

that is my reason for coming here to-night, Mr. Ritchie. I want you to get proof of it if you can."

"You want me —" I said, bewildered.

"I repeat that you are not handsome," — I think he emphasized this unduly, — "that you are self-effacing, inconspicuous; in short, you are not a man to draw suspicion. You might travel anywhere and scarcely be noticed, — I have observed that about you. In addition to this you are wary, you are discreet, you are painstaking. I ask you to go first to St. Louis, in Louisiana territory, and this for two reasons. First, because it will draw any chance suspicion from your real objective, New Orleans; and second, because it is necessary to get letters to New Orleans from such leading citizens of St. Louis as Colonel Chouteau and Monsieur Gratiot, and I will give you introductions to them. You are then to take passage to New Orleans in a barge of furs which Monsieur Gratiot is sending down. Mind, we do not expect that you will obtain proof that Miro is paying Wilkinson money. If you do, so much the better; but we believe that both are too sharp to leave any tracks. You will make a report, however, upon the conditions under which our tobacco is being received, and of all other matters which you may think germane to the business in hand. Will you go?"

I had made up my mind.

"Yes, I will go," I answered.

"Good," said Mr. Wharton, but with no more enthusiasm than he had previously shown; "I thought I had not misjudged you. Is your law business so onerous that you could not go to-morrow?"

I laughed.

"I think I could settle what affairs I have by noon, Mr. Wharton," I replied.

"Egad, Mr. Ritchie, I like your manner," said he; "and now for a few details, and you may go to bed."

He sat with me half an hour longer, carefully reviewing his instructions, and then he left me to a night of contemplation.

CHAPTER VIII

TO ST. LOUIS

By eleven o'clock the next morning I had wound up my affairs, having arranged with a young lawyer of my acquaintance to take over such cases as I had, and I was busy in my room packing my saddle-bags for the journey. The warm scents of spring were wafted through the open door and window, smells of the damp earth giving forth the green things, and tender shades greeted my eyes when I paused and raised my head to think. Purple buds littered the black ground before my door-step, and against the living green of the grass I saw the red stain of a robin's breast as he hopped spasmodically hither and thither, now pausing immovable with his head raised, now tossing triumphantly a wriggling worm from the sod. Suddenly he flew away, and I heard a voice from the street side that brought me stark upright.

"Hold there, neighbor; can you direct me to the mansion of that celebrated barrister, Mr. Ritchie?"

There was no mistaking that voice — it was Nicholas Temple's. I heard a laugh and an answer, the gate slammed, and Mr. Temple himself in a long gray riding-coat, booted and spurred, stood before me.

"Davy," he cried, "come out here and hug me. Why, you look as if I were your grandmother's ghost."

"And if you were," I answered, "you could not have surprised me more. Where have you been?"

"At Jonesboro, acting the gallant with the widow, winning and losing skins and cow-bells and land at rattle-and-snap, horse-racing with that wild Mr. Jackson. Faith, he near shot the top of my head off because I beat him at Greasy Cove."

I laughed, despite my anxiety.

"And Sevier?" I demanded.

"You have not heard how Sevier got off?" exclaimed Nick. "Egad, that was a crowning stroke of genius! Cozby and Evans, Captains Greene and Gibson, and Sevier's two boys whom you met on the Nollichucky rode over the mountains to Morganton. Greene and Gibson and Sevier's boys hid themselves with the horses in a clump outside the town, while Cozby and Evans, disguised as bumpkins in hunting shirts, jogged into the town with Sevier's racing mare between them. They jogged into the town, I say, through the crowds of white trash, and rode up to the court-house where Sevier was being tried for his life. Evans stood at the open door and held the mare and gaped, while Cozby stalked in and shouldered his way to the front within four feet of the bar, like a big, awkward countryman. Jack Sevier saw him, and he saw Evans with the mare outside. Then, by thunder, Cozby takes a step right up to the bar and cries out, 'Judge, aren't you about done with that man?' Faith, it was like judgment day, such a mix-up as there was after that, and Nollichucky Jack made three leaps and got on the mare, and in the confusion Cozby and Evans were off too, and the whole State of North Carolina couldn't catch 'em then." Nick sighed. "I'd have given my soul to have been there," he said.

"Come in," said I, for lack of something better.

"Cursed if you haven't given me a sweet reception, Davy," said he. "Have you lost your practice, or is there a lady here, you rogue," and he poked into the cupboard with his stick. "Hullo, where are you going now?" he added, his eye falling on the saddle-bags.

I had it on my lips to say, and then I remembered Mr. Wharton's injunction.

"I'm going on a journey," said I.

"When?" said Nick.

"I leave in about an hour," said I.

He sat down. "Then I leave too," he said.

"What do you mean, Nick?" I demanded.

"I mean that I will go with you," said he.

"But I shall be gone three months or more," I protested.

"I have nothing to do," said Nick, placidly.

A vague trouble had been working in my mind, but now the full horror of it dawned upon me. I was going to St. Louis. Mrs. Temple and Harry Riddle were gone there, so Polly Ann had avowed, and Nick could not help meeting Riddle. Sorely beset, I bent over to roll up a shirt, and refrained from answering.

He came and laid a hand on my shoulder.

"What the devil ails you, Davy?" he cried. "If it is an elopement, of course I won't press you. I'm hanged if I'll make a third."

"It is no elopement," I retorted, my face growing hot in spite of myself.

"Then I go with you," said he, "for I vow you need taking care of. You can't put me off, I say. But never in my life have I had such a reception, and from my own first cousin, too."

I was in a quandary, so totally unforeseen was this situation. And then a glimmer of hope came to me that perhaps his mother and Riddle might not be in St. Louis after all. I recalled the conversation in the cabin, and reflected that this wayward pair had stranded on so many beaches, had drifted off again on so many tides, that one place could scarce hold them long. Perchance they had sunk,—who could tell? I turned to Nick, who stood watching me.

"It was not that I did not want you," I said, "you must believe that. I have wanted you ever since that night long ago when I slipped out of your bed and ran away. I am going first to St. Louis and then to New Orleans on a mission of much delicacy, a mission that requires discretion and secrecy. You may come, with all my heart, with one condition only—that you do not ask my business."

"Done!" cried Nick. "Davy, I was always sure of you; you are the one fixed quantity in my life. To St. Louis, eh, and to New Orleans? Egad, what havoc we'll

make among the Creole girls. May I bring my nigger? He'll do things for you too."

"By all means," said I, laughing, "only hurry."

"I'll run to the inn," said Nick, "and be back in ten minutes." He got as far as the door, slapped his thigh, and looked back. "Davy, we may run across —"

"Who?" I asked, with a catch of my breath.

"Harry Riddle," he answered; "and if so, may God have mercy on his soul!"

He ran down the path, the gate clicked, and I heard him whistling in the street on his way to the inn.

After dinner we rode down to the ferry, Nick on the thoroughbred which had beat Mr. Jackson's horse, and his man, Benjy, on a scraggly pony behind. Benjy was a small, black negro with a very squat nose, alert and talkative save when Nick turned on him. Benjy had been born at Temple Bow; he worshipped his master and all that pertained to him, and he showered upon me all the respect and attention that was due to a member of the Temple family. For this I was very grateful. It would have been an easier journey had we taken a boat down to Fort Massac, but such a proceeding might have drawn too much attention to our expedition. I have no space to describe that trip overland, which reminded me at every stage of the march against Kaskaskia, the woods, the chocolate streams, the coffee-colored swamps flecked with dead leaves, — and at length the prairies, the grass not waist-high now, but young and tender, giving forth the acrid smell of spring. Nick was delighted. He made me recount every detail of my trials as a drummer boy, or kept me in continuous spells of laughter over his own escapades. In short, I began to realize that we were as near to each other as though we had never been parted.

We looked down upon Kaskaskia from the self-same spot where I had stood on the bluff with Colonel Clark, and the sounds were even then the same, — the sweet tones of the church bell and the lowing of the cattle. We found a few Virginians and Pennsylvanians scattered in amongst the French, the forerunners of that change which

was to come over this country. And we spent the night with my old friend, Father Gibault, still the faithful pastor of his flock; cheerful, though the savings of his lifetime had never been repaid by that country to which he had given his allegiance so freely. Travelling by easy stages, on the afternoon of the second day after leaving Kaskaskia we picked our way down the high bluff that rises above the American bottom, and saw below us that yellow monster among the rivers, the Mississippi. A blind monster he seemed, searching with troubled arms among the islands for his bed, swept onward by an inexorable force, and on his heaving shoulders he carried great trees pilfered from the unknown forests of the North.

Down in the moist and shady bottom we came upon the log hut of a half-breed trapper, and he agreed to ferry us across. As for our horses, a keel boat must be sent after these, and Monsieur Gratiot would no doubt easily arrange for this. And so we found ourselves, about five o'clock on that Saturday evening, embarked in a wide pirogue on the current, dodging the driftwood, avoiding the eddies, and drawing near to a village set on a low bluff on the Spanish side and gleaming white among the trees. And as I looked, the thought came again like a twinge of pain that Mrs. Temple and Riddle might be there, thinking themselves secure in this spot, so removed from the world and its doings.

"How now, my man of mysterious affairs?" cried Nick, from the bottom of the boat; "you are as puckered as a sour persimmon. Have you a treaty with Spain in your pocket or a declaration of war? What can trouble you?"

"Nothing, if you do not," I answered, smiling.

"Lord send we don't admire the same lady, then," said Nick. "Pierrot," he cried, turning to one of the boatmen, "*il y a des belles demoiselles là, n'est-ce pas?*"

The man missed a stroke in his astonishment, and the boat swung lengthwise in the swift current.

"*Dame, Monsieur, il y en a,*" he answered.

"Where did you learn French, Nick?" I demanded.

"Mr. Mason had it hammered into me," he answered

carelessly, his eyes on the line of keel boats moored along the shore. Our guides shot the canoe deftly between two of these, the prow grounded in the yellow mud, and we landed on Spanish territory.

We looked about us while our packs were being unloaded, and the place had a strange flavor in that year of our Lord, 1789. A swarthy boatman in a tow shirt with a bright handkerchief on his head stared at us over the gunwale of one of the keel boats, and spat into the still, yellow water; three high-cheeked Indians, with smudgy faces and dirty red blankets, regarded us in silent contempt; and by the water-side above us was a sled loaded with a huge water cask, a bony mustang pony between the shafts, and a chanting negro dipping gourdfuls from the river. A road slanted up the little limestone bluff, and above and below us stone houses could be seen nestling into the hill, houses higher on the river side, and with galleries there. We climbed the bluff, Benjy at our heels with the saddle-bags, and found ourselves on a yellow-clay street lined with grass and wild flowers. A great peace hung over the village, an air of a different race, a restfulness strange to a Kentuckian. Clematis and honeysuckle climbed the high palings, and behind the privacy of these, low, big-chimneyed houses of limestone, weathered gray, could be seen, their roofs sloping in gentle curves to the shaded porches in front; or again, houses of posts set upright in the ground and these filled between with plaster, and so immaculately whitewashed that they gleamed against the green of the trees which shaded them. Behind the houses was often a kind of pink-and-cream paradise of flowering fruit trees, so dear to the French settlers. There were vineyards, too, and thrifty patches of vegetables, and lines of flowers set in the carefully raked mould.

We walked on, enraptured by the sights around us, by the heavy scent of the roses and the blossoms. Here was a quaint stone horse-mill, a stable, or a barn set uncouthly on the street; a baker's shop, with a glimpse of the white-capped baker through the shaded doorway, and an appetiz-

ing smell of hot bread in the air. A little farther on we heard the tinkle of the blacksmith's hammer, and the man himself looked up from where the hoof rested on his leather apron to give us a kindly "*Bon soir, Messieurs,*" as we passed. And here was a cabaret, with the inevitable porch, from whence came the sharp click of billiard balls.

We walked on, stopping now and again to peer between the palings, when we heard, amidst the rattling of a cart and the jingling of bells, a chorus of voices:—

*"À cheval, à cheval, pour aller voir ma mie,
Lon, lon, la!"*

A shaggy Indian pony came ambling around the corner between the long shafts of a charette. A bareheaded young man in tow shirt and trousers was driving, and three laughing girls were seated on the stools in the cart behind him. Suddenly, before I quite realized what had happened, the young man pulled up the pony, the girls fell silent, and Nick was standing in the middle of the road, with his hat in his hand, bowing elaborately.

"*Je vous salue, Mesdemoiselles,*" he cried, "*mes anges à char-à-banc. Pouvez-vous me diriger chez Monsieur Gratiot?*"

"*Sapristi!*" exclaimed the young man, but he laughed. The young women stood up, giggling, and peered at Nick over the young man's shoulder. One of them wore a fresh red-and-white calamanco gown. She had a complexion of ivory tinged with red, raven hair, and dusky, long-lashed, mischievous eyes brimming with merriment.

"*Volontiers, Monsieur,*" she answered, before the others could catch their breath, "*première droite et première gauche. Allons, Gaspard!*" she cried, tapping the young man sharply on the shoulder, "*es tu fou?*"

Gaspard came to himself, flicked the pony, and they went off down the road with shouts of laughter, while Nick stood waving his hat until they turned the corner.

"Egad," said he, "I'd take to the highway if I could be sure of holding up such a cargo every time. Off with you, Benjy, and find out where she lives," he cried;

and the obedient Benjy dropped the saddle-bags as though such commands were not uncommon.

"Pick up those bags, Benjy," said I, laughing.

Benjy glanced uncertainly at his master.

"Do as I tell you, you black scalawag," said Nick, "or I'll tan you. What are you waiting for?"

"Marse Dave—" began Benjy, rolling his eyes in discomfiture.

"Look you, Nick Temple," said I, "when you shipped with me you promised that I should command. I can't afford to have the town about our ears."

"Oh, very well, if you put it that way," said Nick. "A little honest diversion— Pick up the bags, Benjy, and follow the parson."

Obeying Mademoiselle's directions, we trudged on until we came to a comfortable stone house surrounded by trees and set in a half-block bordered by a seven-foot paling. Hardly had we opened the gate when a tall gentleman of grave demeanor and sober dress rose from his seat on the porch, and I recognized my friend of Cahokia days, Monsieur Gratiot. He was a little more portly, his hair was dressed now in an eelskin, and he looked every inch the man of affairs that he was. He greeted us kindly and bade us come up on the porch, where he read my letter of introduction.

"Why," he exclaimed immediately, giving me a cordial grasp of the hand, "of course. The strategist, the John Law, the reader of character of Colonel Clark's army. Yes, and worse, the prophet, Mr. Ritchie."

"And why worse, sir?" I asked.

"You predicted that Congress would never repay me for the little loan I advanced to your Colonel."

"It was not such a little loan, Monsieur," I said.

"*N'importe*," said he; "I went to Richmond with my box of scrip and promissory notes, but I was not ill repaid. If I did not get my money, I acquired, at least, a host of distinguished acquaintances. But, Mr. Ritchie, you must introduce me to your friend."

"My cousin, Mr. Nicholas Temple," I said.

Monsieur Gratiot looked at him fixedly.

"Of the Charlestown Temples?" he asked, and a sudden vague fear seized me.

"Yes," said Nick, "there was once a family of that name."

"And now?" said Monsieur Gratiot, puzzled.

"Now," said Nick, "now they are become a worthless lot of refugees and outlaws, who by good fortune have escaped the gallows."

Before Monsieur Gratiot could answer, a child came running around the corner of the house and stood, surprised, staring at us. Nick made a face, stooped down, and twirled his finger. Shouting with a terrified glee, the boy fled to the garden path, Nick after him.

"I like Mr. Temple," said Monsieur Gratiot, smiling. "He is young, but he seems to have had a history."

"The Revolution ruined many families— his was one," I answered, with what firmness of tone I could muster. And then Nick came back, carrying the shouting youngster on his shoulders. At that instant a lady appeared in the doorway, leading another child, and we were introduced to Madame Gratiot.

"Gentlemen," said Monsieur Gratiot, "you must make my house your home. I fear your visit will not be as long as I could wish, Mr. Ritchie," he added, turning to me, "if Mr. Wharton correctly states your business. I have an engagement to have my furs in New Orleans by a certain time. I am late in loading, and as there is a moon I am sending off my boats to-morrow night. The men will have to work on Sunday."

"We were fortunate to come in such good season," I answered.

After a delicious supper of gumbo, a Creole dish, of fricassee, of *crème brûlée*, of red wine and fresh wild strawberries, we sat on the porch. The crickets chirped in the garden, the moon cast fantastic shadows from the pecan tree on the grass, while Nick, struggling with his French, talked to Madame Gratiot; and now and then their gay laughter made Monsieur Gratiot pause and smile as he talked to me of my errand. It seemed strange

to me that a man who had lost so much by his espousal of our cause should still be faithful to the American republic. Although he lived in Louisiana, he had never renounced the American allegiance which he had taken at Cahokia. He regarded with no favor the pretensions of Spain toward Kentucky. And (remarkably enough) he looked forward even then to the day when Louisiana would belong to the republic. I exclaimed at this.

"Mr. Ritchie," said he, "the most casual student of your race must come to the same conclusion. You have seen for yourself how they have overrun and conquered Kentucky and the Cumberland districts, despite a hideous warfare waged by all the tribes. Your people will not be denied, and when they get to Louisiana, they will take it, as they take everything else."

He was a man strong in argument, was Monsieur Gratiot, for he loved it. And he beat me fairly.

"Nay," he said finally, "Spain might as well try to dam the Mississippi as to dam your commerce on it. As for France, I love her, though my people were exiled to Switzerland by the Edict of Nantes. But France is rotten through the prodigality of her kings and nobles, and she cannot hold Louisiana. The kingdom is sunk in debt." He cleared his throat. "As for this Wilkinson of whom you speak, I know something of him. I have no doubt that Miro pensions him, but I know Miro likewise, and you will obtain no proof of that. You will, however, discover in New Orleans many things of interest to your government and to the Federal party in Kentucky. Colonel Chouteau and I will give you letters to certain French gentlemen in New Orleans who can be trusted. There is Saint-Gré, for instance, who puts a French Louisiana into his prayers. He has never forgiven O'Reilly and his Spaniards for the murder of his father in sixty-nine. Saint-Gré is a good fellow, — a cousin of the present Marquis in France, — and his ancestors held many positions of trust in the colony under the French régime. He entertains lavishly at *Les Îles*, his plantation on the Mississippi. He has the gossip of New Orleans at his

tongue's tip, and you will be suspected of nothing save a desire to amuse yourselves if you go there." He paused, interrupted by the laughter of the others. "When strangers of note or of position drift here and pass on to New Orleans, I always give them letters to Saint-Gré. He has a charming daughter and a worthless son."

Monsieur Gratiot produced his tabatière and took a pinch of snuff. I summoned my courage for the topic which had trembled all the evening on my lips.

"Some years ago, Monsieur Gratiot, a lady and a gentleman were rescued on the Wilderness Trail in Kentucky. They left us for St. Louis. Did they come here?"

Monsieur Gratiot leaned forward quickly.

"They were people of quality?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"And their name?"

"They — they did not say."

"It must have been the Clives," he cried; "it can have been no other. Tell me — a woman still beautiful, commanding, of perhaps eight and thirty? A woman who had a sorrow — a great sorrow, though we have never learned it. And Mr. Clive, a man of fashion, ill content too, and pining for the life of a capital?"

"Yes," I said eagerly, my voice sinking near to a whisper, "yes — it is they. And are they here?"

Monsieur Gratiot took another pinch of snuff. It seemed an age before he answered: —

"It is curious that you should mention them, for I gave them letters to New Orleans, — amongst others, to Saint-Gré. Mrs. Clive was — what shall I say? — haunted. Monsieur Clive talked of nothing but Paris, where they had lived once. And at last she gave in. They have gone there."

"To Paris?" I said, taking breath.

"Yes. It is more than a year ago," he continued, seeming not to notice my emotion; "they went by way of New Orleans, in one of Chouteau's boats. Mrs. Clive seemed a woman with a great sorrow."