

"I should think that Mrs. Temple might have recognized you," I said, for want of a better opening.

"From the miniature?" she said.

I flushed furiously, and it seemed to burn me through the lining of my pocket.

"That was my salvation," she said. "Mrs. Temple has never seen the miniature. I have heard how you rescued it, Mr. Ritchie," she added, with a curious smile. "Monsieur Philippe de St. Gré told me."

"Then he knew?" I stammered.

She laughed.

"I have told you that you are a very simple person," she said. "Even you are not given to intrigues. I thank you for rescuing me."

I flushed more hotly than before.

"I never expected to see you," I said.

"It must have been a shock," she said.

I was dumb. I had my hand in my coat; I fully intended to give her the miniature. It was my plain duty. And suddenly, overwhelmed, I remembered that it was wrapped in Polly Ann's silk handkerchief.

Madame la Vicomtesse remained for a moment where she was.

"Do not do anything until the morning," she said. "You must go back to your lodgings at once."

"That would be to lose time," I answered.

"You must think of yourself a little," she said. "Do as I say. I have heard that two cases of the yellow fever have broken out this afternoon. And you, who are not used to the climate, must not be out after dark."

"And you?" I said.

"I am used to it," she replied; "I have been here three months. Lest anything should happen, it might be well for you to give me your address."

"I am with Madame Gravois, in the Rue Bienville."

"Madame Gravois, in the Rue Bienville," she repeated. "I shall remember. *A demain*, Monsieur." She courtesied and went swiftly into Mrs. Temple's room. Seizing my hat, I opened the door and found myself in the dark street.

CHAPTER VII

THE DISPOSAL OF THE SIEUR DE ST. GRÉ

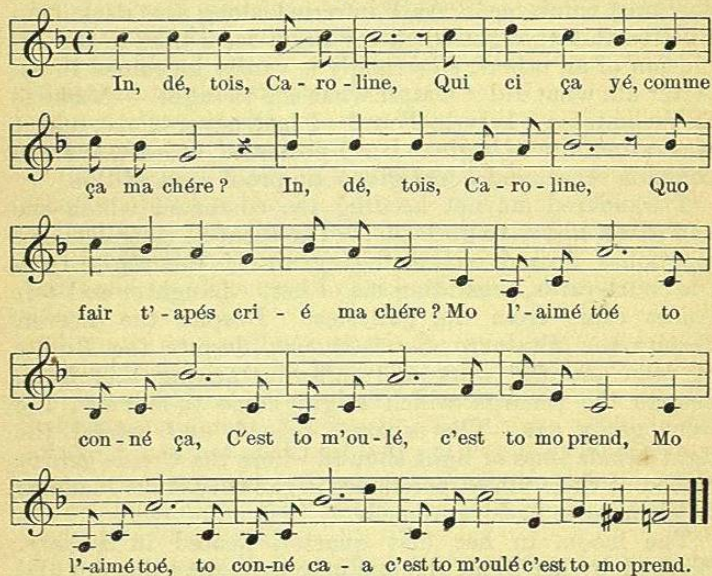
I HAD met Hélène de St. Gré at last. And what a tool she must think me! As I hurried along the dark banquettes this thought filled my brain for a time to the exclusion of all others, so strongly is vanity ingrained in us. After all, what did it matter what she thought, — Madame la Vicomtesse d'Ivry-le-Tour? I had never shone, and it was rather late to begin. But I possessed, at least, average common sense, and I had given no proof even of this.

I wandered on, not heeding the command which she had given me, — to go home. The scent of camellias and magnolias floated on the heavy air of the night from the court-yards, reminding me of her. Laughter and soft voices came from the galleries. Despite the Terror, despite the *Faubourg Saint-Antoine*, despite the Rights of Man and the wars and suffering arising therefrom, despite the scourge which might come to-morrow, life went gayly on. The cabarets echoed, and behind the tight blinds lines of light showed where the Creole gentry gamed at their tables, perchance in the very clubs Madame la Vicomtesse had mentioned.

The moon, in her first quarter, floated in a haze. Washed by her light, the quaintly wrought balconies and heavy-tiled roofs of the Spanish buildings, risen from the charred embers, took on a touch of romance. I paused once with a twinge of remembrance before the long line of the Ursuline convent, with its latticed belfry against the sky. There was the lodge, with its iron gates shut, and the wall which Nick had threatened to climb. As I passed the great square of the new barracks, a sereno (so the night watchmen were called) was crying the hour. I came

to the rambling market-stalls, casting black shadows on the river road, — empty now, to be filled in the morning with shouting *marchands*. The promenade under the willows was deserted, the great river stretched away under the moon towards the forest line of the farther shore, filmy and indistinct. A black wisp of smoke rose from the gunwale of a flatboat, and I stopped to listen to the weird song of a negro, which I have heard many times since.

CAROLINE.



In, dé, tois, Ca-ro-line, Qui ci ça yé, comme
ça ma chère? In, dé, tois, Ca-ro-line, Quo
fair t'-apés cri-é ma chère? Mo l'-aimé toé to
con-né ça, C'est to m'ou-lé, c'est to mo prend, Mo
l'-aimé toé, to con-né ca - a c'est to m'oulé c'est to mo prend.

Gaining the promenade, I came presently to the new hotel which had been built for the Governor, with its balconied windows looking across the river — the mansion of Monsieur le Baron de Carondelet. Even as I sat on the bench in the shadow of the willows, watching the sentry who paced before the arched entrance, I caught sight of a man stealing along the banquette on the other

side of the road. Twice he paused to look behind him, and when he reached the corner of the street he stopped for some time to survey the Governor's house opposite.

Suddenly I was on my feet, every sense alert, staring. In the moonlight, made milky by the haze, he was indistinct. And yet I could have taken oath that the square, diminutive figure, with the head set forward on the shoulders, was Gignoux's. If this man were not Gignoux, then the Lord had cast two in a strange mould.

And what was Gignoux doing in New Orleans? As if in answer to the question two men emerged from the dark archway of the Governor's house, passed the sentry, and stood for an instant on the edge of the shadow. One wore a long Spanish cloak, and the other a uniform that I could not make out. A word was spoken, and then my man was ambling across to meet them, and the three walked away up Toulouse Street.

I was in a fire of conjecture. I did not dare to pass the sentry and follow them, so I made round as fast as I could by the Rue St. Pierre, which borders the Place d'Armes, and then crossed to Toulouse again by Chartres. The three were nowhere to be seen. I paused on the corner for thought, and at length came to a reluctant but prudent conclusion that I had best go back to my lodging and seek Monsieur early in the morning.

Madame Gravois was awaiting me. Was Monsieur mad to remain out at night? Had Monsieur not heard of the yellow fever? Madame Gravois even had prepared some concoction which she poured out of a bottle, and which I took with the docility of a child. Monsieur Vigo had called, and there was a note. A note? It was a small note. I glanced stupidly at the seal, recognized the swan of the St. Gré crest, broke it, and read:—

"Mr. Ritchie will confer a favor upon la Vicomtesse d'Ivry-le-Tour if he will come to Monsieur de St. Gré's house at eight to-morrow morning."

I bade the reluctant Madame Gravois good night, gained my room, threw off my clothes, and covered myself with

the mosquito bar. There was no question of sleep, for the events of the day and surmises for the morrow tortured me as I tossed in the heat. Had the man been Gignoux? If so, he was in league with Carondelet's police. I believed him fully capable of this. And if he knew Nick's whereabouts and St. Gré's, they would both be behind the iron gateway of the *calabozo* in the morning. Monsieur Vigo had pointed out to me that day the gloomy, heavy-walled prison in the rear of the Cabildo, — ay, and he had spoken of its instruments of torture.

What could the Vicomtesse want? Truly (I thought with remorse) she had been more industrious than I.

I fell at length into a fevered sleep, and awoke, athirst, with the light trickling through my lattices. Contrary to Madame Gravois's orders, I had opened the glass of my window. Glancing at my watch, — which I had bought in Philadelphia, — I saw that the hands pointed to half after seven. I had scarcely finished my toilet before there was a knock at the door, and Madame Gravois entered with a steaming cup of coffee in one hand and her bottle of medicine in the other.

"I did not wake Monsieur," she said, "for he was tired."

She gave me another dose of the medicine, made me drink two cups of coffee, and then I started out with all despatch for the House of the Lions. As I turned into the Rue Chartres I saw ahead of me four horses, with their bridles bunched and held by a negro lad, waiting in the street. Yes, they were in front of the house. There it was, with its solid green gates between the lions, its yellow walls with the fringe of peeping magnolias and oranges, with its green-latticed gallery from which Monsieur Auguste had let himself down after stealing the miniature. I knocked at the wicket, the same *gardienne* answered the call, smiled, led me through the cool, paved archway which held in its frame the green of the court beyond, and up the stairs with the quaint balustrade which I had mounted five years before to meet Philippe de St. Gré. As I reached the gallery Madame la Vicomtesse, gowned in

brown linen for riding, rose quickly from her chair and came forward to meet me.

"You have news?" I asked, as I took her hand.

"I have the kind of news I expected," she answered, a smile tempering the gravity of her face; "Auguste is, as usual, in need of money."

"Then you have found them," I answered, my voice betraying my admiration for the feat.

Madame la Vicomtesse shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"I did nothing," she said. "From what you told me, I suspected that as soon as Auguste reached Louisiana he would have a strong desire to go away again. This is undoubtedly what has happened. In any event, I knew that he would want money, and that he would apply to a source which has hitherto never failed him."

"Mademoiselle Antoinette!" I said.

"Precisely," answered Madame la Vicomtesse. "When I reached home last night I questioned Antoinette, and I discovered that by a singular chance a message from Auguste had already reached her."

"Where is he?" I demanded.

"I do not know," she replied. "But he will be behind the hedge of the garden at Les Îles at eleven o'clock — unless he has lost before then his love of money."

"Which is to say —"

"He will be there unless he is dead. That is why I sent for you, Monsieur." She glanced at me. "Sometimes it is convenient to have a man."

I was astounded. Then I smiled, the affair was so ridiculously simple.

"And Monsieur de St. Gré?" I asked.

"Has been gone for a week with Madame to visit the estimable Monsieur Poydras at Pointe Coupée." Madame la Vicomtesse, who had better use for her words than to waste them at such a time, left me, went to the balcony, and began to give the *gardienne* in the court below swift directions in French. Then she turned to me again.

"Are you prepared to ride with Antoinette and me to Les Îles, Monsieur?" she asked.

"I am," I answered.

It must have been my readiness that made her smile. Then her eyes rested on mine.

"You look tired, Mr. Ritchie," she said. "You did not obey me and go home last night."

"How did you know that?" I asked, with a thrill at her interest.

"Because Madame Gravois told my messenger that you were out."

I was silent.

"You must take care of yourself," she said briefly. "Come, there are some things which I wish to say to you before Antoinette is ready."

She led me toward the end of the gallery, where a bright screen of morning-glories shaded us from the sun. But we had scarce reached the place ere the sound of steps made us turn, and there was Mademoiselle Antoinette herself facing us. I went forward a few steps, hesitated, and bowed. She courtesied, my name faltering on her lips. Yes, it was Antoinette, not the light-hearted girl whom we had heard singing "*Ma luron*" in the garden, but a woman now with a strange beauty that astonished me. Hers was the dignity that comes from unselfish service, the calm that is far from resignation, though the black veil caught up on her *chapeau de paille* gave her the air of a Sister of Mercy. Antoinette had inherited the energies as well as the features of the St. Grés, yet there was a painful moment as she stood there, striving to put down the agitation the sight of me gave her. As for me, I was bereft of speech, not knowing what to say or how far to go. My last thought was of the remarkable quality in this woman before me which had held her true to Mrs. Temple, and which sent her so courageously to her duty now.

Madame la Vicomtesse, as I had hoped, relieved the situation. She knew how to broach a dreaded subject.

"Mr. Ritchie is going with us, Antoinette," she said. "It is perhaps best to explain everything to him before we start. I was about to tell you, Mr. Ritchie," she continued, turning to me, "that Auguste has given no hint

in his note of Mr. Temple's presence in Louisiana. And yet you told me that they were to have come here together."

"Yes," I answered, "and I have no reason to think they have separated."

"I was merely going to suggest," said the Vicomtesse, firmly, "I was merely going to suggest the possibility of our meeting Mr. Temple with Auguste."

It was Antoinette who answered, with a force that revealed a new side of her character.

"Mr. Temple will not be there," she said, flashing a glance upon us. "Do you think he would come to me—?"

Hélène laid her hand upon the girl's arm.

"My dear, I think nothing," she said quietly; "but it is best for us to be prepared against any surprise. Remember that I do not know Mr. Temple, and that you have not seen him for five years."

"It is not like him, you know it is not like him," exclaimed Antoinette, looking at me.

"I know it is not like him, Mademoiselle," I replied.

Madame la Vicomtesse, from behind the girl, gave me a significant look.

"This occurred to me," she went on in an undisturbed tone, "that Mr. Temple might come with Auguste to protest against the proceeding,—or even to defend himself against the imputation that he was to make use of this money in any way. I wish you to realize, Antoinette, before you decide to go, that you may meet Mr. Temple. Would it not be better to let Mr. Ritchie go alone? I am sure that we could find no better emissary."

"Auguste is here," said Antoinette. "I must see him." Her voice caught. "I may never see him again. He may be ill, he may be starving—and I know that he is in trouble. Whether" (her voice caught) "whether Mr. Temple is with him or not, I mean to go."

"Then it would be well to start," said the Vicomtesse.

Defly dropping her veil, she picked up a riding whip that lay on the railing and descended the stairs to the courtyard. Antoinette and I followed. As we came through the archway I saw André, Monsieur de St. Gré's mulatto,