What delight for her! she loves travel and new scenes. Indeed, Alain, my son, has purchased a property in your land, and some day she may go over. But for the brief remnant of my life I shall be selfish and want her always on my side of the ocean. What, child? you pale at the mention of death—tah! it is not so bad. The old die by installments, and the last one is not the worst.”

“May it be many years in the future, Maman,” murmured the young Marquise, whose voice betrayed a certain effort as she continued: “I thank you for the suggestion, Madame McVeigh; the property Maman refers to is in New Orleans, and I surely hope to see your country some day; my sympathies are there.”

“We have many French people in the South; our own part of the land was settled originally by the cavaliers of France. You would not feel like a stranger there.”

“Not in your gracious neighborhood, Madame;”—her face had regained its color, and her eyes their brilliant expression.

“And there you would see living pictures like this,” suggested the Countess Helene; “what material for an artist!”

“Oh, no; in the rice fields of South Carolina they do not look like that. We have none of those Oriental effects in dress, you know. Our colored women look very sober in comparison; still they have their attractions, and might be an interesting study for you if you have never known colored folks.”

“Oh, but I have,” remarked the Marquise, smiling; “an entire year of my life was passed in a school with two from Brazil, and one from your country had run away the same season.”

“Judithe; child!”

The dowager fairly gasped the words, and the Marquise moved quickly to her side and sank on the cushion at her feet, looking up with an assuring smile, as she caressed the aged hand.

“Yes, it is quite true,” she continued; “but see, I am alive to tell the tale, and really they say the American was a most harmless little thing; the poor, imprisoned soul.”

“How strange!” exclaimed Mrs. McVeigh; “do you mean as fellow pupils?—colored girls! It seems awful.”

“Really, I never thought of it so; you see, so many planters’ daughters come from the West Indies to Paris schools. Many in feature and color suggest the dark continent, but are accepted, nevertheless. However, the girl I mention was not dark. Her mother had seven white ancestors to one of black. Yet she confided her story to a friend of mine, and she was an American slave.”

The dowager was plainly distressed at the direction of the conversation, for the shock to Mrs. McVeigh was so very apparent, and as her hostess remembered that slavery was threatening to become an institution of uncompromising discord across the water, all reference to it was likely to be unwelcome. She pressed the fingers of the Marquise warningly, and the Marquise smiled up at her, but evidently did not understand.

“Can such a thing be possible?” asked Mrs. McVeigh, incredulously; “in that case I shall think twice before I send *my* daughter here to school, as I had half intended—and you remained in such an establishment?”

“I had no choice; my guardians decided those questions.”

“And the faculty—they allowed it?”

“They did not know it. She was represented as being the daughter of an American planter; which was true. I have reason to believe that my friend was her only confidant.”

“And for what purpose was she educated in such an establishment?”

“That she might gain accomplishments enhancing her value as companion to the man who was to own her.”

“Madame!”

“Marquise!”

The two exclamations betrayed how intent her listeners were, and how full of horror the suggestion. There was even incredulity in the tones, an initiative protest against such possibilities. But the Marquise looked from one to the other with unruffled earnestness.

“So it was told to me,” she continued; “these accomplishments meant extra thousands to the man who sold her, and the man was her father’s brother.”

“No, no, no!” and Mrs. McVeigh shook her head decidedly to emphasize her conviction. “I cannot believe that at the present day in our country such an arrangement could exist. No one, knowing our men, could credit such a story. In the past century such abuses might have existed, but surely not now—in all my life I have heard of nothing like that.”

“Probably the girl was romancing,” agreed the Marquise, with a shrug, “for you would no doubt be aware if such a state of affairs had existence.”

“Certainly.”

“Then your men are not so clever as ours,” laughed the Countess; “for they manage many little affairs their own women never suspect.”

Mrs. McVeigh looked displeased. To her it was not a matter of cleverness, but of principle and morality; and in her mind there was absolutely no comparison possible without jarring decidedly on the prejudices of her Gallic friends, so she let the remark pass without comment.

“Yes,” said the Marquise, rising, “when I heard the story of the girl Rhoda I fancied it one the white mistresses of America seldom heard.”

“Rhoda?”

“Yes, that was the name the girl was known by in the school—Rhoda Larue—the Larue was a fiction; slaves, I am told, having no legal right to names.”

“Heavens! What horrors you fancy! Pray give us some music child, and drive away the gloomy pictures you have suggested.”

“An easy penance;” and the Marquise moved smilingly towards the alcove.

“What!” cried the Countess Helene, in protest, “and the story unfinished! Why, it might develop into a romance. I dote on romances in real life or fiction, but I like them all spelled out for me to the very end.”

“Instead of a romance, I should fancy the girl’s life very prosaic wherever it is lived,” returned the Marquise. “But before her year at the convent had quite expired she made her escape—took no one into her confidence; and when her guardian, or his agent, came to claim her, there were storms, apologies, but no ward.”

“And you do not call that a romance?” said the Countess. “I do; it offers all sorts of possibilities.”

“Yes, the possibility of this;” and Mrs. McVeigh pointed to the picture before them. The Marquise halted, looked curiously at the speaker, then regarded the oriental face on the canvas thoughtfully, and passed her hand over her brow with a certain abstraction.

“I never thought of that,” she said slowly. “You poor creature!” and she took a step nearer the picture. “I–never–thought of that! Maman, Madame McVeigh has just taught me something—to be careful, careful how we judge the unfortunate. They say this Kora is a light woman in morals; but suppose—suppose somewhere the life that girl told of in the convent really does exist, and suppose this pretty Kora had been one of the victims chosen! Should we dare then to judge her by our standards, Maman? I think not.”

Without awaiting an opinion she walked slowly into the alcove, and left the three ladies gazing at each other with a trifle of constraint mingled with their surprise.

“Another sacred cause to fight for,” sighed the dowager, with a quaint grimace. “Last week it was the Jews, who seem to me quite able to take care of themselves! Next week it may be Hindoo widows; but just now it is Kora!”

“She should have been born a boy in the age when it was thought a virtue to don armor and do battle for the weak or incapable; that would have suited Judithe.”

“Not if it was the fashion,” laughed the Countess Helene; “she would insist on being original.”

“The Marquise has a lovely name,” remarked Mrs. McVeigh; “one could not imagine a weak or unattractive person called Judithe.”

“No; they could not,” agreed her friend, “it makes one think of the tragedy of Holofernes. It suggests the strange, the fascinating, the unusual, and—it suits Madame la Marquise.”

“Your approval is an unconscious compliment to me,” remarked the dowager, indulging herself in a tiny pinch of snuff and tapping the jeweled lid of the box; “I named her.”

“Indeed!” and Mrs. McVeigh smiled at the complacent old lady, while the Countess Helene almost stared. Evidently she, also, had heard the opinions concerning the young widow’s foreign extraction. Possibly the dowager guessed what was passing in her mind, for she nodded and smiled.

“Truly, the eyes did it. Though she was not so fully developed as now, those slumbrous, oriental eyes of hers suggested somehow that beauty of Bethulia; the choice was left to me and so she was christened Judithe.”

“She voices such startlingly paganish ideas at times that I can scarcely imagine her at the christening font,” remarked the Countess.

“In truth her questions are hard to answer sometimes. But the heart is all right.”

“And the lady herself magnetic enough without the added suggestion of the name,” remarked Mrs. McVeigh; then she held up her finger as the Countess was about to speak, for from the music room came the appealing legato notes of “Suwanee River,” played with great tenderness.

“What is it?” asked the dowager.

“One of our American folk songs,” and the grey eyes of the speaker were bright with tears; “in all my life I have never heard it played so exquisitely.”

“For a confirmed blue stocking, the Marquise understands remarkably well how to make her little compliments,” said the Countess Helene.

Mrs. McVeigh arose, and with a slight bow to the dowager, passed into the alcove. At the last bar of the song a shadow fell across the keys, and the musician saw their American visitor beside her.

“I should love to have you see the country whose music you interpret so well,” she said impulsively; “I should like to be with you when you do see it.”

“You are kind, and I trust you may be,” replied the Marquise, with a pretty nod that was a bow in miniature. She was rising from the piano, when Mrs. McVeigh stopped her.

“Pray don’t! It is a treat to hear you. I only wanted to ask you to take my invitation seriously and come some time to our South Carolina home; I should like to be one of your friends.”

“It would give me genuine pleasure,” was the frank reply. “You know I confessed that my sympathies were there ahead of me.” The smile accompanying the words was so adorable that Mrs. McVeigh bent to kiss her.

The Marquise offered her cheek with a graciousness that was a caress in itself, and thus their friendship commenced.

After the dowager and her daughter-in-law were again alone, and with an assurance that even the privileged Dumaresque would not break in on their evening, the elder lady asked, abruptly, a question over which she had been puzzling.

“Child, what possessed you to tell to a Southern woman of the States that story reflecting on the most vital of their economic institutions? Had you forgotten their prejudices? I was in dread that you might offend her, and I am sure Helene Biron was quite as nervous.”

“I did not offend her, Maman,” replied the Marquise, looking up from her embroidery with a smile, “and I had not forgotten their prejudices. I only wanted to judge if she herself had ever heard the story.”

“Madame McVeigh!—and why?”

“Because Rhoda Larue was also a native of that particular part of Carolina to which she has invited me, and because of a fact which I have never forgotten, the young planter for whom she was educated—the slave owner who bought her from her father’s brother was named McVeigh. My new friend is delightful in herself but—she has a son.”

“My child!” gasped the dowager, staring at her. “Such a man the son of that charming, sincere woman! Yes, I had forgotten their name, and bid you forget the story; never speak of it again, child!”

“I should be sorry to learn it is the same family,” admitted the Marquise; “still, I shall make a point of avoiding the son until we learn something about him. It is infamous that such men should be received into society.”

The dowager relapsed into silence, digesting the troublesome question proposed.

Occasionally she glanced towards the Marquise as though in expectation of a continuation of the subject. But the Marquise was engrossed by her embroideries, and when she did speak again it was of some entirely different matter.

## CHAPTER III

Two mornings later M. Dumaresque stood in the Caron reception room staring with some dissatisfaction across the breadth of green lawn where the dryad and faun statues held vases of vining and blooming things.

He had just been told the dowager was not yet to be seen. That was only what he had expected; but he had also been told that the Marquise, accompanied, as usual, by Madame Blanc, had been out for two hours—and that he had not expected.

“Did she divine I would be in evidence this morning?” Then he glanced in a pier glass and grimaced. “Gone out with that plain Madame Blanc, when she might have had a treat—an hour with me!”

While he stood there both the Marquise and her companion appeared, walking briskly. Madame Blanc, a stout woman of thirty-five, was rather breathless.

“My dear Marquise, you do not walk, you fly,” she gasped, halting on the steps.

“You poor dear!” said the Marquise, patting her kindly on the shoulder. “I know you are faint for want of your coffee,” and at the same time her strong young arms helped the panting attendant mount the steps more quickly.

Once within the hall Madame Blanc dropped into the chair nearest the door, while the Marquise swept into the reception room and hastily to a window fronting on the street.

“How foolish of me,” she breathed aloud. “How my heart beats!”

“Allow me to prescribe,” said Dumaresque, stepping from behind the screen of the curtain, and smiling at her.

She retreated, her hands clasped over her breast, her eyes startled; then meeting his eyes she began to laugh a little nervously.

“How you frightened me!”

“And it was evidently not the first, this morning.”

She sank into a seat, indicated another to him, away from the window, removed her hat and leaned back looking at him.

“No, you are not,” she said at last. “But account for yourself, Monsieur Loris! The sun is not yet half way on its course, yet you are actually awake, and visible to humanity—it looks serious.”

“It is,” he agreed, smiling at her, yet a trifle nervous in his regard. “I have taken advantage of the only hour out of the twenty when there would be a chance of seeing you alone. So I made an errand—and I am here.”

“And—?”

“And I have determined that, after the fashion of the Americans or the English, I shall no longer ask the intervention of a third person. I decided on it last night before I left here. I have no title to offer you—you coldest and most charming of women, but I shall have fame; you will have no reason to be ashamed of the name of Dumaresque. Put me on probation, if you like, a year, two years!—only—”

“No; no!” she said pleadingly, putting out her hands with a slight repellent gesture. “It is not to be thought of, Monsieur Loris, Maman has told you! Twice has the same reply been given. I really cannot allow you to continue this suppliance. I like you too well to be angry with you, but—”

“I shall be content with the liking—”

“But I should not!” she declared, smilingly. “I have my ideals, if you please, Monsieur. Marriage should mean love. It is only matrimony for which liking is the foundation. I do not approve of matrimony.”

“Pardon; that is the expression of the romance lover—the school girl. But that I know you have lived the life of a nun I should fear some one had been before me, some one who realized those

ideals of yours, and that instead of studying the philosophies of life, you have been a student of the philosophy of love.”

He spoke lightly—half laughingly, but the flush of pink suffusing her throat and brow checked his smile. He could only stare.

She arose hastily and walked the length of the room. When she turned the color was all gone, but her eyes were softly shining.

“All philosophy falls dead when the heart speaks,” she said, as she resumed her chair; “and now, Monsieur Loris, I mean to make you my father confessor, for I know no better way of ending these periodical proposals of yours, and at the same time confession might—well—it might not be without a certain benefit to myself.” He perceived that while she had assumed an air of raillery, there was some substance back of the mocking shadow.

“I shall feel honored by your confidence, Marquise,” he was earnest enough in that.

“And when you realize that there is—some one else—will you then resume your former role of friend?”

“I shall try. Who is the man?”

She met his earnest gaze with a demure smile, “I do not know, Monsieur.”

“What, then?—you are only jesting with me?”

“Truly, I do not know his name.”

“Yet you are in love with him?”

“I am not quite certain even of that,” and she smiled mockingly; “sometimes I have a fancy it may be witchcraft. I only know I am haunted—have been haunted four long weeks by a face, a voice, and two blue eyes.”

“Blue?” Dumaresque glanced in the mirror—his own eyes were blue.

“Yes, Monsieur Loris—blue with a dash of grey—the grey of the sea when clouds are heavy, and the blue of the farthest waves before the storm breaks—don’t you see the color?”

“Only the color of your fancy. He is the owner of blue eyes, a haunting voice, and—what else is my rival?”

“A foreigner, and—Monsieur Incognito.”

“You have met?”

“Three times;” and she held up as many white fingers. The reply evidently astounded Dumaresque.

“You have met three times a man whose name you do not know?”

“We are even on that score,” she said, “for he has spoken to me three times and does not know what I am called.”

“But to address you—”

“He called me Mademoiselle Unknown.”

“Bravo! This grows piquant; an adventure with all the flavor of the eighteenth instead of the nineteenth century. A real adventure, and you its heroine! Oh, Marquise, Marquise!”

“Ah! since you appreciate the humor of the affair you will no longer be oppressed by sentimental fancies concerning me;” and she nodded her head as though well pleased with the experiment of her confession. “You perceive how wildly improper I have been; still, I deny the eighteenth century flavor, Monsieur. Then, with three meetings the cavalier would have developed into a lover, and having gained entrance to a lady’s heart, he would have claimed also the key to her castle.”

“Astute pupil of the nuns!—and Monsieur Incognito?”

“He certainly does not fancy me possessed of either castle or keys. I was to him only an unpretentious English companion in attendance on Madame Blanc in the woods of Fontainebleau.”

“English! Since when are you fond enough of them to claim kindred?”

“He was English; he supposed me so when I replied to him in that tongue. He had taken the wrong path and—”

“And you walked together on another, also the wrong path.”

“No, Monsieur; that first day we only bowed and parted, but the ghost of his voice remained,” and she sighed in comical self-pity.

“I see! You have first given me the overture and now the curtain is to rise. Who opens the next scene?”

“Madame Blanc.”

“My faith! This grows tragical. Blanc, the circumspect, the dowager’s most trusted companion. Has your stranger bewitched her also?”

“She was too near sighted to tell him from the others. I was making a sketch of beeches and to pass the time she fed the carp. A fan by which she set store, fell into the water. She lamented until Monsieur Incognito secured it. Of course I had to be the one to thank him, as she speaks no English.”

“Certainly!—and then?”

“Then I found a seat in the shade for Madame Blanc and her crochet, and selected a sunny spot myself, where I could dry the fan.”

“Alone?”

“At first, I was alone.”

“Delicious! You were never more charming, Marquise; go on.”

“When he saw Madame Blanc placidly knitting under the trees, while I spread her fan to dry, he fancied I was in her service; the fancy was given color by the fact that my companion, as usual, was dressed with extreme elegance, whilst I was insignificant in an old school habit.”

“Insignificant—um! There was conversation I presume?”

“Not much,” she confessed, and again the delicious wave of color swept over her face, “but he had suggested spreading the fan on his handkerchief, and of course then he had to remain until it was dry.”

“Clever Englishman; and as he supposed you to be a paid companion, was he, also, some gentleman’s gentleman?”

She flashed one mutinous glance at him.

“The jest seemed to me amusing; his presence was an exhilaration; and I did not correct his little mistake as to mistress and maid. When he attempted to tell me who or what he was I stopped him; that would have spoiled the adventure. I know he had just come from England; that he was fascinating without being strictly handsome; that he could say through silence the most eloquent things to one! It was an hour in Arcady—just one hour without past or future. They are the only absolutely joyous ones, are they not?”

“Item: it was the happiest hour in the life of Madame La Marquise,” commented Dumaresque, with an attempt at drollery, and an accompaniment of a sigh. “Well—the finale?”

“The hour ended! I said ‘good day, Monsieur Incognito.’ He said, ‘good night, Mademoiselle Unknown.’”

“Good night! Heavens—it was not then an hour, but a day!”

“It was an hour, Monsieur! That was only one way of conveying his belief that all the day was in that hour.”

“Blessed be the teachings of the convent! And you would have me believe that an Englishman could make such speeches? However, I am eager for the finale—the next day?”

“The next day I surprised Monsieur and Madame Blanc by declaring the sketch I was doing of the woods there, was hopelessly bad—I would never complete it.”

“Ah!” and Dumaresque’s exclamation had a note of hope; “he had been a bore after all?”

“The farthest thing possible from it! When I woke in the morning it was an hour earlier than usual. I found myself with my eyes scarcely open, standing before the clock to reckon every instant of time until I should see him again. Well, from that moment my adventure ceased to be merely amusing. I told myself how many kinds of an idiot I was, and I thrust my head among the pillows

again. I realized then, Monsieur, what a girl's first romance means to her. I laughed at myself, of course, as I had laughed at others often. But I could not laugh down the certainty that the skies were bluer, the birds' songs sweeter, and all life more lovely than it had ever been before."

"And by what professions, or what mystic rhymes or runes, did he bring about this enchantment?"

"Not by a single sentence of protestation? An avowal would have sent me from him without a regret. If we had not met at all after that first look, that first day, I am convinced I should have been haunted by him just the same! There were long minutes when we did not speak or look at each other; but those minutes were swept with harmonies. Now, Monsieur Loris, would you call that love, or is it a sort of summer-time madness?"

"Probably both, Marquise; but there was a third meeting?"

"After three days, Monsieur; days when I forced myself to remain indoors; and the struggle it was, when I could close my eyes and see him waiting there under the trees!"

"Ah! There had been an appointment?"

"Pardon, Monsieur; you are perhaps confounding this with some remembered adventure of your own. There was no appointment. But I felt confident that blue-eyed ogre was walking every morning along the path where I met him first, and that he would compel me to open the door and walk straight to our own clump of bushes so long as I did not send him away."

"And you finally went?"

She nodded. "He was there. His smile was like sunshine. He approached me, but I—I did not wait. I went straight to him. He said, 'At last, Mademoiselle Unknown!'"

"Pardon; but it is your words I have most interest in," reminded her confessor.

"But I said so few. I remember I had some violets, and he asked me what they were called in French. I told him I was going away; I had fed the carp for the last time. He was also leaving. He had gathered some wild forget-me-nots. He was coming into Paris."

"And you parted unknown to each other?"

"How could I do else? When he said, 'I bid you good-bye, Mademoiselle Unknown, but we shall meet again.' Then—then I did correct him a little; I said *Madame* Unknown, Monsieur."

"Ah! And to that—?"

"He said not a word, only looked at me; *how* he looked at me! I felt guilty as a criminal. When I looked up he turned away—turned very politely, with lifted hat and a bow even you could not improve upon, Monsieur Loris, I watched him out of sight in the forest. He never halted; and he never turned his head."

"You might at least have let him go without the thought that you were a flirtatious matron with a husband somewhere in the back-ground."

"Yes; I almost regret that. Still, since I had to send him away, what matter how? It would have been so common-place had I said: 'We receive on Thursdays; find Loris Dumaresque when you reach Paris; he will present you.' No!"—and she shook her head laughingly, "the three days were quite enough. He is an unknown world; a romance only suggested, and the suggestion is delicious. I would not for the world have him nearer prosaic reality."

"You will forget him in another three weeks," prophesied Dumaresque; "he has been only a shadow of a man; a romantic dream. I shall refuse to accept any but realities as rivals."

"I assure you, no reality has been so appealing as that dream," she persisted. "I am telling you all this with the hope that once I have laughed with you over this witchcraft it will be robbed of its potency. I have destroyed the sacred wall of sentiment surrounding this ghost of mine because I rebel at being mastered by it."

"Mastered?—you?"

"Oh, you laugh! You think me, then, too cold or too philosophic, in spite of what I have just told you?"

“Not cold, my dear Marquise. But if you will pardon the liberty of analysis I will venture the opinion that when you are mastered it will be by yourself. Your very well-shaped head will forever defend you from the mastery of others.”

“Mastered by myself? I do not think I quite understand you,” she said, slowly. “But I must tell you the extreme limit of my folly, the folly of the imagination. Each morning I go for a walk, as I did this morning. Each time I leave the door I have with me the fancy that somewhere I shall meet him. Of course my reason tells me how improbable it is, but I put the reason aside and enjoy my walk all the more because of that fancied tryst. Now, Monsieur Loris, you have been the victim of my romance long enough. Come; we will join Madame Blanc and have some coffee.”

“And this is all you have to tell me, Marquise?”

“All but one little thing, Monsieur,” and she laughed, though the laugh was a trifle nervous; “this morning for an instant I thought the impossible had happened. Only one street from here my ogre materialized again, or some one wondrously like him. How startled I was! How I hurried poor Madame Blanc! But we were evidently not discovered. I realized, however, at that moment, how imprudent I had been. How shocked Maman would be if she knew. Yet it was really the most innocent jest, to begin with.”

“They often begin that way,” remarked Dumaresque, consolingly.

“Well, I have arrived at one conclusion. It is only because I have met so few men, that *one* dare make such an overwhelming impression on me. I rebel; and shall amaze Maman by becoming a social butterfly for a season. So, in future bring all your most charming friends to see me; but no tall, athletic, blue-eyed Englishmen.”

“So,” said Dumaresque, as he followed her to the breakfast room, “I lay awake all night that I may make love to you early in the morning, and you check-mate me by thrusting forward a brawny Englishman.”

“Pardon; he is not brawny;” she laughed; “I never said so; nevertheless, Monsieur Loris, I can teach you one thing: When love has to be *made* it is best not to waste time with it. The real love makes itself and will neither be helped or hindered; and the love that can be conquered is not worth having.”

He shrugged his shoulders and rolled his eyes towards the ceiling.

“In a year and a day I shall return to the discussion. I give you so long to change your mind and banish your phantasy; and in the meantime I remain your most devoted visitor.”

Madame Blanc was already in evidence with the coffee, and Dumaresque watched the glowing face of the Marquise, surprised and puzzled at this new influence she confessed to and asked analysis for. This book-worm; this reader of law and philosophy; how charming had been her blushes even while she spoke in half mockery of the face haunting her. If only such color would sweep over her cheek at the thought of him—Dumaresque!

But he had his lesson for the present. He would not play the sighing Strephon, realizing that this particular Amaryllis was not to be won so. As he received the coffee from her hand he remarked, mischievously, “Marquise, you did not quite complete the story. What became of the forget-me-nots he gathered?”

But the Marquise only laughed.

“We are no longer in the confessional, Monsieur,” she said.

## CHAPTER IV

Mrs. McVeigh found herself thinking of the young Marquise very often. She was not pleased at the story with which she had been entertained there; yet was she conscious of the fact that she would have been very much more displeased had the story been told by any other than the fascinating girl-widow.

“Do you observe,” she remarked to the Countess Helene, “that young though she is she seems to have associated only with elderly people, or with books where various questions were discussed? It is a pity. She has been robbed of childhood and girlhood by the friends who are so proud of her, and who would make of her only a lovely thinking-machine.”

“You do not then approve of the strong-minded woman, the female philosopher.”

“Oh, yes;” replied Mrs. McVeigh, dubiously; “but this delightful creature does not belong to that order yet. She is bubbling over with enthusiasm for the masses because she has not yet been touched by enthusiasm for an individual. I wish she would fall in love with some fine fellow who would marry her and make her life so happy she would forget all the bad laws of nations and the bad morals of the world.”

“Hum! I fancy suitors have not been lacking. Her income is no trifle.”

“In our country a girl like that would need no income to insure her desirable suitors. She is the most fascinating creature, and so unconscious of her charms.”

Her son, who had been at a writing desk in the corner, laid down his pen and turned around.

“My imperfect following of your rapid French makes me understand at least that this is a serious case,” he said, teasingly. “Are you sure, mother, that she has not treated you to enchantment? I heard the same lady described a few days ago, and the picture drawn was that of an atheistical revolutionist, an unlovely and unlovable type.”

“Ah!” said the Countess Helene. “You also are opposed to beautiful machines that think.”

“I have never been accustomed to those whose thoughts follow such unpleasant lines, Madame,” he replied. “I have been taught to revere the woman whose foundation of life is the religion scorned by the lady you are discussing. A woman without that religion would be like a scentless blossom to me.”

The Countess smiled and raised her brows slightly. This severe young officer, her friend’s son, took himself and his tastes very seriously.

Looking at him she fancied she could detect both the hawk and the dove meeting in those clear, level eyes of his. Though youthful, she could see in him the steadiness of the only son—the head of the house—the protector and the adored of his mother and sister, who were good little women, flattering their men folks by their dependence. And from that picture the lady who was studying him passed on to the picture of the possible bride to whom he would some day fling his favors. She, also, must be adoring and domestic and devout. Her articles of faith must be as orthodox as his affection. He would love her, of course, but must do the thinking for the family.

Because the Lieutenant lacked the buoyant, adaptable French temperament of his mother, the Countess was inclined to be rather severe in her judgment of him. He was so young; so serious. She did not fancy young men except in the pages of romances; even when they had brains they appeared to her always over-weighted with the responsibility of them.

It is only after a man has left his boyhood in the distance that he can amuse a woman with airy nothings and make her feel that his words are only the froth on the edge of a current that is deep—deep!

Mrs. McVeigh, unconscious of the silent criticism being passed on her son, again poised a lance in defence of the stranger under discussion.

“It is absurd to call her atheistical,” she insisted; “would I be influenced by such a person? She is an enthusiast, student of many religions, possibly; but people should know her before they judge,

and you, Kenneth, should see her before you credit their gossip. She is a beautiful, sympathetic child, oppressed too early with the seriousness of life.”

“At any rate, I see I shall never take you home heart whole,” he decided, and laughed as he gathered up letters he had been addressing and left the room.

“One could fancy your son making a tour of the world and coming back without a sentimental scratch,” said the Countess, after he had gone. “I have noticed him with women; perfectly gallant, interested and willing to please, but not a flutter of an eyelid out of form; not a tone of the voice that would flatter one. I am not sure but that the women are all the more anxious to claim such a man, the victory seems greater, yet it is more natural to find them reciprocal. Perhaps there is a betrothed somewhere to whom he has sworn allegiance in its most rigid form; is that the reason?”

Mrs. McVeigh smiled. She rather liked to think her son not so susceptible as Frenchmen pretended to be.

“I do not think there are any vows of allegiance,” she confessed; “but there is someone at home to whom we have assigned him since they were children.”

“Truly? But I fancied the parents did not arrange the affairs matrimonial in your country.”

“We do not; that is, not in a definite official way. Still, we are allowed our little preferences, and sometimes we can help or hinder in our own way. But this affair”—and she made a gesture towards the door of her son’s room, “this affair is in embryo yet.”

“Good settlements?”

“Oh, yes; the girl is quite an heiress and is the niece of his guardian—his guardian that was. Their estates join, and they have always been fond of each other; so you see we have reason for our hopes.”

“Excellent!” agreed her friend, “and to conclude, I am to suppose of course she is such a beauty that she blinds his eyes to all the charms arrayed before him here.”

“Well, we never thought of Gertrude as a beauty exactly; but she is remarkably good looking; all the Loring are. I would have had her with me for this visit but that her uncle, with whom she lives, has been very ill for months. They, also, are of colonial French descent with, of course, the usual infusions of Anglo-Saxon and European blood supposed to constitute the new American.”

“The new—”

“Yes, you understand, we have yet the original American in our land—the Indian.”

“Ah!” with a gesture of repulsion; “the savages; and then, the Africans! How brave you are, Claire. I should die of fear.”

Mrs. McVeigh only smiled. She was searching through a portfolio, and finally extracted a photograph from other pictures and papers.

“That is Miss Loring,” she said, and handed it to the Countess, who examined it with critical interest.

“Very pretty,” she decided, “an English type. If she were a Parisian, a modiste and hairdresser would do wonders towards developing her into a beauty of the very rare, very fair order. She suggests a slender white lily.”

“Yes, Gertrude is a little like that,” assented Mrs. McVeigh, and placed the photograph on the mantel beside that of the very charming, piquant face of a girl resembling Mrs. McVeigh. It was a picture of her daughter.

“Only six weeks since I left her; yet, it seems like a year,” she sighed; and Fitzgerald Delaven, who had entered from the Lieutenant’s room, sighed ponderously at her elbow.

“Well, Dr. Delaven, why are you blowing like a bellows?” she asked, with a smile of good nature.

“Out of sympathy, my lady,” replied the young Irishman.

“Now, how can you possibly sympathize understandingly with a mother’s feelings, you Irish pretender?” she asked with a note of fondness in her tones. “I sigh because I have not seen my little Evilena for six weeks.”

“And I because I am never likely to see that lovely duplicate of yourself at all, at all! Ah, you laugh! But have you not noticed that each time I am allowed to enter this room I pay my devotions to that particular corner of the mantel?”

“A very modern shrine,” observed the Countess; “and why should you not see the original of the picture some day. It is not so far to America.”

“True enough, but I’ll be delving for two years here in the medical college,” he replied with lamentation in his tone. “And after that I’ll be delving for a practice in some modest corner of the world, and all the time that little lady will be counting her lovers on every one of her white fingers, and, finally, will name the wedding day for a better boy than myself, och hone! och hone!”

Both the ladies laughed over his comical despair, and when Lieutenant McVeigh entered and heard the cause of it he set things right by promising to speak a good word for Delaven to the little girl across the water.

“You are a trump, Lieutenant; sorry am I that I have no sister with which to return the compliment.”

“She might be in the way,” suggested the Countess, and made a gesture towards the other picture. “You perceive; our friend need not come abroad for charming faces; those at home are worth courting.”

“True for you, Madame;” he gave a look askance at the Lieutenant, and again turned his eyes to the photograph; “there’s an excuse for turning your back on the prettiest we have to offer you!” and then in an undertone, he added: “Even for putting aside the chance of knowing our so adorable Marquise.”

The American did not appear to hear or to appreciate the spirit of the jest regarding the pictures, for he made no reply. The Countess, who was interested in everybody’s affairs, wondered if it was because the heiress was a person of indifference to him, or a person who was sacred; it was without doubt one or the other for which the man made of himself a blank wall, and discouraged discussion.

Her carriage was just then announced; an engagement with Mrs. McVeigh was arranged for the following morning, and then the Countess descended the staircase accompanied by the Lieutenant and Delaven. She liked to make progress through all public places with at least two men in attendance; even a youthful lieutenant and an untitled medical student were not to be disdained, though she would, of course, have preferred the Lieutenant in a uniform, six feet of broad shouldered, good-looking manhood would not weigh in her estimation with the glitter of buttons and golden cord.

The two friends were yet standing on the lower step of the hotel entrance, gazing idly after her carriage as it turned the corner, when another carriage containing two ladies rolled softly towards their side of the street, as if to stop at a jeweler’s two doors below.

Delaven uttered a slight exclamation of pleasure, and stepped forward as if to speak, or open the door of their carriage. But the occupants evidently did not see him, and, moreover, changed their minds about stopping, for the wheels were just ceasing to revolve when the younger of the ladies leaned forward, spoke a brief word, and the driver sent the horses onward at a rapid trot past the hotel, and Delaven stepped back with a woeful grimace.

“Faith! no chance to even play the lackey for her,” he grumbled. “There’s an old saying that ‘God is good to the Irish;’ but I don’t think I’m getting my share of it this day; unless its by way of being kept out of temptation, and sure, its never a Delaven would pray for that when the temptation is a lovely woman. Now wasn’t she worth a day’s journey afoot just to look at?”

He turned to his companion, whose gaze was still on the receding carriage, and who seemed, at last, to be aroused to interest in something Parisian; for his eyes were alight, his expression, a mingling of delight and disappointment. At Delaven’s question, however, he attempted nonchalance, not very successfully, and remarked, as they re-entered the house, “There were two of them to look at, which do you mean?”

“Faith, now, did you suppose for a minute it was the dowager I meant? Not a bit of it! Madame Alain, as I heard some of them call her, is the ‘gem of purest ray serene.’ What star of the heavens dare twinkle beside her?”

“Don’t attempt the poetical,” suggested the other, unfeelingly. “I am to suppose, then, that you know her—this Madame Alain?”

“Do I know her? Haven’t I been raving about her for days? Haven’t you vowed she belonged to the type abhorrent to you? Haven’t I had to endure your reflections on my sanity because of the adjectives I’ve employed to describe her attractions? Haven’t you been laughing at your own mother and myself for our infatuation?—and now—”

He stopped, because the Lieutenant’s grip on his shoulder was uncomfortably tight, as he said:

“Shut up! Who the devil are you talking about?”

“By the same power, how can I shut up and tell you at the same time?” and Delaven moved his arm, and felt of his shoulder, with exaggerated self-pity. “Man! but you’ve got a grip in that fist of yours.”

“Who is the lady you call Madame Alain?”

“Faith, if you had gone to her home when you were invited you’d have no need to ask me the question this day. Her nearest friends call her Madame Alain, because that was the given name of her husband, the saints be good to him! and it helps distinguish her from the dowager. But for all that she is the lady you disdained to know—Madame la Marquise de Caron.”

McVeigh stared at him moodily, even doubtfully.

“You are not trying to play a practical joke, I reckon?” he said at last; and then without waiting for a reply, walked over to the office window, where he stood staring out, his hands in his pockets, his back to Delaven, who was eyeing him calmly. Directly, he came back smiling; his moody fit all gone.

“And I was idiot enough to disdain that invitation?” he asked; “well, Fitz, I have repented. I am willing to do penance in any agreeable way we can conjure up, and to commence by calling tomorrow, if you can find a way.”

Delaven found a way. Finding the way out of, or into difficulties was one of his strong points and one he especially delighted in, if it had a flavor of intrigue, and was to serve a friend. Since his mother’s death in Paris, several years before, he had made his home in or about the city. He was without near relatives, but had quite a number of connections whose social standing was such that there were few doors he could not find keys to, or a password that was the equivalent. His own frank, ingenuous nature made him quite as many friends as his social and diplomatic connections; so that despite the fact of a not enormous income, and that he meant to belong to the professions some day, and that he was by no means a youth on matrimony bent—with all these drawbacks he was welcomed in a social way to most delightful circles, and when he remarked to the dowager that he would like to bring his friend, the Lieutenant, at an early day, she assured him they would be welcome.

She endeavored to make them so in her own characteristic way, when they called, twenty-four hours later, and they spent a delightful twenty minutes with her. She could not converse very freely with the American, because of the difficulties of his French and her English, but their laughter over mistakes really tended to better their acquaintance. He was conscious that her eyes were on him, even while she talked with Delaven, whose mother she had known. He would have been uncomfortable under such surveillance but for the feeling that it was not entirely an unkindly regard, and he had hopes that the impression made was in his favor.

Loris Dumaresque arrived as they were about to take their departure, and Lieutenant McVeigh gathered from their greeting that he was a daily visitor—that as god-son he was acting as far as possible in the stead of a real son, and that the dowager depended on him in many ways since his return to Paris.

The American realized also that the artist would be called a very handsome man by some people, and that his gaiety and his self confidence would make him especially attractive to women.

He felt an impatience with women who liked that sort of impudence. Delaven did not get a civil word from him all the way home.

Madame la Marquise—Madame Alain—had not appeared upon the scene at all.

## CHAPTER V

“But he is not at all bad, this American officer,” insisted the dowager; “such a great, manly fellow, with the deference instinctive, and eyes that regard you well and kindly. Your imagination has most certainly led you astray; it could not be that with such a face, and such a mother, he could be the—horrible! of that story.”

“All the better for him,” remarked her daughter-in-law. “But I should not feel at ease with him. He must be some relation, and I should shrink from all of the name.”

“But, Madame McVeigh—so charming!”

“Oh, well; she only has the name by accident, that is, by marriage.”

The dowager regarded her with a smile of amusement.

“Shall you always regard marriage as merely an accident?” she asked. “Some day it will be presented to you in such a practical, advantageous way that you will cease to think it all chance.”

“Advantageous?” and the Marquise raised her brows; “could we be more happy than we are?” The old face softened at the words and tone.

“But I shall not be always with you,” she replied; “and then—”

“Alain knew,” said the girl, softly. “He said as a widow I could have liberty. I would need no guardian; I could look after all my affairs as young girls could not do. Each year I shall grow older—more competent.”

“But there is one thing Alain did not foresee: that your many suitors would rob you of peace until you made choice of some particular one. These late days I have felt I should like the choice to be made while I am here to see.”

“Maman! you are not ill?” and in a moment she was beside the couch.

“No; I think not; no, no, nothing to alarm you. I have only been thinking that together—both of us to plan and arrange—yet I need Loris daily. And if there should be only one of us, that remaining one would need some man’s help all the more, and if it were you, who then would the man be? You perceive! It is wise to make plans for all possibilities.”

“There are women who live alone.”

“Not happy women,” said the dowager in a tone, admitting of no contradiction; “the women who live alone from choice are cold and selfish; or have hurts to hide and are heart-sick of a world in which their illusions have been destroyed; or else they have never known companionship, and so never feel the lack of it. My child, I will not have you like any of these; you were made to enjoy life, and life to the young should mean—well, I am a sentimentalist. I married the one man who had all my affection. I approve of such marriages. If the man comes for whom you would care like that, I should welcome him.”

“He will never come, Maman,” and the smile of the Marquise somehow drifted into a sigh. “I shall live and die the widow of Alain.”

The dowager embraced her. “But for all that I do not approve,” she protested. “Your reasons for not marrying do not convince me, and I promise my support to the most worthy who presents himself. Have you an ideal to which nothing human may reach?”

“For three years your son has seemed ideal to me,” said the Marquise, after a moment’s hesitation. The dowager regarded her attentively.

“He was?” she asked; “your regard for him does you credit; but, amber eyes, it is not for a man who has been dead a year that a woman blushes as you blush now.”

“Oh!” began the Marquise, as if in protest; and then feeling that the color was becoming even more pronounced, she was silent.

The dowager smiled, well pleased at her cleverness.

“There was sure to be some one, some day,” she said, nodding sagaciously; “when you want to talk of it I will listen, my Judithe. I could tell it in the tone of your voice as you sang or laughed; yes, there is nothing so wonderful in that,” she explained, as the girl looked up, startled. “You have always been a creature of aims, serious, almost ponderous. Suddenly you emerge like sunshine from the shadows; you are all gaiety and sudden smiles; unconsciously you sing low songs of happiness; you suggest brightness and hope; you have suddenly come into your long-delayed girlhood. You give me affectionate glimpses of the woman God meant you to be some day. It can only be a man who works such a miracle in an ascetic of nineteen years. When the lucky fellow gathers courage to speak, I shall be glad to pass judgment on him.”

The Marquise was silent. The light, humorous tone of the dowager had disarmed her; yet she had of her own accord, and influenced by some wild mood, told Dumaresque all that was only guesswork to the friend beside her. How could she have confessed it to him? She had wondered at herself that she had dared, and after all it had been so entirely useless; it had not driven away the memory of the man at Fontainebleau, even for one little instant.

Madame Blanc entered with some message for the dowager, and the question of marriage, also the more serious one of love, were put aside for the time.

But Judithe was conscious that she was under a kindly surveillance, and suspected that Dumaresque, also, was given extra attention. Her confession of that unusual fascination had made them better comrades, and the dowager was taking note that their tone was more frank, and their attitude suggested some understanding. It was like a comedy for her to watch them, feeling so sure that their sentiments were very clear and that she could see the way it would all end. Judithe would coquette with him awhile, and then it would be all very well; and it would not be like a stranger coming into the family.

The people who came close enough to see her often, realized that the journey back to Paris had not been beneficial to the dowager. It had only been an experiment through which she had been led to open her house, receive her friends, introduce her daughter; but the little excitement of that had vanished, and now that the routine of life was to be followed, it oppressed her. The ghosts of other days came so close—the days when Alain had been beside her. At times she regretted Rome, but the physician forbade her return there until autumn. She had fancied that a season in the old house at Fontainebleau would serve as a restorative to health—the house where Alain was born; but it was a failure. Her days there were days of tears, and sad, far-away memories. So to Paris she went with the assertion that there alone, life was to be found. She meant to live to the last minute of her life, and where so well as in the one city inexhaustible?

“Maman is trying to frighten me into marriage,” thought the Marquise after their conversation; “she wants some spectacular ceremony to enliven the house for a season, and cure her ennui; Paris has been a disappointment, and Loris is making himself necessary to her.”

She was thinking of the matter, and of the impossibility that she should ever marry Loris, when a box of flowers was brought—one left by a messenger, who said nothing of whence they came, and no name or card attached suggested the sender.

“For Maman,” decided the Marquise promptly.

But Madame Blanc thought not.

“You, Madame, are the Marquise.”

“Oh, true! but the people who would send me flowers would not be so certain their own names would not be forgotten. I have no old, tried, and silent friends to remember me so.”

While she spoke she was lifting out the creamy and blush-tinted roses; Maman should see them arranged in the prettiest vase, they must go up with the chocolate—she would take it herself!

So she chattered while Madame Blanc arranged the tray. But suddenly the chatter ceased. The Marquise had lifted out the last of the roses, and under the fragrant screen lay the cause of the sudden silence.

It was a few sprays of dew-wet forget-me-nots! Her heart seemed to stop beating.

Forget-me-not! there was but one person who had any association in her mind with that flower. Did this have a meaning relating to him? or was it only chance?

She said nothing to Madame Blanc about the silent message in the bottom of the box.

All that day she moved as in a dream. At times she was oppressed by the terror of discovery, and again it was with a rebellious, delicious feeling of certainty that he had not forgotten! He had searched for her—found her! She meant to ignore him if they should meet; certainly she must do that! His assurance in daring to—yet—yes, she rather liked the daring—still—!

She remembered some one saying that impertinence gained more favors from women than respect, and he—yes, certainly he was impertinent; she must never recognize him, of course—never! Her cheek burned as she fancied what he must think of her—a girl who made friends with strangers in the park! Yet she was glad that since he had not let her forget, he also had been forced to remember.

She told herself all this, and much more; the task occupied so much of her time that she forgot to go asleep that night, and she saw the morning star shine out of the blue haze beyond the city, and it belonged to a dawn with a meaning entirely its own. Never before or after was a daybreak so beautiful. The sun wheeled royally into view through the atmosphere of her first veritable love romance.

## CHAPTER VI

Even the card of Lieutenant McVeigh could not annoy her that morning. He came with some message to the dowager from his mother. At any other time the sound of his name would have made a discord for her. The prejudices of Judithe were so decided, and so independent of all accepted social rules, that the dowager hoped when she did choose a husband he would prove a diplomat—they would need one in the family.

“Madame Blanc, will you receive the gentleman?” she asked. “Maman has not yet left her room, and I am engaged.”

And for the second time the American made his exit from the Caron establishment without having seen the woman his friends raved about. Descending the steps he remembered the old saw that a third attempt carried a charm with it. He smiled, and the smile suggested that there would be a third attempt.

The Marquise looked at the card he left, and her smile had not so much that was pleasant in it.

“Maman, my conjecture was right,” she remarked as she entered the room of the dowager; “your fine, manly American was really the youth of my Carolina story.”

“Carolina story?” and the dowager looked bewildered for a moment; when one has reached the age of eighty years the memory fails for the things of today; only the affairs of long ago retain distinctness.

“Exactly; the man for whom Rhoda Larue was educated, and of whom you forbade me to speak—the man who bought her from Matthew Loring, of Loringwood, Carolina.”

“You are certain?”

“Here is the name, Kenneth McVeigh. It is not likely there are two Kenneth McVeighs in the same region. How small the world is after all! I used to fancy the width of the ocean was as a barrier between two worlds, yet it has not prevented these people from crossing, and coming to our door!”

She sank into a seat, the card still in her hand.

“Judithe,” said the dowager, after watching her moody face thoughtfully, “my child, I should be happier if you banished, so far as possible, that story from your memory. It will have a tendency to narrow your views. You will always have a prejudice against a class for the wrong done by an individual. Put it aside! It is a question outside of your life, outside of it always unless your sympathies persist in dragging you into such far-away abuses. We have the Paris poor, if you must think and do battle for the unfortunate. And as to the American, consider. He must have been very young, perhaps was influenced by older heads. He may not have realized—”

The Marquise smiled, but shook her head. “You are eloquent, Maman, but you do not convince me. He must be very handsome to have won you so completely in one interview. For me, I do not believe in his ignorance of the evil nor in his youthful innocence. I think of the women who for generations have been the victims of such innocence, and I should like to see your handsome young cadet suffer for his share of it!”

“Tah!” and the dowager put out her hand with a gesture of protest and a tone of doubt in her voice. “You say so Judithe, but you could not see any one suffer, not even the criminal. You would come to his defense with some philosophical reason for the sin—some theory of pre-natal influence to account for his depravity. Collectively you condemn them; individually you would pardon every one rather than see them suffer—I mean, than stand by and actually see the suffering.”

“I could not pardon that man,” insisted the Marquise; “Ugh! I feel as if for him I could have the hand of Judithe as well as the name.”

“And treat him a-la-Holofernes? My child, sometimes I dislike that name of Judithe for you; I do not want you to have a shadow of the character it suggests. I shall regret the name if it carries such dark influences with it. As for the man—forget him!”

“With all my heart, if he keeps out of my way,” agreed the Marquise; “but if the old Jewish god of battles ever delivers him into my hands—!” She paused and drew a deep breath.

“Well?”

“Well—I should show him mercy such as the vaunted law-giver, the chosen of the Lord, the man of meekness, showed to the conquered Midianites—no more!” and her laugh had less of music in it than usual. “I instinctively hate the man, Kenneth McVeigh—Kenneth McVeigh!—even the name is abhorrent since the day I heard of that awful barter and sale. It seems strange, Maman, does it not, when I never saw him in my life—never expected to hear his name again—that it is to our house he has found his way in Paris; to our house, where an unknown woman abhors him. Ah!” and she flung the card from her. “You are right, Maman; I am too often conquered by my own moods and feelings. The American need be nothing to us.”

The dowager was pleased when the subject was dropped. She had seen so many battles fought, in theory, by humanitarians who are alive to the injustice of the world. But her day was over for race questions and creeds. Judithe was inspiring in her sympathies, but the questions that breathe living flame for us at twenty years, have burned into dead ashes at eighty.

“Tah! I would rather she would marry and let me see her children,” she grumbled to Madame Blanc; “if she does not, I trust her to your care when I am gone. She is different since we reached Paris—different, gayer, and less of the student.”

“But no more in touch with society,” remarked the attentive companion; “she accepts no invitations, and goes only to the galleries and theatres.”

“Um!—pictured people, and artificial people! Both have a tendency to make her an idealist instead of a realist.”

To Dumaresque she made the same remark, and suggested he should help find attractions for her in real life.

“She is too imaginative, and I do not want her to be of the romantic women; the craze for romance in life is what fills the columns of the journals with new scandals each month.”

“Madame Judithe is safe from that sort of romance,” declared her god-son. “Yet with her face and those glorious eyes one should allow her some flights in the land of the ideal. She suggests all old Italy at times, but she has never mentioned her family to me.”

“Because it was a topic which both Alain and I forbade her, when she was younger, to discuss. Naturally, she has not a joyous temperament and memories of her childhood can only have an unhappy effect, which accounts for our decision of the matter. Her father died before she could remember him, and the mother, who was of Greek blood, not long after. A relative who arranged affairs left the daughter penniless. At the little chateau Levigne she was of great service to me when she was but sixteen. Madam Blanc, who tried to reach me in time, declares the child saved my life. It was a dog—a mad one. I was on the lawn when he broke through the hedge, snapped Alain’s mastiff, Ponto, and came straight for me. I was paralyzed with terror; then, just as he leaped at me, the child swung a heavy chair over her head. Tah! She looked like a young tigress. The dog was struck helpless, his back broken. The gardener came and killed him, and Ponto, too, was killed, when he showed that the bite had given him the poison. Ah, it was terrible, that day. Then I wrote Alain and we decided she should never leave us. I made over to her the income of the little Lavigne estate, thus her education was carried on, and when we went to Rome—well, Alain was not satisfied until he could do even more for her.”

The old lady helped herself to snuff and sighed. Her listener wondered if, after all, that death-bed marriage had been entirely acceptable to the mother. Some suggestion of his thought must have come to her, for she continued:

“Not that I disapproved, you must understand. No daughter could be more devoted. I could not be without her now. But I had a hope—a mother’s foolish hope—that perhaps it might be a love

affair; that the marriage would renew his interest in life and thus accomplish what the physicians could not do—save him.”

“Good old Alain,” said Dumaresque, with real feeling in his tones. “He deserved to live and win her. I can imagine no better fortune for a man.”

“But it was an empty hope, and a sad wedding,” continued the dowager, with a sigh. “That was, to her, a day of gloom, which to others is the one day to look forward to through girlhood and backward to from old age. Oh, yes; it is not so much to be wondered at that she is a creature of moods and ideals outlined on a background of shadow.”

The voice of the Marquise sounded through the hall and up the stairs. She was singing, joying as a bird. The eyes of the two met, and Dumaresque laughed.

“Oh! and what is that but a mood, too?” demanded the dowager; “a mood that is pleasant, I grant you, and it has lasted longer than usual—ever since we came to Paris. I enjoy it, but I like to know the reason of things. I guess at it in this case; yet it eludes me.”

Dumaresque raised his brows and smiled as one who invites further confidences. But he received instead a keen glance from the old eyes, and a question:

“Loris, who is the man?”

“What! You ask me?”

“There is no other to ask; you know all the men she has met; you are not a fool, and an artist’s eye is trained to observe.”

“It has not served me in this case, my god-mother.”

“Which means you will not tell. I shall suspect it is yourself if you conspire to keep it from me.”

“Pouf! When it is myself I shall be so eager to let it be known that no one will have time to ask a question.”

“That is good,” she said approvingly. “I must rest now. I have talked so long; but a word, Loris; she likes you, she trusts you, and that—well, that goes far.”

And all the morning her assurance made for him hours of brightness. The stranger of Fontainebleau had drifted into the background, and should never have real place in their lives. She liked and trusted *him*; and that would go far.

He was happy in imagining the happiness that might be, forgetful of another lover, one among the poets, who avowed that the happiness of the future was the only real happiness of the world.

He was pleased that his god-mother had confided to him these little facts of family history. He remembered how intensely eager the dowager had been for Alain’s marriage, years before, that there might be an heir; and he remembered, in part, the cause—her detestation of a female relative whose son would inherit the Marquisate should a son be born to her, and Alain die without children. He could see how eagerly the dowager would have consented to a marriage with even the poorest of poor relations if both the Marquisate and Alain might be saved by it.

Poor Alain! He remembered the story of why he had remained single; a story of love forbidden, and of a woman who entered a convent because, in the world, she could not live with her lover, and would not live with the man whose name she bore. It was an old story; she had died long ago, but Alain had remained faithful. It had been the one great passion he had known of, outside of a romance, and the finale of it was that the slight girlish protegee was mistress of his name and fortune, though her heart had never beat the faster for his glance.

And the Greek blood doubtless accounted for her readiness of speech in different tongues; they were so naturally linguists—the Greeks. He had met her first in Rome, and fancied her an Italian. Delaven had asked if she were not English; and now in the heart of France she appeared to him entirely Parisian.

A chameleon-like wife might have her disadvantages, he thought, as he walked away after the talk with his god-mother; yet she would not be so apt as others to bore one with sameness. At nineteen she was charming; at twenty-five she would be magnificent.

The streets were alive that morning with patriotic groups discussing the victory of the French troops at Magenta. The first telegrams were posted and crowds were gathered about them.

Dumaresque passed through them with an unusually preoccupied air. Then a tall man, leaning against a pillar and viewing the crowd, bowed to him in such a way as to arrest his attention. It was the American, of the smiling, half sleepy eyes, and the firm mouth. The combination appealed to Dumaresque as an artist; also the shape of the head, it was exceedingly good, strong; even his lounging attitude had the grace suggestive of strength. He remembered seeing somewhere the head of a young lion painted with just those half closed, shadowy eyes. Lieutenant McVeigh was regarding him with something akin to their watchfulness, the same slow gaze travelling from the feet to the head as they approached each other; it was deliberate as the measuring of an adversary, and its finale was a smile.

“Glad to see a man,” he remarked. “I have been listening to the jabbering and screeches of the crowd until they seem only manikins.”

Dumaresque laughed. “You come by way of England, I believe; do you prefer the various dialects of that land of fog?”

“No, I do not; have a cigar?” Dumaresque accepted the offer. McVeigh himself lighted one and continued:

“Their stuffiness lacks the picturesque qualities possessed by even the poorest of France, and then they bore one with their wranglings for six-pences, from Parliament down to peasant. They are always at it in Britannia the gem of the ocean, wrangling over six-pences, and half-pennies and candle ends.”

“You are finding flaws in the people who call you cousin,” remarked the artist.

“Yes, I know they do,” said the other, between puffs. “But I can’t imagine a real American helping them in their claims for relationship. Our history gives us no cause for such kindly remembrances.”

“Unless on the principle that one has a kindly regard for a man after fighting with him and not coming out second best,” remarked Dumaresque. “I have an errand in the next street; will you come?”

McVeigh assented. They stalked along, chattering and enjoying their cigars until they reached a florists, where Dumaresque produced a memorandum and read off a list of blossoms and greenery to be delivered by a certain date.

“An affair for the hospitals to be held in the home of Madame Dulac, wife of General Dulac,” he explained; “it is to be all very novel, a bazaar and a ball. Madame is an old friend of my god-mother, the dowager Marquise de Caron, whom you have met.”

McVeigh assented and showed interest.

“We have almost persuaded Madame Alain, her daughter, to preside over one of the booths. Ah! It will be a place to empty one’s pockets; you must come.”

“Not sure about invitations,” confessed McVeigh, frankly. “It is a very exclusive affair, I believe, and a foreigner will be such a distinctive outsider at such gatherings.”

“We will undertake to prevent that,” promised Dumaresque, “and in the interests of charity you will find both dames and demoiselles wonderfully gracious to even a lonely, unattached man. If you dance you can win your own place.”

“Oh, yes; we all dance in our country; some of us poorly, perhaps; still, we dance.”

“Good! You must come. I am assisting, after a fashion, in planning the decorations, and I promise to find you some one who is charming, and who speaks your language delightfully.”

There was some further chat. McVeigh promised he would attend unless his mother had made conflicting engagements. Dumaresque informed him it was to be a fancy dress affair; uniforms would be just the thing; and he parted with the American much more pleased with him than in the salons where they had met heretofore.

Kenneth McVeigh sauntered along the avenue, tall, careless, reposeful. His expression was one of content, and he smiled as he silently blessed Loris Dumaresque, who had done him excellent

service without knowing it—had found a method by which he would try the charm of the third attempt to see the handsome girl who had passed them that day in the carriage.

He entered the hotel late that night. Paris, in an unofficial way, was celebrating the victory of Magenta by shouting around bon-fires, laughing under banners, forming delegations no one remembered, and making addresses no one listened to.

Late though it was, Mrs. McVeigh had not retired. From a window she was looking out on the city, where sleep seemed forgotten, and her beautiful eyes had a seriousness contrasting strangely with the joyous celebrations of victory she had been witnessing.

“What is it, mother?” he asked, in the soft, mellow tones of the South, irresistible in their caressing qualities. The mother put out her hand and clasped his without speaking.

“Homesick?” he ventured, trying to see her face as he drew a chair closer; “longing for that twelve-year-old baby of yours? Evilena certainly would enjoy the hubbub.”

“No, Kenneth,” she said at last: “it is not that. But I have been watching the enthusiasm of these people over a victory they have helped win for Italy’s freedom—not their own. We have questions just as vital in our country; some day they must be settled in the same way; there seems no doubt of it—and then—”

“Then we will go out, have our little pass at each other, and come back and go on hoeing our corn, just as father did in the Mexican campaign,” he said with an attempt at lightness; but she shook her head.

“Many a soldier left the corn fields who never came back to them.”

“Why, mother, what is it, dear? You’ve been crying, crying here all alone over one war that is nothing to us, and another that may never happen; come! come!” He put his arm about her as if she were a child to be petted. Her head sank on his shoulder, though she still looked away from him, out into the brilliantly lighted street.

“It was not the—the political justice or injustice of the wars,” she confessed after a little; “it was not of that I was thinking. But a woman screamed out there on the street. They—the people—had just told her the returns of the battle, and her son was among the killed—poor woman! Her only son, Kenneth, and—”

“Yes, dear, I understand.” He drew her closer and lifting her head from her lap, placed it on his shoulder. She uttered a tremulous little sigh of content. And then, with his arms about her, the mother and son looked out on Paris after a victory, each thinking of their own home, their own capital cities, and their own vague dread of battles to be in the future.

## CHAPTER VII

As morning after morning passed without the arrival of other mysterious boxes of flowers or of significant messages, the Marquise began to watch Loris Dumaresque more than was usual with her. He was the only one who knew; had he, educated by some spirit of jest, been the sender of the blossoms?

And inconsistent as it may appear when one remembers her avowed fear of discovery, yet from the moment that suspicion entered her mind the charm was gone from the blossoms and the days to follow, and she felt for the first time a resentment towards Monsieur Incognito.

Her reason told her this was an inevitable consequence, through resentment forgetfulness would come.

But her heart told her—?

Her presence at the charitable fete held by Madame la General at the Hotel Dulac was her first response, in a social way to the invitations of her Parisian acquaintances. A charity one might support without in any way committing oneself to further social plunges. She expected to feel shy and strange; she expected to be bored. But since Maman wished it so much—!

There is nothing so likely to banish shyness as success. The young Marquise could not but be conscious that she attracted attention, and that the most popular women of the court who had been pleased to show their patronage by attendance, did not in the least eclipse her own less pretentious self. People besieged Madame Dulac for introductions, and to her own surprise the debutante found herself enjoying all the gay nothings, the jests, the bright sentences tossed about her and forming a foundation for compliments delicately veiled, and the flattering by word or glance that was as the breath of life to those people of the world.

She was dressed in white of medieval cut. Heavy white silk cord was knotted about the slender waist and touched the embroidered hem. The square neck had also the simple finish of cord and above it was the one bit of color; a flat necklace of etruscan gold fitted closely about the white throat, holding alternate rubies and pearls in their curiously wrought settings. On one arm was a bracelet of the same design; and the linked fillet above her dark hair gleamed, also, with the red of rubies.

It was the age of tarletan and tinsel, of delicate zephyrs and extremes in butterfly effects. Hoop-skirts were persisted in, despite the protests of art and reason; so, the serenity of this dress, fitting close as a habit, and falling in soft straight folds with a sculpturesque effect, and with the brown-eyed Italian face above it, created a sensation.

Dumaresque watched her graciously accepting homage as a matter of course, and smiled, thinking of his prophecy that she would be magnificent at twenty-five;—she was so already.

Some women near him commented on the simplicity of her attire.

“Oh, that is without doubt the taste of the dowager; failing to influence the politics of the country she consoled herself with an attempt to make a revolution in the fashions of the age.”

“And is this sensation to illustrate her ideas?” asked another. “She has rather a good manner—the girl—but the dress is a trifle theatrical, suggestive of the pages of tragedies and martyred virgins.”

“Suggestive of the girl Cleopatra before she realized her power,” thought the artist as he passed on. He knew that just those little remarks stamped her success a certainty, and was pleased accordingly. The dowager had expressed her opinion that Judithe would bury herself in studies if left to herself, perhaps even go back to the convent. He fancied a few such hours of adulation as this would change the ideas of any girl of nineteen as to the desirability of convents.

He noticed that the floral bower over which she presided had little left now but the ferns and green things; she had been adding money to the hospital fund. Once he noticed the blossoms left in charge of her aides while she entered the hall room on the arm of the most distinguished official present, and later, on that of one of the dowager's oldest friends. She talked with, and sold roses to

the younger courtiers at exorbitant prices, but it was only the men of years and honors whom she walked beside.

Madame Dulac and Dumaresque exchanged glances of approval; as a possible general in the social field of the future, she had commenced with the tactics of absolute genius. Dumaresque wondered if she realized her own cleverness, or if it was because she honestly liked best to talk or listen to the men of years, experience, and undoubted honors.

Mrs. McVeigh was there, radiant as Aurore and with eyes so bright one would not fancy them bathed in tears so lately, or the smooth brow as containing a single anxious motherly thought. But the Marquise having heard that story of the son, wondered as she looked at her if the handsome mother had not many an anxious thought the world never suspected.

She was laughing frankly to the Marquise over the future just read in her palm by a picturesque Egyptian, who was one of the novelties added to Madame Dulac's list for the night.

Nothing less than an adoring husband had been promised her, and with the exception of a few shadowed years, not a cloud larger than the hand of a man was to cross the sky of her destiny.

"I am wishing Kenneth had come—my son, you know. Something has detained him. I certainly would have liked him to hear that promise of a step-father. Our Southern men are not devoid of jealousy—even of their mothers."

Then she passed on, a glory of azure and silver, and the Marquise felt a sense of satisfaction that the son had not come; the prejudice she felt against that unabashed American would make his presence the one black cloud across the evening.

While she was thinking of him the party about her separated, and she took advantage of a moment alone to slip the alcove back of the evergreens. It seemed the one nook unappropriated by the glittering masses of people whose voices, near and far, suggested the murmur of bees to her as she viewed it from her shadowy retreat, while covered from sight herself.

The moonlight was shining through the window of the little alcove screened by the tall palms. The music of a tender waltz movement drifted softly across to her and made perfect her little retreat. She was conscious that it had all been wonderfully and unexpectedly perfect; the success, the adulation, had given her a new definite faith in herself. How Maman would have enjoyed it. Maman, who would want every little detail of the pleasant things said and done. She wondered if it was yet too early to depart, she might reach home before the dowager slept, and tell her all the glories of it.

So thinking, she turned to enter again the glare of light to find Madame Dulac, or Madame Blanc, who had accompanied her, to tell them.

But another hand pushed aside the curtain of silk and the drooping fronds of gigantic fern. Looking up she saw a tall, young man, wearing a dark blue uniform, who bowed with grace, and stood aside that she might pass if she chose. He showed no recognition, and there was the pause of an instant. She could feel the color leave her face. Then, with an effort, she raised her eyes, and tried to speak carelessly, but the voice was little more than a whisper, in which she said:

"You!"

His face brightened and grew warm. The tone itself told more than she knew; a man would be stupid who could not read it, and this one, though youthful, did not look stupid.

"Madame Unknown," he murmured, in the voice she had not been able to forget, "I am not so lost here as at Fontainebleau. May I ask some one to present me to your notice?"

At that she smiled, and the smile was contagious.

"You may not," she replied frankly, recovering herself, and assuming a tone of lightness to conquer the fluttering in her throat. "The list of names I have had to remember this evening is most formidable, another one would make the last feather here," and she tapped her forehead significantly. "I was just about to flee from it all when—"

She hesitated and looked about her in an uncertain way. He at once placed a chair for her. She allowed her hand to rest on the back of it as if undecided.

“You will not be so unkind?” he said; and his words held a plea. She answered it by seating herself.

“Well?”

At the interrogation he smiled.

“Will you not allow me, Madame, to introduce myself?”

“But, Monsieur Incognito, consider; I have remembered you best because you have not done so; it was a novelty. But all those people whose names were spoken to me this evening—pouf!” and she blew a feathery spray of fern from her palms, “they have all drifted into oblivion like that. Do you wish, then, to be presented and—to follow them?”

“I refuse to follow them there—from you.”

His tones were so low, so even, so ardent, that she looked startled and drew her breath quickly.

“You are bold, Monsieur,” and though she strove to speak haughtily she was too much of a girl to be severe when her eyes met his.

“Why not?” he asked, growing bolder as she grew more timid. “You grant me one moment out of your life; then you mean to close the gates against me—if you can. In that brief time I must condense all that another man should take months to say to you. I have been speaking to you daily, however, for six weeks and—”

“Monsieur! Six weeks?”

“Every day,” he assented, smiling down at her. “Of course you did not hear me. I was very confidential about it. I even tried to stop it entirely when I was allowed to believe that Mademoiselle was Madame.”

“But it is quite true—she is Madame.”

“Certainly; yet you let me think—well, I forgive you for it now, since I have found you again.”

“Monsieur!”—she half arose.

“Will Mademoiselle have her fortune told?” asked a voice beside them, and the beringed Egyptian pushed aside the palms, “or Monsieur, perhaps?”

“Both of us,” he assented with eagerness; “that is, if Mademoiselle chooses.” He dropped two pieces of gold in the beaded purse held out. “Come,” he half whispered to the Marquise, “let me see if oblivion is really the doom fate reads against me.”

She half put out her hand, thinking that after all it was only a part of the games of the night—the little amusements with which purses were filled for charity; then some sudden after thought made her draw it back.

“You fear the decision?” he asked.

She did not fear the decision he meant, but she did fear—

“No, Monsieur, I am not afraid. Oh, yes; she may read my palm, it is all a jest, of course.”

The Egyptian held the man’s hand at which she had not yet glanced. She took the hand of the Marquise.

“Pardon, Madame, it is no jest, it is a science,” she said briefly, and holding their hands, glanced from one to the other.

“Firm hands, strong hands, both,” she said, and then bent over that of the Marquise; as she did so the expression of casual interest faded from her face; she slowly lifted her head and met the gaze of the owner.

“Well, well? Am I to commit murders?” she asked; but her smile was an uneasy one; the gaze of the Egyptian made her shrink.

“Not with your own hand,” said the woman, slowly studying the well-marked palm; “but you will live for awhile surrounded by death and danger. You will hate, and suffer for the hate you feel. You will love, and die for the love you will not take—you—”

But the Marquise drew her hand away petulantly.

“Oh! I am to die of love, then?—I!” and her light laugh was disdainful. “That is quite enough of the fates for one evening;” she regarded the pink palm doubtfully. “See, Monsieur, it does not look so terrible; yet it contains all those horrors.”

“Naturally it would not contain them,” said the Egyptian. “You will force yourself to meet what you call the horrors. You will sacrifice yourself. You will meet the worst as the women of ’93 ascended the guillotine—laughing.”

“Ah, what pictures! Monsieur, I wish you a better fortune.”

“Than to die of love?” he asked, and met her eyes; “that were easier than to live without it.”

“Chut!—you speak like the cavalier of a romance.”

“I feel like one,” he confessed, “and it rests on your mercy whether the romance has a happy ending.”

She flashed one admonishing glance at him and towards the woman who bent over his hand.

“Oh, she does not comprehend the English,” he assured her; “and if she does she will only hear the echo of what she reads in my hand.”

“Proceed,” said the Marquise to the Egyptian, “we wait to hear the list of Monsieur’s romances.”

“You will live by the sword, but not die by the sword,” said the woman. “You will have one great passion in your life. Twice the woman will come in your path. The first time you will cross the seas to her, the second time she comes to you—and—ah!—”

She reached again for the hand of the Marquise and compared them. The two young people looked, not at her, but at each other.

In the eyes of the Marquise was a certain petulant rebellion, and in his the appealing, the assuring, the ardent gaze that met and answered her.

“It is peculiar—this,” continued the woman. “I have never seen anything like it before; the same mark, the same, Mademoiselle, Monsieur; you will each know tragedies in your experience, and the lives are linked together.”

“No!”—and again the Marquise drew her hand away. “It is no longer amusing,” she remarked in English, “when those people think it their duty to pair couples off like animals in the ark.”

Her face had flushed, though she tried to look indifferent. The Egyptian had stepped back and was regarding her curiously.

“Do not cross the seas, Mademoiselle; all of content will be left behind you.”

“Wait,” and the Monsieur Incognito put out his hand. “You call the lady ‘Mademoiselle,’ but your guess has not been good;” and he pointed to a plain ring on the hand of the Marquise.

“I call her Mademoiselle because she never has been a wife, and—she never will be a wife. There are marriages without wedding rings, and there are wedding rings without marriages; pardon!—” and passing between the ferns and palms she was gone.

“That is true!” half whispered the Marquise, looking up at him; “her words almost frighten me.”

“They need not,” and the caress in his eyes made her drop her own; “all your world of Paris knows the romance of your marriage. You are more of a celebrity than you may imagine; my knowledge of that made me fear to approach you here.”

“The fear did not last long,” and she laughed, the coquetry of the sex again uppermost. “For how many seconds did you tremble on the threshold?”

“Long enough to avoid any friends who had planned to present me.”

“And why?”

“Lest it might offend to have the person thrust on you whom you would not know among less ceremonious surroundings.”

“Yet you came alone?”

“I could not help that, I *had* to see you, even though you refused to recognize me; I had to see you. Did I not prophecy there in the wood that we should meet again? Even the flowers you gave me I—”

“Monsieur, no more!” and she rose from the chair with a certain decision. “It was a thoughtless, childish farce played there at Fontainebleau. But—it is over. I—I have felt humiliated by that episode, Monsieur. Young ladies in France do not converse with strangers. Pray go back to England and forget that you found one so indiscreet—oh! I know what you would say, Monsieur,” as he was about to speak. “I know many of these ladies of the court would only laugh over such an episode—it would be but a part of their amusements for the day; but I, I do not belong to the court or their fashions. I am only ashamed, and ask that you forget it. I would not want any one to think—I mean that I—”

She had commenced so bravely with her wise, firm little speech, but at the finale she wavered and broke down miserably.

“Don’t!”—he broke in as a tear fell on the fan she held; “you make me feel like a brute who has persecuted you; don’t cry. Come here to the window; listen to me. I—I loved you that first day; you just looked at me, spoke to me and it was all over with me. I can’t undo it. I can go away, and I *will*, rather than make you unhappy; but I can’t forget you. I have never forgotten you for an hour. That was why. Oh, I know it is the wildest, maddest, most unpardonable thing I am saying to you. Your friends would want to call me out and shoot me for it, and I shall be happy to give them the chance,” he added, grimly. “But don’t, for Heaven’s sake, think that my memory of you would be less than respectful. Why, I—I adore you. I am telling it to you like a fool, but I only ask you to not laugh until I am out of hearing. I—will go now—and do not even ask your forgiveness, because—well I can’t honestly say I am sorry.”

Sorry! She thought of those days when she had wakened to a new world because his eyes and his voice haunted her; she heard him acknowledge the same power, and he spoke of forgiveness as though convicted of a fault. Well, she had not been able to prevent the same fault, so, how dared she blame him? He need not know, of course, how well she had remembered; yet she might surely be a little kind for all that.

“Monsieur Incognito!”

Her voice had an imperious tone; she remembered she must not be too kind. He was already among the palms, in the full light of the salon, and he was boy enough for all the color to leave his face as he heard the low command. She had heard him declare his devotion, yet she had recalled him.

“Madame,” he said, and stood stubbornly the width of the alcove from her, though he was conscious of all tender words rushing to his lips. She was so adorable; a woman in mentality, but the veriest girl as to the emotions his words had awakened.

“Monsieur,” she said, without looking at him, “I do not truly believe you meant to offend me; therefore I have nothing to forgive.”

“You angel!” he half whispered, but she heard him.

“No, I am not that,” and she flashed a quick glance at him, “only I think I comprehend you, and to comprehend is to forgive, is it not? I—I cannot listen to the—affection you speak of. Love and marriage are not for me. Did not the Egyptian say it? Yes; that was quite true. But I can shake hands in good-bye, Monsieur Incognito. Your English people always do that, eh? Well, so will I.”

She held out her hand; he took it in both his own and his lips touched it.

“No! no!” she said softly, and shook her head; “that is not an English custom.” He lifted his head and looked at her.

“Why do you call me English?” he asked, and she smiled, glad to break that tenseness of feeling by some commonplace.

“It was very simple, Monsieur; first it was the make of your hat, I read the name of the maker in the crown that day in the park; then you spoke English; you said you had just arrived from England; and the English are so certain to get lost unless they go in groups—therefore!”

She had enumerated all those reasons on her white fingers. She glanced at him, with an adorable smile as a finale, so confident she had proven her case.

“And you French have no fondness for the English people,” he said slowly, looking at her. “I wear an American uniform tonight; suppose I am an American? I am tempted to disobey and tell you who I am, in hopes you will not send me into exile quite so soon.”

“No, no, *no!*” she breathed hurriedly. “You must go; and you must remain Monsieur Incognito; thus it will be only a comedy, a morsel of romance. But if I knew you well—ah! I do not know what it would be then. I am afraid to think. Yes, I confess it, Monsieur, you make me afraid. I tell myself you are a foreign ogre, yet when you speak to me—ah!”

She put out her hands as he came close. But he knelt at her feet, kissing her hands, her wrists, the folds of her dress, then lifted his face glowing, ardent, to her own.

“I shall make you love me some day,” he whispered; “not now, perhaps, but some day.”

She stared at him without a word. She had received proposals of marriage, dignified, ceremonious affairs submitted to her by the dowager, but from this stranger came the first avowal of love she had ever listened to. A stranger; yet he held her hand; she felt herself drawn towards him by a force she could not combat. Her other arm was over the back of a chair, slowly she lifted it, then he felt her hand touch his hair and the touch was a caress.

“My queen!”

“Co—now,” she said so lowly. It was almost a whisper. He arose, pressed her hand to his lips and turned away, when a woman’s voice spoke among the palms:

“Did you say in this corner, Madame? I have not found him; Kenneth!”

“It is my mother,” he said softly, and was about to draw back the alcove draperies when the Marquise took a step towards him, staring strangely into his face.

“*Your Mother!*” and her tones expressed only doubt and dread. “No, no! Why, I—I know the voice; it is Madame McVeigh; she called Kenneth, her son—”

He smiled an affirmative.

“Yes; you will forgive me for having my name spoken to you after all? But there seems to be no help for it. So you see I am not English despite the hat, and my name is Kenneth McVeigh.”

His smile changed to quick concern as he noticed the strange look on her face, and the swaying movement towards the chair. He put out his hand, but she threw herself back from him with a shuddering movement of repulsion.

And a moment later the palms parted beside Mrs. McVeigh, and she was startled at sight of her son’s face.

“Kenneth! Why, what is wrong?”

“A lady has fainted there in the alcove,” he said, in a voice which sounded strange to her; “will you go to her?”

“Fainted? Why, Kenneth!—”

“Yes; I think it is the Marquise de Caron.”

## CHAPTER VIII

The dowager was delighted to find that the one evening of complete social success had changed her daughter-in-law into a woman of society. It had modified her prejudices. She accepted invitations without her former protests, and was only careful that the people whom she visited should be of the most distinguished.

Dumaresque watched her with interest. There seemed much of deliberation back of every move she made. The men of mark were the only ones to whom she gave encouragement, and she found several so responsive that there was no doubt, now, as to whether she was awake to her own power—more, she had a mind to use it. She was spoken of as one of the beauties of the day.

The McVeighs had gone to Italy, the mother to visit a relative, the son to view the late battle fields on the other side of the Pyrenees and acquaint himself with military matters wherever he found them.

He had called on the Marquise the day following the fete at the Hotel Dulac. She had quite recovered her slight indisposition of the preceding evening, and there had been no hesitation about receiving him. She was alone, and she met him with the fine, cool, gracious manner reserved for the people who were of no importance in her life.

Looking at her, listening to her, he could scarcely believe this could be the girl who had provoked him into a declaration of love less than a day ago, and in whose eyes he had surprised a fervor responding to his own. She called him Lieutenant McVeigh, with an utter disregard of the fact that she had ever called him anything else.

When in sheer desperation he referred to their first meeting, she listened with a chill little smile.

“Yes,” she agreed; “Fontainebleau was beautiful in the spring time. Maman was especially fond of it. She, herself, had been telling a friend lately of the very unconventional meeting under the bushes of the Mademoiselle and Monsieur Incognito, and he—the friend—had thought it delightfully amusing, good enough for the thread of a comedy.”

Then she sent some kindly message to Mrs. McVeigh, but refused to see the wonder—the actual pain—in the eyes where before she had remembered those half slumberous smiles, or that brief space of passionate pleading. He interrupted some cool remark by rising.

“It is scarcely worth while—all this,” he said, abruptly. “Had you closed your doors against me after last night I should have understood—I should have gone away adoring you just the same. But to open them, to receive me, and then—”

His voice trembled in spite of himself. All at once he appeared so much more boyish than ever before—so helpless in a sort of misery he could not account for, she turned away her head.

“With the ocean between us my love could not have hurt you. You might have let me keep that.” He had recovered control of his voice and his eyes swept over her from head to foot like blue lightning. “I bid you good-day, Madame.”

She made an inclination of the head, but did not speak. She had reached the limit of her self control. His words, “*You might have let me keep that,*” were an accusation she dared not discuss.

When the door closed behind him she could see nothing, for the blur of tears in her eyes. Madame La Marquise received no other callers that day.

In the days following she compared him with the courtiers, the diplomats, the very clever men whom she met, and told herself he was only a boy—a cadet of twenty-two. Why should she remember his words, or forget for one instant that infamy with which his name was connected?

“He goes on his knees to me only because he has grown weary of the slave-women of the plantations,” she told herself in deepest disgust. Sometimes she would look curiously at the hands once covered by his kisses. And once she threw a withered bunch of forget-me-nots from her window, at night, and crept down at daybreak next morning and found it, and took it back to her room.

It looked as though the boy was holding his own despite the diplomats.

When she saw him again it was at an auction of articles donated for a charity under the patronage of the Empress, and open to the public. Cotton stuffs jostled my lady's satins, and the half-world stared at short range into the faces whose owners claimed coronets.

Many leading artists had donated sketches of their more pretentious work. It was to that department the Marquise made her way, and entering the gallery by a side door, found that the crowd had separated her from the Countess Biron and the rest of their party.

Knowing that sooner or later they would find her there, she halted, examining some choice bits of color near the door. A daintily dressed woman, who looked strangely familiar, was standing near with apparently the same intent. But she stood so still; and the poise of her head betrayed that she was listening to something. The something was a group of men back of them, where the black and white sketches were on exhibition. The corridor was not wide, and their conversation was in English and not difficult to understand if one gave attention. The Marquise noted that Dumaresque was among them, and they stood before his donation of sketches, of which the principal one was a little study of the octoroon dancer, Kora.

Then in a flash she understood who the person was who listened. She was the original of the picture, drawn there no doubt by a sort of vanity to hear the artistic praise, or personal comment. But a swift glance showed her it had been a mistake; the dark brows were frowning, the full lip was bitten nervously, and the small ungloved hand was clenched.

The men were laughing carelessly over some argument, not noticing that they had a listener; the people moving along the corridor, single and in groups, hid the two who remained stationary, and whose backs were towards them. It was most embarrassing, and the Marquise was about to move away when she heard a voice there was no mistaking—the voice she had not been able to forget.

"No, I don't agree with you;" he was saying, "and you would not find half so much to admire in the work if the subject were some old plantation mammy equally well painted. Come over and see them where they grow. After that you will not be making celebrities of them."

"If they grow many like that I am most willing, Monsieur."

"I, too. When do we start? I can fancy no land so well worth a visit but that of Mohammed."

The first speaker uttered an exclamation of annoyance, but the others laughed.

"Oh, we have seen other men of your land here," remarked Dumaresque. "They are not all so discreet as yourself. We have learned that they do not usually build high walls between themselves and pretty slaves."

"You are right," agreed the American. "Sorry I can't contradict you. But these gorgeous Koras and Phrynes remind me of a wild blossom in our country; it is exquisite in form, beautiful to the eye, but poison if touched to the lips. It is called the yellow jasmine."

"No doubt you are right," remarked one of the men as Kora dropped her veil over her face. "You are at all events poetical."

"And the reason of their depravity?"

"The fact that they are the outgrowth of the worst passions of both races—at least so I have heard it said by men who make more of a study of such questions than I."

A party of people moved between the two women and the speakers. The Marquise heard Kora draw a sobbing breath. She hesitated an instant, her own eyes flashing, her cheeks burning. *He* to sit in judgment on others—he!

Then she laid her hand on the wrist of Kora.

"Come with me," she said, softly, in English, and the girl with one glance of tear-wet eyes, obeyed.

The Marquise opened the door beside her, a few steps further and another door led into an ante-room belonging to a portion of the building closed for repairs.

“Why do you weep?” she asked briefly, but the kindly clasp of her wrist told that the questioner was not without sympathy, and the girl strove to compose herself while staring at the other in amazement.

“You—I have seen you—I remember you,” she said, wonderingly, “the Marquise de Caron!”

“Yes;” the face of the Marquise flushed, “and you are the dancer—Kora. Why did you weep at their words?”

“Since you know who I am, Madame, I need not hesitate to tell you more,” she said, though she did hesitate, and looked up, deprecatingly, to the Marquise, who stood a few paces away leaning against the window.

There was only one chair in the room. Kora perceived for the first time that it had been given to her while the Marquise stood. She arose to her feet, and with a deference that lent a subtle grace to her expression, offered it to her questioner.

“No; resume your seat;” the command was a trifle imperious, but it was softened the next instant by the smile with which she said: “A dear old lady taught me that to the burdened horse we should always give the right of way. We must make easier the way of those who bear sorrows. You have the sorrow today—what is it?”

“I am not sure that you will understand, Madame,” and the girl’s velvety black eyes lifted and then sought the floor again. “But you, perhaps, heard what they said out there, and the man I—I—well, he was there.”

The lips of the Marquise grew a trifle rigid, but Kora was too much engaged with her own emotion to perceive it.

“I suppose I shouldn’t speak of him to a—a lady who can’t understand people who live in a different sort of world. But you mean to be kind, and I suppose have some reason for asking?” and she glanced at the lady in the window. “So—”

The Marquise looked at her carefully; yes, the girl was undeniably handsome; a medium sized, well-turned figure, small hands and feet, graceful in movement, velvety oriental eyes, and the deep cream complexion over which the artists had raved. She had the manner of one well trained, but was strangely diffident before this lady of the other world. The Marquise drew a deep breath as she realized how attractive she could be to a man who cared.

“You are a fool,” she said, harshly, “to care for a man who speaks so of your people.”

“Oh, Madame!” and the graceful form drooped helplessly. “I knew you could never understand. But if folks only loved where it was wise to love, all the trouble of the world would be ended.”

The hand of the Marquise went to her throat for an instant.

“And then it is true, all they said there,” continued Kora; “that is why—why I had let you see me cry; what he said is true—and I—I belong in his country where the yellow jasmine grows. There are times when I never stop to think—weeks when I am satisfied that I have money and a fine apartment. Then, all at once, in a minute like this, I see that it does not weigh down the one drop of black blood in my hand there. Sometimes I would sell my soul to wipe it out, and I can’t! I can’t!”

Her emotions were again overwhelming her. The Marquise watched her clench the shapely hands with their tapering fingers and many rings, the pretty graceful bit of human furniture in an establishment for such as *he!*

“An oriental prince was entertained by the Empress last week,” she remarked, abruptly. “His mother was a black woman, yours was not.”

“I know; I try to understand it—all the difference that is made. I can’t do it; I have not the brain. I can only”—and she smiled bitterly—“only learn to dance a little, and you don’t need brain for that. My God! How can they expect us to have brain when our mothers and grandmothers had to live under laws forbidding a slave to dispute any command of a white man? Madame, ladies like you—ladies of France—could not understand. I could not tell you. Sometimes I think money is all that can help you

in this world. But even money can't kill the poison he spoke of. We might be free for generations but the curse would stay on us, because away back in the past our people had been slaves."

"So have the ancestors of those men you listened to," said the Marquise, and the girl looked at her wonderingly.

"*They!* Why, Madame!"

"It is quite true. Everyone of them is the descendant of slaves of the past. Every ancient race was at some time the slaves of some stronger nation. Many of the masters of today are the descendants of people who were bought and sold with the land for hundreds of years. Think of that when they taunt you with slavery!"

"Oh! Madame!"

"And remember that every king and queen of Egypt for centuries, every one told of in their bibles and histories, would look black beside the woman who was your mother! Chut! do not look so startled! The Caucassian of today is now believed by men of science to be only a bleached negro. To be sure, it has taken thousands of years, and the ice-fields and cave dwellings of the North to do the bleaching. But man came originally from the Orient, the very womb of the earth from which only creatures of color come forth."

"You!—a white lady! a noble! say this to comfort me; why?" asked the girl. She had risen again and stood back of the chair. She looked half frightened.

"I say it because, if you study such questions earnestly, you will perceive how the opinion of those self-crowned judges will dwindle; they will no longer loom above you because of your race. My child, you are as royal as they by nature. It is the cultivation, the training, the intellect built up through generations, by which they are your superiors today. If your own life is commendable you need not be ashamed because of your race."

Kora turned her head away, fingering the rings on her pretty hands.

"You—it is no use trying to make a lady like you understand," she muttered, "but you know who I am, and it is too late now!"

She attempted to speak with the nonchalance customary to her, but the entire interview, added to the conversation in the corridor, had touched depths seldom stirred, and never before appealed to by a woman. What other woman would have dared question her like that? And it was not that she had been awed by the rank and majesty in which this Marquise moved; she, Kora—who had laughed in the face of a Princess whose betrothed was seen in Kora's carriage! No; it was not the rank, it was the gentle, yet slightly imperious womanliness, back of which could be felt a fund of sympathy new and strange to her; it appealed to her as the reasoning of a man would appeal; and man was the only compelling force hitherto acknowledged by Kora.

The Marquise looked at her thoughtfully, but did not speak. She was too much of a girl herself to understand entirely the nature before her or its temptations. They looked, really, about the same age, yet for all the mentality of the Marquise, she knew Kora was right—the world of emotions that was an open book to the bewitching octoroon was an unknown world to her.

"The things I do not understand I will not presume to judge," she said, at last, very gently; "but is there no one anywhere in this world whose affection for you would be strong enough to help you live away from these people who speak of you as those men spoke, yet who are themselves accountable for the faults over which they laugh together."

"Oh, what you have said has turned me against that Trouvelot—that dandy!" she said, with a certain vehemence. "He is only a Count of yesterday, after all; I'll remember that! Still; it is all the habit of life, Madame, and I never knew any other. Look here; when I was twelve I was told by an old woman to be careful of my hands, of my good looks every way, for if I was handsome as my mother, I would never need to do housework; that was the beginning! Well!" and she smiled bitterly, "I have not had to do it, but it was through no planning of theirs."

"And your mother?"

“Dead; and my father, too. He was her master.”

“It is that spendthrift—Trouvelot, you care for?”

“Not this minute,” confessed the girl; “but,” and she shrugged her shoulders, “I probably shall tomorrow! I know myself well enough for that; and I won’t lie—to you! You saw how he could make me cry? It is only the man we care for who can hurt us.”

The Marquise did not reply; she was staring out of the window. Kora, watching her, did not know if she heard. She had heard and was angry with herself that her heart grew lighter when she heard the name of Kora’s lover.

“I—I will not intrude longer, Madame,” said the girl at last. “What you’ve said will make me think more. I never heard of what you’ve told me today. I wish there were women in America like you; oh, I wish there were! There are good white ladies there, of course, but they don’t teach the slaves to think; they only tell them to have faith! They teach them from their bible; and all I could ever remember of it was: ‘Servants, obey your masters;’ and I hated it. So you see, Madame, it is too late for me; I don’t know any other life; I—”

“I will help you to a different life whenever you are willing to leave Paris,” said the Marquise.

“You would do that, Madame?”

Kora dropped into the chair again, covering her face with her hands. After a little she looked up, and the cunning of her class was in her eyes.

“Is it to separate me from *him*?” she asked, bluntly. “I know they want him to marry; are you a friend of his family?”

The Marquise smiled at that.

“I really do not know if he has a family,” she replied. “I am interested because it seems so pitiful that a girl should never have had a chance to live commendably. It is not too late. In your own country a person of your intelligence and education should be able to do much good among the children of the free colored people. You would be esteemed. You—”

“Esteemed!” Kora smiled skeptically, thinking no doubt of the half-world circle over which she was a power in her adopted city; she, who had only to show herself in the spectacle to make more money than a year’s earnings in American school teaching. She knew she could not really dance, but she did pose in a manner rather good; and then, her beauty!

“I was a fool when I came here—to Paris,” she said woefully. “I thought everybody would know I was colored, so I told. But they would not know,” and she held out her hand, looking at the white wrist, “I could have said I was a West Indian, a Brazilian, or a Spanish Creole—as many others do. But it is all too late. America was never kind to my people, or me. You mean to be kind, Madame; but you don’t know colored folks. They would be the first to resent my educational advantages; not that I know much; books were hard work for me, and Paris was the only one I could learn to read easy. As for America, I own up, I’m afraid of America.”

The Marquise thought she knew why, but only said:

“If you change your mind you can let me know. I have a property in New Orleans. Some day I may go there. I could protect you if you would help protect yourself.” She looked at the lovely octoroon with meaning, and the black velvety eyes fell under that regard.

“You can always learn where I am in Paris, and if you should change your mind—” At the door she paused and said kindly: “My poor girl, if you remain here he will break your heart.”

“They usually do when a woman loves them, Madame,” replied Kora, with a sad little smile; she had learned so much in the book of Paris.

The friends of the Marquise were searching for her when she emerged from the ante-room. The Countess Biron confessed herself in despair.

“In such a mixed assembly! and all alone! How was one to know what people you might meet, or what adventures.”

“Oh, I am not adventurous, Countess,” was the smiling reply; “and let me whisper: I have been talking all of the time with one person, one very pretty person, and it has been an instructive half hour.”

“Pretty? Well, that is assurance as to sex,” remarked Madame Choudey, with a glance towards one of the others of the party.

“And if you will watch that door you will be enlightened as to the individual,” said the Marquise.

Three pair of eyes turned with alertness to the door. At that moment it opened, and Kora appeared. The lace veil no longer hid her beautiful eyes—all the more lovely for that swift bath of tears. She saw the Marquise and her friends, but passed as if she had never seen one of them before; Kora had her own code.

“Are you serious, Judithe de Caron?” gasped the Countess Helene. “Were you actually—conversing—with that—demi-mondaine?”

“My dear Marquise!” purred Madame Choudey, “when she does not even *pretend* to be respectable!”

“It is because she does not pretend that I spoke with her. Honesty should receive some notice.”

“Honesty! Good heavens!” cried Madame Ampere, who had not yet spoken, but who expressed horror by her eyes, “where then do you find your standards for such judgment?”

“Now, listen!” and the Marquise turned to the three with a quizzical smile, “if Kora lived exactly the same life morally, but was a ruler of the fashionable world, instead of the other one; if she wore a crown of state instead of the tinsel of the varieties, you would not exclaim if she addressed me.”

“Oh, I must protest, Marquise,” began Madame Ampere in shocked remonstrance, but the Marquise smiled and stopped her.

“Yesterday,” she said slowly, “I saw you in conversation with a man who has the panels of his carriage emblazoned with the Hydrangea—also called the Hortensia.”

The shocked lady looked uncomfortable.

“What then? since it was the Emperor’s brother.”

“Exactly; the brother of the Emperor, and both of them the sons of a mother beside whom beautiful Kora is a thing of chastity.”

“The children could not help the fact that they were all half-brothers,” laughed the Countess Helene.

“But this so-called Duke could help parading the doubtful honor of his descent; yet who fails to return his bow? And I have yet to learn that his mother was ignored by the ladies of her day. Those Hortensias on his carriage are horrible to me; they are an attempt to exalt in a queen the immorality condemned in a subject.”

“Ah! You make my head swim with your theories,” confessed the Countess. “How do you find time to study them all?”

“They require no study; one meets them daily in the street or court. The difficulty is to cease thinking of them—to enjoy a careless life when justice is always calling somewhere for help.”

“I refuse to be annoyed by the calls, yet am comfortable,” said Madame Choudey. “The people who imagine they hear justice calling have had, too often, to follow the calls into exile.”

“That is true,” agreed her friend; “take care Marquise! Your theories are very interesting, but, truly, you are a revolutionist.”

Their little battle of words did not prevent them parting with smiles and all pleasantry. But the Countess Biron, to whose house the Marquise was going, grimaced and looked at her with a smile of doubt when they were alone.

“Do you realize how daring you are Judithe?—to succeed socially you should not appeal to the brains of people, but to their vanities.”

“Farewell, my social ambitions!” laughed the Marquise. “Dear Countess, pray do not scold! I could not help it. Why must the very respectable world see only the sins of the unfortunate, and

save all their charity for the heads with coronets? Maman is not like that; she is always gentle with the people who have never been taught goodness; though she is severe on those who disgrace good training. I like her way best; and Alain? Well, he only told me to do my own thinking, to be sure I was right before I spoke, and to let no other consideration weigh at all.”

“Yes! and he died in exile because he let no worldly consideration weigh,” said the Countess Helene grimly.

## CHAPTER IX

At the entrance to the gallery the Marquise saw Dumaresque on the step, and with him Kenneth McVeigh. She entered the carriage, hoping the Countess would not perceive them; but the hope was in vain, she did, and she motioned them both to her to learn if Mrs. McVeigh had also unexpectedly returned.

She had not. Italy was yet attractive to her, and the Lieutenant had come alone. He was to await her arrival, whenever she chose, and then their holiday would be over. When they left Paris again it would be for America.

He smiled in the same lazy, yet deferential way, as the Countess chatted and questioned him. He confessed he did not remember why he had returned; at least he could not tell in a crowd, or with cynical Dumaresque listening to him.

“Invite him home, and he will vow it was to see you,” said the artist.

“I mean to,” she retorted; “but do not judge all men by yourself, Monsieur Loris, for I suspect Lieutenant McVeigh has a conscience.”

“I have,” he acknowledged, “too much of one to take advantage of your invitation. Some day, when you are not tired from the crowds, I shall come, if you will allow me.”

“No, no; come now!” insisted the Countess, impulsively; “you will rest me; I assure you it is true! We have been with women—women all morning! So take pity on us. We want to hear all about the battle grounds and fortresses you were to inspect. The Marquise, especially, is a lover of wars.”

“And of warriors?” queried Dumaresque; but the Countess paid no attention to him.

“Yes, she is really a revolutionist, Monsieur; so come and enlighten us as to the latest methods of those amiable patriots.”

The Marquise had given him a gracious little bow, and had politely shown interest in their remarks to such an extent that the Countess did not notice her silence. But during the brief glance she noticed that the blue eyes had dark circles under them, but they were steady for all that. He looked tired, but he also looked more the master of himself than when they last met; she need fear no further pleading.

The Countess prevailed, and he entered the carriage. Dumaresque was also invited, but was on some committee of arrangements and could not leave.

As they were about to drive away the Marquise called him.

“Oh, Monsieur Loris, one moment! I want the black and white sketch of your Kora. Pray have it bid in for me.”

It was the first time she had ever called him Loris, except in her own home, and as a partial echo of the dowager. His eyes thanked her, and Kenneth McVeigh received the benefit both of her words and the look.

“But, my dear Marquise, it will give me pleasure to make you something finer of the same subject.”

“No, no; only the sketch. I will value it as a souvenir of—well—do not let any one else have it.”

Then she bowed, flashed a rare smile at him, and they wheeled away with McVeigh facing her and noting with his careless smile every expression of her coquetry. He had gone away a boy—so she had called him; but he had come back man enough to hide the hurts she gave him, and willing to let her know it.

Someway he appeared more as he had when she met him first under the beeches; then he had seemed so big, so strong, so masterful, that she had never thought of his years. But she knew now he was younger than he looked.

She had plenty of time to think of this, and of many other things, during the drive.

The Countess monopolized the young officer with her questions. He endeavored to make the replies she invited, and neither of them appeared to note that the share of the Marquise was limited to an interested expression, and an occasional smile.

She studied his well-formed, strong hands, and thought of the night they had held her own—thought of all the impetuous, passionate words; try as she would to drive them away they came back with a rush as his cool, widely different tones fell on her ear. What a dissembler the fellow was! All that evil nature which she knew about was hidden under an exterior so engaging! “*If one only loved where it was wise to love, all the sorrows of the world would be ended,*” those words of the pretty figureante haunted her, with all their meaning beating through her brain. What a farce seemed the careless, empty chatter beside her! It grew unbearable, to feel his careless glance sweep across her face, to hear him laugh carelessly, to be conscious of the fact that after all he was the stronger; he could face her easily, graciously, and she did not dare even meet his eyes lest he should, after all, see; the thought of her weakness frightened her; suppose he should compel her to the truth. Suppose—

She felt half hysterical; the drive had never before been so long. She feared she must scream—do something to break through this horrible chain of circumstances, linking them for even so short a space within touch of each other. And he was the man she had promised herself to hate, to make suffer, to—

Some one did scream; but it was the Countess. Out of a side street came a runaway team, a shouting man heralding their approach. At that point street repairs had left only a narrow carriage-way, and a wall of loose stone; there was no time to get out of the way; no room to turn. There was a collision, a crash! The horses of the Countess leaped aside, the right front wheel struck the heap of stone, flinging the driver from his seat. He fell, and did not move again.

At that sight the Countess uttered a gasp and sank to the bottom of the carriage. The Marquise stooped over her only for an instant, while the carriage righted itself and all four wheels were on a level once more; the horses alone had been struck, and were maddened with fear, and in that madness lay their only danger now.

She lifted her head, and the man opposite, in her instant of shrinking, had leaped over the back of the seat to secure the lines of the now thoroughly wild animals.

One line was dragging between them on the ground. Someway he maintained his footing on the carriage pole long enough to secure the dragging line, and when he gained the driver’s seat the Marquise was beside him.

She knew what lay before them, and he did not—a dangerous curve, a steep embankment—and they had passed the last street where they could have turned into a less dangerous thoroughfare.

People ran out and threw up their hands and shouted. She heard him fling an oath at them for adding fury to the maddened animals.

“It is no use,” she said, and laid her hand on his. He turned and met her eyes. No veil of indifference was between them now, no coquetry; all pretense was swept aside and the look they exchanged was as a kiss.

“You love me—now?” he demanded, half fiercely.

“Now, and always, from the first hour you looked at me!” she said, with her hand on his wrist. His grip tightened on the lines, and the blood leaped into his face.

“My love, my love!” he whispered; and she slipped on her knees beside him that she might not see the danger to be faced.

“It is no use, Kenneth, Kenneth! There is the bank ahead—they cannot stop—it will kill us! It is just ahead!”

She was muttering disjointed sentences, her face averted, her arms clasping him.

“Kill us? Don’t you believe it!” And he laughed a trifle nervously. “Look up, sweetheart; the danger is over. I knew it when you first spoke. See! They are going steady now.”

They were. He had gained control of them in time to make the dangerous curve in safety. They were a quarter of the way along the embankment. Workmen there stared at the lady and gentleman on the coachman's seat, and at the rather rapid gait; but the real danger was over.

They halted at a little cafe, which was thrown into consternation at sight of a lady insensible in the bottom of the carriage; but a little wine and the administrations of the Marquise aided her recovery, and in a short time enabled her to hear the account of the wild race.

The driver had a broken arm, and one of the horses was slightly injured. Lieutenant McVeigh had sent back about the man, and secured another team for the drive home. He was now walking up and down the pavement in front of the cafe, in very good spirits, and awaiting the pleasure of the Countess.

They drove home at once; the Countess volubly grateful to Kenneth, and apparently elated over such a tremendous adventure. The young officer shared her high spirits, and the Marquise was the only silent member of the party. After the danger was passed she scarcely spoke. When he helped her into the carriage the pressure of his hand and one whispered word sent the color sweeping over her face, leaving it paler than before. She scarcely lifted her eyes for the rest of the drive, and after retiring for a few moments' rest, apparently, broke down entirely; the nervous strain had proven rather trying, and she was utterly unable—to her own regret—to join them at lunch.

Lieutenant McVeigh begged to withdraw, but the Countess Biron, who declared she had never been the heroine of a thrilling adventure, before, insisted that she at least was quite herself again, and would feel cheated if their heroic deliverer did not remain for a lunch, even though it be a tete-a-tete affair; and she, of course, wanted to hear all the details of the horror; that child, Judithe, had not seemed to remember much; she supposed she must have been terribly frightened. "Yet, one never knew how the Marquise would be effected by *any* thing! She was always surprising people; usually in delightful ways, of course."

"Of course," assented her guest, with a reminiscent gleam and a wealth of absolute happiness in the blue eyes. "Yes, she is rather surprising at times; she surprised me!"

"Judithe, my child, it was an ideal adventure," insisted the Countess, an hour after the Lieutenant had left her, and she had repaired to the room where the Marquise was supposed to be resting. Her nervousness had evidently not yet abated, for she was walking up and down the floor.

"An absolutely ideal adventure, and a heroic foreigner to the rescue! What a god-send that I invited him! And I really believe he enjoyed it. I never before saw him so gay, so charming! There are men, you know, to whom danger is a tonic, and my friend's son is like that, surely. Did he not seem at all afraid?"

"Not that I observed."

"Did he not say anything?"

"Y—yes; he swore at the people who shouted and tried to stop the horses."

"You should not have let yourself hear that," said the Countess, reproachfully. "I thought he was so perfect, and was making my little romance about him—or could, if you would only show a little more interest. Ah! at your age I should have been madly in love with the fine fellow, just for what he did today; but *you*! Still, it would be no use, I suppose. He is fiancee, you know. Yes; the mother told me; a fine settlement; I saw her picture—very pretty."

"American—I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; their lands join, and she is a great heiress. The name—the name is Loring—Genevieve? No—Gertrude, Mademoiselle Gertrude Loring. Ah! so strong he was, so heroic. If she loves him she should have seen him today."

"Yes," agreed the Marquise, with a curious little smile, "she should."

Two hours later she was on her knees beside the dowager's couch, her face hidden and all her energy given to one plea:

"Maman—Maman! Do not question me; only give me your trust—let us go away!"

“But the man—tah! It is only a fancy; why should you leave for that? Whoever it is, the infatuation grew quickly and will die out the same way—so—”

“No! If I remain I cannot answer for myself. I am ashamed to confess it, but—listen, Maman—but put your arms around me first; he is not worthy, I know it; yet I love him! He vows love to me, yet he is betrothed; I know that, *also*; but I have no reason left, and my folly will make me go to him if you do not help me. Listen, Maman! I—I will do all you say. I will marry in a year—two years—when this is all over. I will obey you in everything, if you will only take me away. I cannot leave you; yet I am afraid to stay where he is.”

“Afraid! But, Judithe, my child, no one shall intrude upon you. Your friends will protect you from such a man. You have only to refuse to see him, and in a little while—”

“Refuse! Maman, what can I say to make you understand that I could never refuse him again? Yet, oh, the humiliation! Maman, he is the man I despised—the man I said was not fit to be spoken to; it was all true, but when I hear his voice it makes me forget his unworthiness. Listen, Maman! I—I confessed to him today that I loved him; yet I know he is the man who by the laws of America is the owner of Rhoda Larue, and he is now the betrothed of her half-sister; I heard the name of his fiancée today, and it told me the whole story. He is the man! *Now*

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