

low roof. We took our stand within the empty doorway of a blackened house, nearly opposite, and there we waited, Nick murmuring all sorts of ridiculous things in my ear. But presently I began to reflect upon the consequences of being taken in such a situation by a constable and dragged into the light of a public examination. I put this to Nick as plainly as I could, and was declaring my intention of going back to Madame Bouvet's, when the sound of voices arrested me. The voices came from the latticed gallery, and they were low at first, but soon rose to such an angry pitch that I made no doubt we had hit on the right house after all. What they said was lost to us, but I could distinguish the woman's voice, low-pitched and vibrant as though insisting upon a refusal, and the man's scarce adult tones, now high as though with balked passion, now shaken and imploring. I was for leaving the place at once, but Nick clutched my arm tightly; and suddenly, as I stood undecided, the voices ceased entirely, there were the sounds of a scuffle, and the lattice of the gallery was flung open. In the all but darkness we saw a figure climb over the railing, hang suspended for an instant, and drop lightly to the ground. Then came the light relief of a woman's gown in the opening of the lattice, the cry "Auguste, Auguste!" the wicket in the gate opened and slammed, and a man ran at top speed along the banquette towards the levee.

Instinctively I seized Nick by the arm as he started out of the doorway.

"Let me go," he cried angrily, "let me go, Davy."

But I held on.

"Are you mad?" I said.

He did not answer, but twisted and struggled, and before I knew what he was doing he had pushed me off the stone step into a tangle of blackened beams behind. I dropped his arm to save myself, and it was mere good fortune that I did not break an ankle in the fall. When I had gained the step again he was gone after the man, and a portly citizen stood in front of me, looking into the doorway.

"*Qu'est-ce-qu'il-y-a la dedans?*" he demanded sharply.

It was a sufficiently embarrassing situation. I put on a bold front, however, and not deigning to answer, pushed past him and walked with as much leisure as possible along the banquette in the direction which Nick had taken. As I turned the corner I glanced over my shoulder, and in the darkness I could just make out the man standing where I had left him. In great uneasiness I pursued my way, my imagination summing up for Nick all kinds of adventures with disagreeable consequences. I walked for some time — it may have been half an hour — aimlessly, and finally decided it would be best to go back to Madame Bouvet's and await the issue with as much calmness as possible. He might not, after all, have caught the fellow.

There were few people in the dark streets, but at length I met a man who gave me directions, and presently found my way back to my lodging place. Talk and laughter floated through the latticed windows into the street, and when I had pushed back the curtain and looked into the saloon I found the same gaming party at the end of it, sitting in their shirt-sleeves amidst the moths and insects that hovered around the candles.

"Ah, Monsieur," said Madame Bouvet's voice behind me, "you must excuse them. They will come here and play, the young gentlemen, and I cannot find it in my heart to drive them away, though sometimes I lose a respectable lodger by their noise. But, after all, what would you?" she added with a shrug; "I love them, the young men. But, Monsieur," she cried, "you have had no supper! And where is Monsieur your companion? *Comme il est beau garçon!*"

"He will be in presently," I answered with unwarranted assumption.

Madame shot at me the swiftest of glances and laughed, and I suspected that she divined Nick's propensity for adventure. However, she said nothing more than to bid me sit down at the table, and presently Zoey came in with lights and strange, highly seasoned dishes, which I ate

with avidity, notwithstanding my uneasiness of mind, watching the while the party at the far end of the room. There were five young gentlemen playing a game I knew not, with intervals of intense silence, and boisterous laughter and execrations while the cards were being shuffled and the money rang on the board and glasses were being filled from a stand at one side. Presently Madame Bouvet returned, and placing before me a cup of wondrous coffee, advanced down the room towards them.

"Ah, Messieurs," she cried, "you will ruin my poor house."

The five rose and bowed with marked profundity. One of them, with a puffy, weak, good-natured face, answered her briskly, and after a little raillery she came back to me. I had a question not over discreet on my tongue's tip.

"There are some fine residences going up here, Madame," I said.

"Since the fire, Monsieur, the dreadful fire of Good Friday a year ago. You admire them?"

"I saw one," I answered with indifference, "with a wall and lions on the gate-posts—"

"*Mon Dieu*, that is a house," exclaimed Madame; "it belongs to Monsieur de Saint-Gré."

"To Monsieur de Saint-Gré!" I repeated.

She shot a look at me. She had bright little eyes like a bird's, that shone in the candlelight.

"You know him, Monsieur?"

"I heard of him in St. Louis," I answered.

"You will meet him, no doubt," she continued. "He is a very fine gentleman. His grandfather was Commissary-general of the colony, and he himself is a cousin of the Marquis de Saint-Gré, who has two châteaux, a house in Paris, and is a favorite of the King." She paused, as if to let this impress itself upon me, and added archly, "*Tenez*, Monsieur, there is a daughter—"

She stopped abruptly.

I followed her glance, and my first impression—of claret-color—gave me a shock. My second confirmed

it, for in the semi-darkness beyond the rays of the candle was a thin, eager face, prematurely lined, with coal-black, lustrous eyes that spoke eloquently of indulgence. In an instant I knew it to be that of the young man whom I had seen on the levee.

"Monsieur Auguste?" stammered Madame.

"*Bon soir*, Madame," he cried gayly, with a bow; "*diable*, they are already at it, I see, and the punch in the bowl. I will win back to-night what I have lost by a week of accursed luck."

"Monsieur your father has relented, perhaps," said Madame, deferentially.

"Relented!" cried the young man, "not a sou. *C'est égal!* I have the means here," and he tapped his pocket, "I have the means here to set me on my feet again, Madame."

He spoke with a note of triumph, and Madame took a curious step towards him.

"*Qu'est-ce-que c'est*, Monsieur Auguste?" she inquired.

He drew something that glittered from his pocket and beckoned to her to follow him down the room, which she did with alacrity.

"Ha, Adolphe," he cried to the young man of the puffy face, "I will have my revenge to-night. *Voilà!*" and he held up the shining thing, "this goes to the highest bidder, and you will agree that it is worth a pretty sum."

They rose from their chairs and clustered around him at the table, Madame in their midst, staring with bent heads at the trinket which he held to the light. It was Madame's voice I heard first, in a kind of frightened cry.

"*Mon Dieu*, Monsieur Auguste, you will not part with that!" she exclaimed.

"Why not?" demanded the young man, indifferently. "It was painted by Boze, the back is solid gold, and the Jew in the Rue Toulouse will give me four hundred livres for it to-morrow morning."

There followed immediately such a chorus of questions,

exclamations, and shrill protests from Madame Bouvet, that I (being such a laborious French scholar) could distinguish but little of what they said. I looked in wonderment at the gesticulating figures grouped against the light, Madame imploring, the youthful profile of the newcomer marked with a cynical and scornful refusal. More than once I was for rising out of my chair to go over and see for myself what the object was, and then, suddenly, I perceived Madame Bouvet coming towards me in evident agitation. She sank into the chair beside me.

"If I had four hundred livres," she said, "if I had four hundred livres!"

"And what then?" I asked.

"Monsieur," she said, "a terrible thing has happened. Auguste de Saint-Gré—"

"Auguste de Saint-Gré!" I exclaimed.

"He is the son of that Monsieur de Saint-Gré of whom we spoke," she answered, "a wild lad, a spendthrift, a gambler, if you like. And yet he is a Saint-Gré, Monsieur, and I cannot refuse him. It is the miniature of Mademoiselle Hélène de Saint-Gré, the daughter of the Marquis, sent to Mamselle Toinette, his sister, from France. How he has obtained it I know not."

"Ah!" I exclaimed sharply, the explanation of the scene of which I had been a witness coming to me swiftly. The rascal had wrenched it from her in the gallery and fled.

"Monsieur," continued Madame, too excited to notice my interruption, "if I had four hundred livres I would buy it of him, and Monsieur de Saint-Gré *père* would willingly pay it back in the morning."

I reflected. I had a letter in my pocket to Monsieur de Saint-Gré, the sum was not large, and the act of Monsieur Auguste de Saint-Gré in every light was detestable. A rising anger decided me, and I took a wallet from my pocket.

"I will buy the miniature, Madame," I said.

She looked at me in astonishment.

"God bless you, Monsieur," she cried; "if you could see



Painted by Lilian Bayliss.

HELÈNE DE ST. GRÉ.

In a Costume worn at Private Theatricals  
at Chantilly.

Mamselle Toinette you would pay twice the sum. The whole town loves her. Monsieur Auguste, Monsieur Auguste!" she shouted, "here is a gentleman who will buy your miniature."

The six young men stopped talking and stared at me with one accord. Madame arose, and I followed her down the room towards them, and, had it not been for my indignation, I should have felt sufficiently ridiculous. Young Monsieur de Saint-Gré came forward with the good-natured, easy insolence to which he had been born, and looked me over.

"Monsieur is an American," he said.

"I understand that you have offered this miniature for four hundred livres," I said.

"It is the Jew's price," he answered; "*mais pardieu*, what will you?" he added with a shrug, "I must have the money. *Regardez*, Monsieur, you have a bargain. Here is Mademoiselle Hélène de Saint-Gré, daughter of my lord the Marquis of whom I have the honor to be a cousin," and he made a bow. "It is by the famous court painter, Joseph Boze, and Mademoiselle de Saint-Gré herself is a favorite of her Majesty." He held the portrait close to the candle and regarded it critically. "Mademoiselle Hélène Victoire Marie de Saint-Gré, painted in a costume of Henry the Second's time, with a ruff, you notice, which she wore at a ball given by his Highness the Prince of Condé at Chantilly. A trifle haughty, if you like, Monsieur, but I venture to say you will be hopelessly in love with her within the hour."

At this there was a general titter from the young gentlemen at the table.

"All of which is neither here nor there, Monsieur," I answered sharply. "The question is purely a commercial one, and has nothing to do with the lady's character or position."

"It is well said, Monsieur," Madame Bouvet put in.

Monsieur Auguste de Saint-Gré shrugged his slim shoulders and laid down the portrait on the walnut table.

"Four hundred livres, Monsieur," he said.

I counted out the money, scrutinized by the curious eyes of his companions, and pushed it over to him. He bowed carelessly, sat him down, and began to shuffle the cards, while I picked up the miniature and walked out of the room. Before I had gone twenty paces I heard them laughing at their game and shouting out the stakes. Suddenly I bethought myself of Nick. What if he should come in and discover the party at the table? I stopped short in the hallway, and there Madame Bouvet overtook me.

"How can I thank you, Monsieur?" she said. And then, "You will return the portrait to Monsieur de Saint-Gré?"

"I have a letter from Monsieur Gratiot to that gentleman, which I shall deliver in the morning," I answered. "And now, Madame, I have a favor to ask of you."

"I am at Monsieur's service," she answered simply.

"When Mr. Temple comes in, he is not to go into that room," I said, pointing to the door of the saloon; "I have my reasons for requesting it."

For answer Madame went to the door, closed it, and turned the key. Then she sat down beside a little table with a candlestick and took up her knitting.

"It will be as Monsieur says," she answered.

I smiled.

"And when Mr. Temple comes in will you kindly say that I am waiting for him in his room?" I asked.

"As Monsieur says," she answered. "I wish Monsieur a good-night and pleasant dreams."

She took a candlestick from the table, lighted the candle, and handed it me with a courtesy. I bowed, and made my way along the gallery above the deserted court-yard. Entering my room and closing the door after me, I drew the miniature from my pocket and stood gazing at it for I know not how long.

## CHAPTER XII

### LES ÎLES

I STOOD staring at the portrait, I say, with a kind of fascination that astonished me, seeing that it had come to me in such a way. It was no French face of my imagination, and as I looked it seemed to me that I knew Mademoiselle Hélène de Saint-Gré. And yet I smile as I write this, realizing full well that my strange and foreign surroundings and my unforeseen adventure had much to do with my state of mind. The lady in the miniature might have been eighteen, or thirty-five. Her features were of the clearest cut, the nose the least trifle aquiline, and by a blurred outline the painter had given to the black hair piled high upon the head a suggestion of waviness. The eyebrows were straight, the brown eyes looked at the world with an almost scornful sense of humor, and I marked that there was determination in the chin. Here was a face that could be infinitely haughty or infinitely tender, a mouth of witty — nay, perhaps cutting — repartee of brevity and force. A lady who spoke quickly, moved quickly, or reposed absolutely. A person who commanded by nature and yet (dare I venture the thought?) was capable of a supreme surrender. I was aroused from this odd reverie by footsteps on the gallery, and Nick burst into the room. Without pausing to look about him, he flung himself lengthwise on the bed on top of the mosquito bar.

"A thousand curses on such a place," he cried; "it is full of rat holes and rabbit warrens."

"Did you catch your man?" I asked innocently.

"Catch him!" said Nick, with a little excusable profanity; "he went in at one end of such a warren and came out at another. I waited for him in two streets until an