

## CHAPTER IX

### "CHERCHEZ LA FEMME"

SUNDAY came with the soft haziness of a June morning, and the dew sucked a fresh fragrance from the blossoms and the grass. I looked out of our window at the orchard, all pink and white in the early sun, and across a patch of clover to the stone kitchen. A pearly, feathery smoke was wafted from the chimney, a delicious aroma of Creole coffee pervaded the odor of the blossoms, and a cotton-clad negro *à pieds nus* came down the path with two steaming cups and knocked at our door. He who has tasted Creole coffee will never forget it. The effect of it was lost upon Nick, for he laid down the cup, sighed, and promptly went to sleep again, while I dressed and went forth to make his excuses to the family. I found Monsieur and Madame with their children walking among the flowers. Madame laughed.

"He is charming, your cousin," said she. "Let him sleep, by all means, until after Mass. Then you must come with us to Madame Chouteau's, my mother's. Her children and grandchildren dine with her every Sunday."

"Madame Chouteau, my mother-in-law, is the queen regent of St. Louis, Mr. Ritchie," said Monsieur Gratiot, gayly. "We are all afraid of her, and I warn you that she is a very determined and formidable personage. She is the widow of the founder of St. Louis, the Sieur Laclède, although she prefers her own name. She rules us with a strong hand, dispenses justice, settles disputes, and — sometimes indulges in them herself. It is her right."

"You will see a very pretty French custom of submission to parents," said Madame Gratiot. "And afterwards there is a ball."

"A ball!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"It may seem very strange to you, Mr. Ritchie, but we believe that Sunday was made to enjoy. They will have time to attend the ball before you send them down the river?" she added mischievously, turning to her husband.

"Certainly," said he; "the loading will not be finished before eight o'clock."

Presently Madame Gratiot went off to Mass, while I walked with Monsieur Gratiot to a storehouse near the river's bank, whence the skins, neatly packed and numbered, were being carried to the boats on the sweating shoulders of the negroes, the half-breeds, and the Canadian boatmen, — bulky bales of yellow elk, from the upper plains of the Missouri, of buffalo and deer and bear, and priceless little packages of the otter and the beaver trapped in the green shade of the endless Northern forests, and brought hither in pirogues down the swift river by the red tribesmen and Canadian adventurers.

Afterwards I strolled about the silent village. Even the cabarets were deserted. A private of the Spanish Louisiana Regiment in a dirty uniform slouched behind the palings in front of the commandant's quarters, — a quaint stone house set against the hill, with dormer windows in its curving roof, with a wide porch held by eight sturdy hewn pillars; here and there the muffled figure of a prowling Indian loitered, or a barefooted negress shuffled along by the fence crooning a folk-song. All the world had obeyed the call of the church bell save these — and Nick. I bethought myself of Nick, and made my way back to Monsieur Gratiot's.

I found my cousin railing at Benjy, who had extracted from the saddle-bags a wondrous gray suit of London cut in which to array his master. Clothes became Nick's slim figure remarkably. This coat was cut away smartly, like a uniform, towards the tails, and was brought in at the waist with an infinite art.

"Whither now, my *conquistador*?" I said.

"To Mass," said he.



"To Mass!" I exclaimed; "but you have slept through the greater part of it."

"The best part is to come," said Nick, giving a final touch to his neck-band. Followed by Benjy's adoring eyes, he started out of the door, and I followed him perforce. We came to the little church, of upright logs and plaster, with its crudely shingled, peaked roof, with its tiny belfry crowned by a cross, with its porches on each side shading the line of windows there. Beside the church, a little at the back, was the curé's modest house of stone, and at the other hand, under spreading trees, the graveyard with its rough wooden crosses. And behind these graves rose the wooded hill that stretched away towards the wilderness.

What a span of life had been theirs who rested here! Their youth, perchance, had been spent amongst the crooked streets of some French village, streets lined by red-tiled houses and crossing limpid streams by quaint bridges. Death had overtaken them beside a monster tawny river of which their imaginations had not conceived, a river which draws tribute from the remote places of an unknown land,—a river, indeed, which, mixing all the waters, seemed to symbolize a coming race which was to conquer the land by its resistless flow, even as the Mississippi bore relentlessly towards the sea.

These were my own thoughts as I listened to the tones of the priest as they came, droningly, out of the door, while Nick was exchanging jokes in doubtful French with some half-breeds leaning against the palings. Then we heard benches scraping on the floor, and the congregation began to file out.

Those who reached the steps gave back, respectfully, and there came an elderly lady in a sober turban, a black mantilla wrapped tightly about her shoulders, and I made no doubt that she was Monsieur Gratiot's mother-in-law, Madame Chouteau, she whom he had jestingly called the queen regent. I was sure of this when I saw Madame Gratiot behind her. Madame Chouteau indeed had the face of authority, a high-bridged nose, a determined chin,

a mouth that shut tightly. Madame Gratiot presented us to her mother, and as she passed on to the gate Madame Chouteau reminded us that we were to dine with her at two.

After her the congregation, the well-to-do and the poor alike, poured out of the church and spread in merry groups over the grass: keel boatmen in tow shirts and party-colored worsted belts, the blacksmith, the shoemaker, the farmer of a small plot in the common fields in large cotton pantaloons and light-wove camlet coat, the more favored in skull-caps, linen small-clothes, cotton stockings, and silver-buckled shoes,—every man pausing, dipping into his tabatière, for a word with his neighbor. The women, too, made a picture strange to our eyes, the matrons in jacket and petticoat, a Madras handkerchief flung about their shoulders, the girls in fresh cottonade or calamanco.

All at once cries of "'Polyte! 'Polyte!" were heard, and a nimble young man with a jester-like face hopped around the corner of the church, trundling a barrel. Behind 'Polyte came two rotund little men perspiring freely, and laden down with various articles,—a bird-cage with two yellow birds, a hat-trunk, an inlaid card box, a roll of scarlet cloth, and I know not what else. They deposited these on the grass beside the barrel, which 'Polyte had set on end and proceeded to mount, encouraged by the shouts of his friends, who pressed around the barrel.

"It's an auction," I said.

But Nick did not hear me. I followed his glance to the far side of the circle, and my eye was caught by a red ribbon, a blush that matched it. A glance shot from underneath long lashes,—but not for me. Beside the girl, and palpably uneasy, stood the young man who had been called Gaspard.

"Ah," said I, "your angel of the tumbrel."

But Nick had pulled off his hat and was sweeping her a bow. The girl looked down, smoothing her ribbon, Gaspard took a step forward, and other young women near us tittered with delight. The voice of Hippolyte rolling his r's called out in a French dialect:—



"*M'ssieurs et Mesdames, ce sont des effets d'un pauvre officier qui est mort. Who will buy?*" He opened the hat-trunk, produced an antiquated beaver with a gold cord, and surveyed it with a covetousness that was admirably feigned. For 'Polyte was an actor. "M'ssieurs, to own such a hat were a patent of nobility. Am I bid twenty livres?"

There was a loud laughter, and he was bid four.

"Gaspard," cried the auctioneer, addressing the young man of the tumbrel, "Suzanne would no longer hesitate if she saw you in such a hat. And with the trunk, too. Ah, *mon Dieu*, can you afford to miss it?"

The crowd howled, Suzanne simpered, and Gaspard turned as pink as clover. But he was not to be bullied. The hat was sold to an elderly person, the red cloth likewise; a pot of grease went to a housewife, and there was a veritable scramble for the box of playing cards; and at last Hippolyte held up the wooden cage with the fluttering yellow birds.

"Ha!" he cried, his eyes on Gaspard once more, "a gentle present—a present to make a heart relent. And Monsieur Léon, perchance you will make a bid, although they are not gamecocks."

Instantly, from somewhere under the barrel, a cock crew. Even the yellow birds looked surprised, and as for 'Polyte, he nearly dropped the cage. One elderly person crossed himself. I looked at Nick. His face was impassive, but suddenly I remembered his boyhood gift, how he had imitated the monkeys, and I began to shake with inward laughter. There was an uncomfortable silence.

"*Peste, c'est la magie!*" said an old man at last, searching with an uncertain hand for his snuff.

"Monsieur," cried Nick to the auctioneer, "I will make a bid. But first you must tell me whether they are cocks or yellow birds."

"*Parbleu,*" answered the puzzled Hippolyte, "that I do not know, Monsieur."

Everybody looked at Nick, including Suzanne.

"Very well," said he, "I will make a bid. And if they

turn out to be gamecocks, I will fight them with Monsieur Léon behind the cabaret. Two livres!"

There was a laugh, as of relief.

"Three!" cried Gaspard, and his voice broke.

Hippolyte looked insulted.

"*M'ssieurs,*" he shouted, "they are from the Canaries. *Diable, un berger doit être généreux.*"

Another laugh, and Gaspard wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Five!" said he.

"Six!" said Nick, and the villagers turned to him in wonderment. What could such a fine Monsieur want with two yellow birds?

"*En avant,* Gaspard," said Hippolyte, and Suzanne shot another barbed glance in our direction.

"Seven," muttered Gaspard.

"Eight!" said Nick, immediately.

"Nine," said Gaspard.

"Ten," said Nick.

"Ten," cried Hippolyte, "I am offered ten livres for the yellow birds. *Une bagatelle! Onze, Gaspard! Onze! onze livres, pour l'amour de Suzanne!*"

But Gaspard was silent. No appeals, entreaties, or taunts could persuade him to bid more. And at length Hippolyte, with a gesture of disdain, handed Nick the cage, as though he were giving it away.

"Monsieur," he said, "the birds are yours, since there are no more lovers who are worthy of the name. They do not exist."

"Monsieur," answered Nick, "it is to disprove that statement that I have bought the birds. Mademoiselle," he added, turning to the flushing Suzanne, "I pray that you will accept this present with every assurance of my humble regard."

Mademoiselle took the cage, and amidst the laughter of the village at the discomfiture of poor Gaspard, swept Nick a frightened courtesy,—one that nevertheless was full of coquetry. And at that instant, to cap the situation, a rotund little man with a round face under a linen biretta



grasped Nick by the hand, and cried in painful but sincere English:—

"Monsieur, you mek my daughter ver' happy. She want those bird ever sence Captain Lopez he die. Monsieur, I am Jean Baptiste Lenoir, Colonel Chouteau's miller, and we ver' happy to see you at the pon'."

"If Monsieur will lead the way," said Nick, instantly, taking the little man by the arm.

"But you are to dine at Madame Chouteau's," I expostulated.

"To be sure," said he. "*Au revoir, Monsieur. Au revoir, Mademoiselle. Plus tard, Mademoiselle; nous danserons plus tard.*"

"What devil inhabits you?" I said, when I had got him started on the way to Madame Chouteau's.

"Your own, at present, Davy," he answered, laying a hand on my shoulder, "else I should be on the way to the pon' with Lenoir. But the ball is to come," and he executed several steps in anticipation. "Davy, I am sorry for you."

"Why?" I demanded, though feeling a little self-commissioner also.

"You will never know how to enjoy yourself," said he, with conviction.

Madame Chouteau lived in a stone house, wide and low, surrounded by trees and gardens. It was a pretty tribute of respect her children and grandchildren paid her that day, in accordance with the old French usage of honoring the parent. I should like to linger on the scene, and tell how Nick made them all laugh over the story of Suzanne Lenoir and the yellow birds, and how the children pressed around him and made him imitate all the denizens of wood and field, amid deafening shrieks of delight.

"You have probably delayed Gaspard's wooing another year, Mr. Temple. Suzanne is a sad coquette," said Colonel Auguste Chouteau, laughing, as we set out for the ball.

The sun was hanging low over the western hills as we approached the barracks, and out of the open windows came the merry, mad sounds of violin, guitar, and flageo-

let, the tinkle of a triangle now and then, the shouts of laughter, the shuffle of many feet over the puncheons. Within the door, smiling and benignant, unmindful of the stifling atmosphere, sat the black-robed village priest talking volubly to an elderly man in a scarlet cap, and several stout ladies ranged along the wall: beyond them, on a platform, Zéron, the baker, fiddled as though his life depended on it, the perspiration dripping from his brow, frowning, gesticulating at them with the flageolet and the triangle. And in a dim, noisy, heated whirl the whole village went round and round and round under the low ceiling in the *valse*, young and old, rich and poor, high and low, the sound of their laughter and the scraping of their feet cut now and again by an agonized squeak from Zéron's fiddle. From time to time a staggering, panting couple would fling themselves out, help themselves liberally to pink *sirop* from the bowl on the side table, and then fling themselves in once more, until Zéron stopped from sheer exhaustion, to tune up for a *pas de deux*.

Across the room, by the *sirop* bowl, a pair of red ribbons flaunted, a pair of eyes sent a swift challenge, Zéron and his assistants struck up again, and there in a corner was Nick Temple, with characteristic effrontery attempting a *pas de deux* with Suzanne. Though Nick was ignorant, he was not ungraceful, and the village laughed and admired. And when Zéron drifted back into a *valse* he seized Suzanne's plump figure in his arms and bore her, unresisting, like a prize among the dancers, avoiding alike the fat and unwieldy, the clumsy and the spiteful. For a while the tune held its mad pace, and ended with a shriek and a snap on a high note, for Zéron had broken a string. Amid a burst of laughter from the far end of the room I saw Nick stop before an open window in which a prying Indian was framed, swing Suzanne at arm's length, and bow abruptly at the brave with a grunt that startled him into life.

"*Va-t'en, méchant!*" shrieked Suzanne, excitedly.

Poor Gaspard! Poor Hippolyte! They would gain Suzanne for a dance only to have her snatched away at the next by the slim and reckless young gentleman in the



gray court clothes. Little Nick cared that the affair soon became the amusement of the company. From time to time, as he glided past with Suzanne on his shoulder, he nodded gayly to Colonel Chouteau or made a long face at me, and to save our souls we could not help laughing.

"The girl has met her match, for she has played shuttlecock with all the hearts in the village," said Monsieur Chouteau. "But perhaps it is just as well that Mr. Temple is leaving to-night. I have signed a *bon*, Mr. Ritchie, by which you can obtain money at New Orleans. And do not forget to present our letter to Monsieur de Saint Gré. He has a daughter, by the way, who will be more of a match for your friend's fascinations than Suzanne."

The evening faded into twilight, with no signs of weariness from the dancers. And presently there stood beside us Jean Baptiste Lenoir, the Colonel's miller.

"*B' soir, Monsieur le Colonel*," he said, touching his skullcap, "the water is very low. You fren'," he added, turning to me, "he stay long time in St. Louis?"

"He is going away to-night,—in an hour or so," I answered, with thanksgiving in my heart.

"I am sorry," said Monsieur Lenoir, politely, but his looks belied his words. "He is ver' fond Suzanne. *Peut-être* he marry her, but I think not. I come away from France to escape the fine gentlemen; long time ago they want to run off with my wife. She was like Suzanne."

"How long ago did you come from France, Monsieur?" I asked, to get away from an uncomfortable subject.

"It is twenty years," said he, dreamily, in French. "I was born in the *Quartier Saint Jean*, on the harbor of the city of Marseilles near *Notre Dame de la Nativité*." And he told of a tall, uneven house of four stories, with a high pitched roof, and a little barred door and window at the bottom giving out upon the rough cobbles. He spoke of the smell of the sea, of the rollicking sailors who surged through the narrow street to embark on his Majesty's men-of-war, and of the King's white soldiers in ranks of four going to foreign lands. And how he had become a farmer, the tenant of a country family. Excitement grew on

him, and he mopped his brow with his blue rumal handkerchief.

"They desire all, the nobles," he cried, "I make the land good, and they seize it. I marry a pretty wife, and Monsieur le Comte he want her. *L' bon Dieu*," he added bitterly, relapsing into French. "France is for the King and the nobility, Monsieur. The poor have but little chance there. In the country I have seen the peasants eat roots, and in the city the poor devour the refuse from the houses of the rich. It was we who paid for their luxuries, and with mine own eyes I have seen their gilded coaches ride down weak men and women in the streets. But it cannot last. They will murder Louis and burn the great châteaux. I, who speak to you, am of the people, Monsieur, I know it."

The sun had long set, and with flint and tow they were touching the flame to the candles, which flickered transparent yellow in the deepening twilight. So absorbed had I become in listening to Lenoir's description that I had forgotten Nick. Now I searched for him among the promising figures, and missed him. In vain did I seek for a glimpse of Suzanne's red ribbons, and I grew less and less attentive to the miller's reminiscences and arraignments of the nobility. Had Nick indeed run away with his daughter?

The dancing went on with unabated zeal, and through the open door in the fainting azure of the sky the summer moon hung above the hills like a great yellow orange. Striving to hide my uneasiness, I made my farewells to Madame Chouteau's sons and daughters and their friends, and with Colonel Chouteau I left the hall and began to walk towards Monsieur Gratiot's, hoping against hope that Nick had gone there to change. But we had scarce reached the road before we could see two figures in the distance, hazily outlined in the mid-light of the departed sun and the coming moon. The first was Monsieur Gratiot himself, the second Benjy. Monsieur Gratiot took me by the hand.

"I regret to inform you, Mr. Ritchie," said he, politely,



"that my keel boats are loaded and ready to leave. Were you on any other errand I should implore you to stay with us."

"Is Temple at your house?" I asked faintly.

"Why, no," said Monsieur Gratiot; "I thought he was with you at the ball."

"Where is your master?" I demanded sternly of Benjy.

"I ain't seed him, Marse Dave, sence I put him inter dem fine clothes 'at he w'ars a-cou'tin'."

"He has gone off with the girl," put in Colonel Chouteau, laughing.

"But where?" I said, with growing anger at this lack of consideration on Nick's part.

"I'll warrant that Gaspard or Hippolyte Beaujais will know, if they can be found," said the Colonel. "Neither of them willingly lets the girl out of his sight."

As we hurried back towards the throbbing sounds of Zéron's fiddle I apologized as best I might to Monsieur Gratiot, declaring that if Nick were not found within the half-hour I would leave without him. My host protested that an hour or so would make no difference. We were about to pass through the group of loungers that loitered by the gate when the sound of rapid footsteps arrested us, and we turned to confront two panting and perspiring young men who halted beside us. One was Hippolyte Beaujais, more fantastic than ever as he faced the moon, and the other was Gaspard. They had plainly made a common cause, but it was Hippolyte who spoke.

"Monsieur," he cried, "you seek your friend? Ha, we have found him, — we will lead you to him."

"Where is he?" said Colonel Chouteau, repressing another laugh.

"On the pond, Monsieur, — in a boat, Monsieur, with Suzanne, Monsieur le Colonel! And, moreover, he will come ashore for no one."

"*Parbleu*," said the Colonel, "I should think not for any arguments that you two could muster. But we will go there."

"How far is it?" I asked, thinking of Monsieur Gratiot.

"About a mile," said Colonel Chouteau, "a pleasant walk."

We stepped out, Hippolyte and Gaspard running in front, the Colonel and Monsieur Gratiot and myself following; and a snicker which burst out now and then told us that Benjy was in the rear. On any other errand I should have thought the way beautiful, for the country road, rutted by wooden wheels, wound in and out through pleasant vales and over gentle rises, whence we caught glimpses from time to time of the Mississippi gleaming like molten gold to the eastward. Here and there, nestling against the gentle slopes of the hillside clearing, was a low-thatched farmhouse among its orchards. As we walked, Nick's escapade, instead of angering Monsieur Gratiot, seemed to present itself to him in a more and more ridiculous aspect, and twice he nudged me to call my attention to the two vengefully triumphant figures silhouetted against the moon ahead of us. From time to time also I saw Colonel Chouteau shaking with laughter. As for me, it was impossible to be angry at Nick for any space. Nobody else would have carried off a girl in the face of her rivals for a moonlight row on a pond a mile away.

At length we began to go down into the valley where Chouteau's pond was, and we caught glimpses of the shimmering of its waters through the trees, ay, and presently heard them tumbling lightly over the mill-dam. The spot was made for romance, — a sequestered vale, clad with forest trees, cleared a little by the water-side, where Monsieur Lenoir raised his maize and his vegetables. Below the mill, so Monsieur Gratiot told me, where the creek lay in pools on its limestone bed, the village washing was done; and every Monday morning bare-legged negresses strode up this road, the bundles of clothes balanced on their heads, the paddles in their hands, followed by a stream of black urchins who tempted Providence to drown them.

Down in the valley we came to a path that branched from the road and led under the oaks and hickories towards the pond, and we had not taken twenty paces in it before the notes of a guitar and the sound of a voice reached our



ears. And then, when the six of us stood huddled in the rank growth at the water's edge, we saw a boat floating idly in the forest shadow on the far side.

I put my hand to my mouth.

"Nick!" I shouted.

There came for an answer, with the careless and unskilful thrumming of the guitar, the end of the verse:—

"Thine eyes are bright as the stars at night,  
Thy cheeks like the rose of the dawning, oh!"

"*Hélas!*" exclaimed Hippolyte, sadly, "there is no other boat."

"Nick!" I shouted again, reënforced vociferously by the others.

The music ceased, there came feminine laughter across the water, then Nick's voice, in French that dared everything:—

"Go away and amuse yourselves at the dance. *Peste*, it is scarce an hour ago I threatened to row ashore and break your heads. *Allez vous en, jaloux!*"

A scream of delight from Suzanne followed this sally, which was received by Gaspard and Hippolyte with a rattle of *sacrés*, and—despite our irritation—the Colonel, Monsieur Gratiot, and myself with a burst of involuntary laughter.

"*Parbleu*," said the Colonel, choking, "it is a pity to disturb such a one. Gratiot, if it was my boat, I'd delay the departure till morning."

"Indeed, I shall have had no small entertainment as a solace," said Monsieur Gratiot. "Listen!"

The tinkle of the guitar was heard again, and Nick's voice, strong and full and undisturbed:—

"S'posin' I was to go to N' O'leans an' take sick an' die,  
Like a bird into the country my spirit would fly.  
Go 'way, old man, and leave me alone,  
For I am a stranger and a long way from home."

There was a murmur of voices in the boat, the sound of a paddle gurgling as it dipped, and the dugout shot out towards the middle of the pond and drifted again.

I shouted once more at the top of my lungs:—

"Come in here, Nick, instantly!"

There was a moment's silence.

"By gad, it's Parson Davy!" I heard Nick exclaim. "Halloo, Davy, how the deuce did you get there?"

"No thanks to you," I retorted hotly. "Come in."

"Lord," said he, "is it time to go to New Orleans?"

"One might think New Orleans was across the street," said Monsieur Gratiot. "What an attitude of mind!"

The dugout was coming towards us now, propelled by easy strokes, and Nick could be heard the while talking in low tones to Suzanne. We could only guess at the tenor of his conversation, which ceased entirely as they drew near. At length the prow slid in among the rushes, was seized vigorously by Gaspard and Hippolyte, and the boat hauled ashore.

"Thank you very much, Messieurs; you are most obliging," said Nick. And taking Suzanne by the hand, he helped her gallantly over the gunwale. "Monsieur," he added, turning in his most irresistible manner to Monsieur Gratiot, "if I have delayed the departure of your boat, I am exceedingly sorry. But I appeal to you if I have not the best of excuses."

And he bowed to Suzanne, who stood beside him coyly, looking down. As for 'Polyte and Gaspard, they were quite breathless between rage and astonishment. But Colonel Chouteau began to laugh.

"*Diable*, Monsieur, you are right," he cried, "and rather than have missed this entertainment I would pay Gratiot for his cargo."

"*Au revoir*, Mademoiselle," said Nick, "I will return when I am released from bondage. When this terrible mentor relaxes vigilance, I will escape and make my way back to you through the forests."

"Oh!" cried Mademoiselle to me, "you will let him come back, Monsieur."

"Assuredly, Mademoiselle," I said, "but I have known him longer than you, and I tell you that in a month he will not wish to come back."



Hippolyte gave a grunt of approval to this plain speech. Suzanne exclaimed, but before Nick could answer footsteps were heard in the path and Lenoir himself, perspiring, panting, exhausted, appeared in the midst of us.

"Suzanne!" he cried, "Suzanne!" And turning to Nick, he added quite simply, "So, Monsieur, you did not run off with her, after all?"

"There was no place to run, Monsieur," answered Nick.

"Praise be to God for that!" said the miller, heartily; "there is some advantage in living in the wilderness, when everything is said."

"I shall come back and try, Monsieur," said Nick.

The miller raised his hands.

"I assure you that he will not, Monsieur," I put in.

He thanked me profusely, and suddenly an idea seemed to strike him.

"There is the priest," he cried; "*Monsieur le curé* retires late. There is the priest, Monsieur."

There was an awkward silence, broken at length by an exclamation from Gaspard. Colonel Chouteau turned his back, and I saw his shoulders heave. All eyes were on Nick, but the rascal did not seem at all perturbed.

"Monsieur," he said, bowing, "marriage is a serious thing, and not to be entered into lightly. I thank you from my heart, but I am bound now with Mr. Ritchie on an errand of such importance that I must make a sacrifice of my own interests and affairs to his."

"If Mr. Temple wishes—" I began, with malicious delight. But Nick took me by the shoulder.

"My dear Davy," he said, giving me a vicious kick, "I could not think of it. I will go with you at once. *Adieu, Mademoiselle,*" said he, bending over Suzanne's unresisting hand. "*Adieu, Messieurs,* and I thank you for your great interest in me." (This to Gaspard and Hippolyte.)

"And now, Monsieur Gratiot, I have already presumed too much on your patience. I will follow you, Monsieur."

We left them, Lenoir, Suzanne, and her two suitors, standing at the pond, and made our way through the path in the forest. It was not until we reached the road and

had begun to climb out of the valley that the silence was broken between us.

"Monsieur," said Colonel Chouteau, slyly, "do you have many such escapes?"

"It might have been closer," said Nick.

"Closer?" ejaculated the Colonel.

"Assuredly," said Nick, "to the extent of abducting *Monsieur le curé*. As for you, Davy," he added, between his teeth, "I mean to get even with you."

It was well for us that the Colonel and Monsieur Gratiot took the escapade with such good nature. And so we walked along through the summer night, talking gayly, until at length the lights of the village twinkled ahead of us, and in the streets we met many parties making merry on their homeward way. We came to Monsieur Gratiot's, bade our farewells to Madame, picked up our saddle-bags, the two gentlemen escorting us down to the river bank where the keel boat was tugging at the ropes that held her, impatient to be off. Her captain, a picturesque Canadian by the name of Xavier Paret, was presented to us; we bade our friends farewell, and stepped across the plank to the deck. As we were casting off, Monsieur Gratiot called to us that he would take the first occasion to send our horses back to Kentucky. The oars were manned, the heavy hulk moved, and we were shot out into the mighty current of the river on our way to New Orleans.

Nick and I stood for a long time on the deck, and the windows of the little village gleamed like stars among the trees. We passed the last of its houses that nestled against the hill, and below that the forest lay like velvet under the moon. The song of our boatmen broke the silence of the night:—

*"Voici le temps et la saison,  
Voici le temps et la saison,  
Ah! vrai, que les journées sont longues,  
Ah! vrai, que les journées sont longues!"*