

he added, "I should dislike devilishly to go too far on such a day and have to come back again."

"We will rest here," I said, laughing, "and send in Benjy to find out."

"Davy," he answered, with withering contempt, "you have no more romance in you than a turnip. We will go ourselves and see what befalls."

"Very well, then," I answered, falling in with his humor, "we will go ourselves."

He brushed his face with his handkerchief, gave himself a pull here and a pat there, and led the way down the alley. But we had not gone far before he turned into a path that entered the grove on the right, and to this likewise I made no protest. We soon found ourselves in a heavenly spot, — sheltered from the sun's rays by a dense verdure, — and no one who has not visited these Southern country places can know the teeming fragrance there. One shrub (how well I recall it!) was like unto the perfume of all the flowers and all the fruits, the very essence of the delicious languor of the place that made our steps to falter. A bird shot a bright flame of color through the checkered light ahead of us. Suddenly a sound brought us to a halt, and we stood in a tense and wondering silence. The words of a song, sung carelessly in a clear, girlish voice, came to us from beyond.

*"Je voudrais bien me marier,  
Je voudrais bien me marier,  
Mais j'ai grand' peur de me tromper:  
Mais j'ai grand' peur de me tromper:  
Ils sont si malhonnêtes!  
Ma luron, ma lurette,  
Ils sont si malhonnêtes!  
Ma luron, ma luré."*

"We have come at the very zenith of opportunity," I whispered.

"Hush!" he said.

*"Je ne veux pas d'un avocat,  
Je ne veux pas d'un avocat,  
Car ils aiment trop les ducats,  
Car ils aiment trop les ducats,*

*Ils trompent les fillettes,  
Ma luron, ma lurette,  
Ils trompent les fillettes,  
Ma luron, ma luré."*

"Eliminating Mr. Ritchie, I believe," said Nick, turning on me with a grimace. "But hark again!"

*"Je voudrais bien d'un officier:  
Je voudrais bien d'un officier:  
Je marcherais a pas carrés,  
Je marcherais a pas carrés,  
Dans ma joli' chambrette,  
Ma luron, ma lurette,  
Dans ma joli' chambrette,  
Ma luron, ma luré."*

The song ceased with a sound that was half laughter, half sigh. Before I realized what he was doing, Nick, instead of retracing his steps towards the house, started forward. The path led through a dense thicket which became a casino hedge, and suddenly I found myself peering over his shoulder into a little garden bewildering in color. In the centre of the garden a great live-oak spread its sheltering branches. Around the gnarled trunk was a seat. And on the seat, — her sewing fallen into her lap, her lips parted, her eyes staring wide, sat the young lady whom we had seen on the levee the evening before. And Nick was making a bow in his grandest manner.

"*Hélas, Mademoiselle,*" he said, "*je ne suis pas officier, mais on peut arranger tout cela, sans doute.*"

My breath was taken away by this unheard-of audacity, and I braced myself against screams, flight, and other feminine demonstrations of terror. The young lady did nothing of the kind. She turned her back to us, leaned against the tree, and to my astonishment I saw her slim shoulders shaken with laughter. At length, very slowly, she looked around, and in her face struggled curiosity and fear and merriment. Nick made another bow, worthy of Versailles, and she gave a frightened little laugh.

"You are English, Messieurs — yes?" she ventured.

"We were once!" cried Nick, "but we have changed, Mademoiselle."

"*Et quoi donc?*" relapsing into her own language.

"Americans," said he. "Allow me to introduce to you the Honorable David Ritchie, whom you rejected a few moments ago."

"Whom I rejected?" she exclaimed.

"Alas," said Nick, with a commiserating glance at me, "he has the misfortune to be a lawyer."

Mademoiselle shot at me the swiftest and shyest of glances, and turned to us once more her quivering shoulders. There was a brief silence.

"Mademoiselle?" said Nick, taking a step on the garden path.

"Monsieur?" she answered, without so much as looking around.

"What, now, would you take this gentleman to be?" he asked with an insistence not to be denied.

Again she was shaken with laughter, and suddenly to my surprise she turned and looked full at me.

"In English, Monsieur, you call it—a gallant?"

My face fairly tingled, and I heard Nick laughing with unseemly merriment.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he cried, "you are a judge of character, and you have read him perfectly."

"Then I must leave you, Messieurs," she answered, with her eyes in her lap. But she made no move to go.

"You need have no fear of Mr. Ritchie, Mademoiselle," answered Nick, instantly. "I am here to protect you against his gallantry."

This time Nick received the glance, and quailed before it.

"And who—*par exemple*—is to protect me against—you, Monsieur?" she asked in the lowest of voices.

"You forget that I, too, am unprotected—and vulnerable, Mademoiselle," he answered.

Her face was hidden again, but not for long.

"How did you come?" she demanded presently.

"On air," he answered, "for we saw you in New Orleans yesterday."

"And—why?"

"Need you ask, Mademoiselle?" said the rogue, and then, with more effrontery than ever, he began to sing:—

*"Je voudrais bien me marier,  
Je voudrais bien me marier,  
Mais j'ai grand' peur de me tromper."*

She rose, her sewing falling to the ground, and took a few startled steps towards us.

"Monsieur! you will be heard," she cried.

"And put out of the Garden of Eden," said Nick.

"I must leave you," she said, with the quaintest of English pronunciation.

Yet she stood irresolute in the garden path, a picture against the dark green leaves and the flowers. Her age might have been seventeen. Her gown was of some soft and light material printed in buds of delicate color, her slim arms bare above the elbow. She had the ivory complexion of the province, more delicate than I had yet seen, and beyond that I shall not attempt to describe her, save to add that she was such a strange mixture of innocence and ingenuousness and coquetry as I had not imagined. Presently her gaze was fixed seriously on me.

"Do you think it very wrong, Monsieur?" she asked.

I was more than taken aback by this tribute.

"Oh," cried Nick, "the arbiter of etiquette!"

"Since I am here, Mademoiselle," I answered, with anything but readiness, "I am not a proper judge."

Her next question staggered me.

"You are well-born?" she asked.

"Mr. Ritchie's grandfather was a Scottish earl," said Nick, immediately, a piece of news that startled me into protest. "It is true, Davy, though you may not know it," he added.

"And you, Monsieur?" she said to Nick.

"I am his cousin,—is it not honor enough?" said he.

"Yet you do not resemble one another."

"Mr. Ritchie has all the good looks in the family," said Nick.

"Oh!" cried the young lady, and this time she gave us her profile.

"Come, Mademoiselle," said Nick, "since the fates have cast the die, let us all sit down in the shade. The place was made for us."

"Monsieur!" she cried, giving back, "I have never in my life been alone with gentlemen."

"But Mr. Ritchie is a duenna to satisfy the most exacting," said Nick; "when you know him better you will believe me."

She laughed softly and glanced at me. By this time we were all three under the branches.

"Monsieur, you do not understand the French customs. *Mon Dieu*, if the good Sister Lorette could see me now —"

"But she is safe in the convent," said Nick. "Are they going to put glass on the walls?"

"And why?" asked Mademoiselle, innocently.

"Because," said Nick, "because a very bad man has come to New Orleans, — one who is given to climbing walls."

"You?"

"Yes. But when I found that a certain demoiselle had left the convent, I was no longer anxious to climb them."

"And how did you know that I had left it?"

I was at a loss to know whether this were coquetry or innocence.

"Because I saw you on the levee," said Nick.

"You saw me on the levee?" she repeated, giving back.

"And I had a great fear," the rogue persisted.

"A fear of what?"

"A fear that you were married," he said, with a boldness that made me blush. As for Mademoiselle, a color that vied with the June roses charged through her cheeks. She stooped to pick up her sewing, but Nick was before her.

"And why did you think me married?" she asked in a voice so low that we scarcely heard.

"Faith," said Nick, "because you seemed to be quarrelling with a man."

She turned to him with an irresistible seriousness.

"And is that your idea of marriage, Monsieur?"

This time it was I who laughed, for he had been hit very fairly.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I did not for a moment think it could have been a love match."

Mademoiselle turned away and laughed.

"You are the very strangest man I have ever seen," she said.

"Shall I give you my notion of a love match, Mademoiselle?" said Nick.

"I should think you might be well versed in the subject, Monsieur," she answered, speaking to the tree, "but here is scarcely the time and place." She wound up her sewing, and faced him. "I must really leave you," she said.

He took a step towards her and stood looking down into her face. Her eyes dropped.

"And am I never to see you again?" he asked.

"Monsieur!" she cried softly, "I do not know who you are." She made him a courtesy, took a few steps in the opposite path, and turned. "That depends upon your ingenuity," she added; "you seem to have no lack of it, Monsieur."

Nick was transported.

"You must not go," he cried.

"Must not? How dare you speak to me thus, Monsieur?" Then she tempered it. "There is a lady here whom I love, and who is ill. I must not be long from her bedside."

"She is very ill?" said Nick, probably for want of something better.

"She is not really ill, Monsieur, but depressed — is not that the word? She is a very dear friend, and she has had trouble — so much, Monsieur, — and my mother brought her here. We love her as one of the family."

This was certainly ingenuous, and it was plain that the girl gave us this story through a certain nervousness, for she twisted her sewing in her fingers as she spoke.

"Mademoiselle," said Nick, "I would not keep you from such an errand of mercy."

She gave him a grateful look, more dangerous than any which had gone before.

"And besides," he went on, "we have come to stay awhile with you, Mr. Ritchie and myself."

"You have come to stay awhile?" she said.

I thought it time that the farce were ended.

"We have come with letters to your father, Monsieur de Saint-Gré, Mademoiselle," I said, "and I should like very much to see him, if he is at leisure."

Mademoiselle stared at me in unfeigned astonishment.

"But did you not meet him, Monsieur?" she demanded.

"He left an hour ago for New Orleans. You must have met a gentleman riding very fast."

It was my turn to be astonished.

"But that was not your father!" I exclaimed.

"*Et pourquoi non?*" she said.

"Is not your father the stout gentleman whom I saw with you on the levee last evening?" I asked.

She laughed.

"You have been observing, Monsieur," she said.

"That was my uncle, Monsieur de Beauséjour. You saw me quarrelling with my brother, Auguste," she went on a little excitedly. "Oh, I am very much ashamed of it. I was so angry. My cousin, Mademoiselle Hélène de Saint-Gré, has just sent me from France such a beautiful miniature, and Auguste fell in love with it."

"Fell in love with it!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"You should see it, Monsieur, and I think you also would fall in love with it."

"I have not a doubt of it," said Nick.

Mademoiselle made the faintest of *moues*.

"Auguste is very wild, as you say," she continued, addressing me, "he is a great care to my father. He intrigues, you know, he wishes *Louisiane* to become French once more,—as we all do. But I should not say this, Monsieur," she added in a startled tone. "You will not tell? No, I know you will not. We do not like the Spaniards. They killed my grandfather when they came to take the province. And once, the Governor-general

Miro sent for my father and declared he would put Auguste in prison if he did not behave himself. But I have forgotten the miniature. When Auguste saw that he fell in love with it, and now he wishes to go to France and obtain a commission through our cousin, the Marquis of Saint-Gré, and marry Mademoiselle Hélène."

"A comprehensive programme, indeed," said Nick.

"My father has gone back to New Orleans," she said, "to get the miniature from Auguste. He took it from me, Monsieur." She raised her head a little proudly. "If my brother had asked it, I might have given it to him, though I treasured it. But Auguste is so—impulsive. My uncle told my father, who is very angry. He will punish Auguste severely, and—and I do not like to have him punished. Oh, I wish I had the miniature."

"Your wish is granted, Mademoiselle," I answered, drawing the case from my pocket and handing it to her.

She took it, staring at me with eyes wide with wonder, and then she opened it mechanically.

"Monsieur," she said with great dignity, "do you mind telling me where you obtained this?"

"I found it, Mademoiselle," I answered; and as I spoke I felt Nick's fingers on my arm.

"You found it? Where? How, Monsieur?"

"At Madame Bouvet's, the house where we stayed."

"Oh," she said with a sigh of relief, "he must have dropped it. It is there where he meets his associates, where they talk of the French *Louisiane*."

Again I felt Nick pinching me, and I gave a sigh of relief. Mademoiselle was about to continue, but I interrupted her.

"How long will your father be in New Orleans, Mademoiselle?" I asked.

"Until he finds Auguste," she answered. "It may be days, but he will stay, for he is very angry. But will you not come into the house, Messieurs, and be presented to my mother?" she asked. "I have been very—inhabitable," she added with a glance at Nick.

We followed her through winding paths bordered by

shrubs and flowers, and presently came to a low house surrounded by a wide, cool gallery, and shaded by spreading trees. Behind it were clustered the kitchens and quarters of the house servants. Mademoiselle, picking up her dress, ran up the steps ahead of us and turned to the left in the hall into a darkened parlor. The floor was bare, save for a few mats, and in the corner was a massive escritoire of mahogany with carved feet, and there were tables and chairs of a like pattern. It was a room of more distinction than I had seen since I had been in Charlestown, and reflected the solidity of its owners.

"If you will be so kind as to wait here, Messieurs," said Mademoiselle, "I will call my mother."

And she left us.

I sat down, rather uncomfortably, but Nick took a stand and stood staring down at me with folded arms.

"How I have undervalued you, Davy," he said.

"I am not proud of it," I answered shortly.

"What the deuce is to do now?" he asked.

"I cannot linger here," I answered; "I have business with Monsieur de Saint-Gré, and I must go back to New Orleans at once."

"Then I will wait for you," said Nick. "Davy, I have met my fate."

I laughed in spite of myself.

"It seems to me that I have heard that remark before," I answered.

He had not time to protest, for we heard footsteps in the hall, and Mademoiselle entered, leading an older lady by the hand. In the light of the doorway I saw that she was thin and small and yellow, but her features had a regularity and her mien a dignity which made her impressing, which would have convinced a stranger that she was a person of birth and breeding. Her hair, tinged with gray, was crowned by a lace cap.

"Madame," I said, bowing and coming forward, "I am David Ritchie, from Kentucky, and this is my cousin, Mr. Temple, of Charlestown. Monsieur Gratiot and Colonel Chouteau, of St. Louis, have been kind enough to give us

letters to Monsieur de Saint-Gré." And I handed her one of the letters which I had ready.

"You are very welcome, Messieurs," she answered, with the same delightful accent which her daughter had used, "and you are especially welcome from such a source. The friends of Colonel Chouteau and of Monsieur Gratiot are our friends. You will remain with us, I hope, Messieurs," she continued. "Monsieur de Saint-Gré will return in a few days at best."

"By your leave, Madame, I will go to New Orleans at once and try to find Monsieur," I said, "for I have business with him."

"You will return with him, I hope," said Madame.

I bowed.

"And Mr. Temple will remain?" she asked, with a questioning look at Nick.

"With the greatest pleasure in the world, Madame," he answered, and there was no mistaking his sincerity. As he spoke, Mademoiselle turned her back on him.

I would not wait for dinner, but pausing only for a sip of cool Madeira and some other refreshment, I made my farewells to the ladies. As I started out of the door to find Benjy, who had been waiting for more than an hour, Mademoiselle gave me a neatly folded note.

"You will be so kind as to present that to my father, Monsieur," she said.