

holding open the wicket for us to pass. He helped the ladies to mount the ponies, lengthened my own stirrups for me, swung into the saddle himself, and then the four of us were picking our way down the Rue Chartres at an easy amble. Turning to the right beyond the cool garden of the Ursulines, past the yellow barracks, we came to the river front beside the fortifications. A score of negroes were sweating there in the sun, swinging into position the long logs for the palisades, nearly completed. They were like those of Kaskaskia and our own frontier forts in Kentucky, with a forty-foot ditch in front of them. Seated on a horse talking to the overseer was a fat little man in white linen who pulled off his hat and bowed profoundly to the ladies. His face gave me a start, and then I remembered that I had seen him only the day before, resplendent, coming out of church. He was the Baron de Carondelet.

There was a sentry standing under a crape-myrtle where the Royal Road ran through the gateway. Behind him was a diminutive five-sided brick fort with a dozen little cannon on top of it. The sentry came forward, brought his musket to a salute, and halted before my horse.

"You will have to show your passport," murmured Madame la Vicomtesse.

I drew the document from my pocket. It was signed by De Lemos, and duly countersigned by the officer of the port. The man bowed, and I passed on.

It was a strange, silent ride through the stinging heat to Les Îles, the brown dust hanging behind us like a cloud, to settle slowly on the wayside shrubbery. Across the levee bank the river was low, listless, giving off hot breath like a monster in distress. The forest pools were cracked and dry, the Spanish moss was a haggard gray, and under the sun was the haze which covered the land like a saffron mantle. At times a listlessness came over me such as I had never known, to make me forget the presence of the women at my side, the very errand on which we rode. From time to time I was roused into admiration of the horsemanship of Madame la Vicomtesse, for the restive Texas pony which she rode was stung to madness by the flies.

As for Antoinette, she glanced neither right nor left through her veil, but rode unmindful of the way, heedless of heat and discomfort, erect, motionless save for the easy gait of her horse. At length we turned into the avenue through the forest, lined by wild orange trees, came in sight of the low, belvedere plantation house, and drew rein at the foot of the steps. Antoinette was the first to dismount, and passed in silence through the group of surprised house servants gathering at the door. I assisted the Vicomtesse, who paused to bid the negroes disperse, and we lingered for a moment on the gallery together.

"Poor Antoinette!" she said, "I wish we might have saved her this." She looked up at me. "How she defended him!" she exclaimed.

"She loves him," I answered.

Madame la Vicomtesse sighed.

"I suppose there is no help for it," she said. "But it is very difficult not to be angry with Mr. Temple. The girl cared for his mother, gave her a home, clung to her when he and the world would have cast her off, sacrificed her happiness for them both. If I see him, I believe I shall shake him. And if he doesn't fall down on his knees to her, I shall ask the Baron to hang him. We must bring him to his senses, Mr. Ritchie. He must not leave Louisiana until he sees her. Then he will marry her." She paused, scrutinized me in her quick way, and added: "You see that I take your estimation of his character. You ought to be flattered."

"I am flattered by any confidence you repose in me, Madame la Vicomtesse."

She laughed. I was not flattered then, but cursed myself for the quaint awkwardness in my speech that amused her. And she was astonishingly quick to perceive my moods.

"There, don't be angry. You will never be a courtier, my honest friend, and you may thank God for it. How sweet the shrubs are! Your chief business in life seems to be getting people out of trouble, and I am going to help you with this case."

It was my turn to laugh.

"You are going to help!" I exclaimed. "My services have been heavy, so far."

"You should not walk around at night," she replied irrelevantly.

Suddenly I remembered Gignoux, but even as I was about to tell her of the incident Antoinette appeared in the doorway. She was very pale, but her lips were set with excitement and her eyes shone strangely. She was still in her riding gown, in her hand she carried a leather bag, and behind her stood André with a bundle.

"Quick!" she said; "we are wasting time, and he may be gone."

Checking an exclamation which could hardly have been complimentary to Auguste, the Vicomtesse crossed quickly to her and put her arm about her.

"We will follow you, *mignonne*," she said in French.

"Must you come?" said Antoinette, appealingly. "He may not appear if he sees any one."

"We shall have to risk that," said the Vicomtesse, dryly, with a glance at me. "You shall not go alone, but we will wait a few moments at the hedge."

We took the well-remembered way through the golden-green light under the trees, Antoinette leading, and the sight of the garden brought back to me poignantly the scene in the moonlight with Mrs. Temple. There was no sound save the languid morning notes of the birds and the humming of the bees among the flowers as Antoinette went tremblingly down the path and paused, listening, under the branches of that oak where I had first beheld her. Then, with a little cry, we saw her run forward—into the arms of Auguste de St. Gré. It was a pitiful thing to look upon.

Antoinette had led her brother to the seat under the oak. How long we waited I know not, but at length we heard their voices raised, and without more ado Madame la Vicomtesse, beckoning me, passed quickly through the gap in the hedge and went towards them. I followed with André. Auguste rose with an oath, and then stood

facing his cousin like a man struck dumb, his hands dropped. He was a sorry sight indeed, unshaven, unkempt, dark circles under his eyes, clothes torn.

"Hélène! You here—in America!" he cried in French, staring at her.

"Yes, Auguste," she replied quite simply, "I am here." He would have come towards her, but there was a note in her voice which arrested him.

"And Monsieur le Vicomte—Henri?" he said.

I found myself listening tensely for the answer.

"Henri is in Austria, fighting for his King, I hope," said Madame la Vicomtesse.

"So Madame la Vicomtesse is a refugee," he said with a bow and a smile that made me very angry.

"And Monsieur de St. Gré?" I asked.

At the sound of my voice he started and gave back, for he had not perceived me. He recovered his balance, such as it was, instantly.

"Monsieur seems to take an extraordinary interest in my affairs," he said jauntily.

"Only when they are to the detriment of other persons who are my friends," I said.

"Monsieur has intruded in a family matter," said Auguste, grandly, still in French.

"By invitation of those most concerned, Monsieur," I answered, for I could have throttled him.

Auguste had developed. He had learned well that effrontery is often the best weapon of an adventurer. He turned from me disdainfully, petulantly, and addressed the Vicomtesse once more.

"I wish to be alone with Antoinette," he said.

"No doubt," said the Vicomtesse.

"I demand it," said Auguste.

"The demand is not granted," said the Vicomtesse; "that is why we have come. Your sister has already made enough sacrifices for you. I know you, Monsieur Auguste de St. Gré," she continued with quiet contempt. "It is not for love of Antoinette that you have sought this meeting. It is because," she said, riding down a torrent of

words which began to escape from him, "it is because you are in a predicament, as usual, and you need money."

"Hélène!"

It was Antoinette who spoke. She had risen, and was standing behind Auguste. She still held the leather bag in her hand.

"Perhaps the sum is not enough," she said; "he has to get to France. Perhaps we could borrow more until my father comes home." She looked questioningly at us.

Madame la Vicomtesse was truly a woman of decision. Without more ado she took the bag from Antoinette's unresisting hands and put it into mine. I was no less astonished than the rest of them.

"Mr. Ritchie will keep this until the negotiations are finished," said the Vicomtesse.

"Negotiations!" cried Auguste, beside himself. "This is insolence, Madame."

"Be careful, sir," I said.

"Auguste!" cried Antoinette, putting her hand on his arm.

"Why did you tell them?" he demanded, turning on her.

"Because I trust them, Auguste," Antoinette answered. She spoke without anger, as one whose sorrow has put her beyond it. Her speech had a dignity and force which might have awed a worthier man. His disappointment and chagrin brought him beyond bounds.

"You trust them!" he cried, "you trust them when they tell you to give your brother, who is starving and in peril of his life, eight hundred livres? Eight hundred livres, *pardieu*, and your brother!"

"It is all I have, Auguste," said his sister, sadly.

"Ha!" he said dramatically, "I see, they seek my destruction. This man"—pointing at me—"is a Federalist, and Madame la Vicomtesse"—he bowed ironically—"is a Royalist."

"Pish!" said the Vicomtesse, impatiently, "it would be an easy matter to have you sent to the Morro—a word to Monsieur de Carondelet, Auguste. Do you believe for

a moment that, in your father's absence, I would have allowed Antoinette to come here alone? And it was a happy circumstance that I could call on such a man as Mr. Ritchie to come with us."

"It seems to me that Mr. Ritchie and his friends have already brought sufficient misfortune on the family."

It was a villanous speech. Antoinette turned away, her shoulders quivering, and I took a step towards him; but Madame la Vicomtesse made a swift gesture, and I stopped, I know not why. She gave an exclamation so sharp that he flinched physically, as though he had been struck. But it was characteristic of her that when she began to speak, her words cut rather than lashed.

"Auguste de St. Gré," she said, "I know you. The Tribunal is merciful compared to you. There is no one on earth whom you would not torture for your selfish ends, no one whom you would not sell without compunction for your pleasure. There are things that a woman should not mention, and yet I would tell them without shame to your face were it not for your sister. If it were not for her, I would not have you in my presence. Shall I speak of your career in France? There is Valenciennes, for example—"

She stopped abruptly. The man was gray, but not on his account did the Vicomtesse stay her speech. She forgot him as though he did not exist, and by one of those swift transitions which thrilled me had gone to the sobbing Antoinette and taken her in her arms, murmuring endearments of which our language is not capable. I, too, forgot Auguste. But no rebuke, however stinging, could make him forget himself, and before we realized it he was talking again. He had changed his tactics.

"This is my home," he said, "where I might expect shelter and comfort. You make me an outcast."

Antoinette disengaged herself from Hélène with a cry, but he turned away from her and shrugged.

"A stranger would have fared better. Perhaps you will have more consideration for a stranger. There is a French ship at the *Terre aux Bœufs* in the English Turn,

which sails to-night. I appeal to you, Mr. Ritchie," — he was still talking in French — "I appeal to you, who are a man of affairs," — and he swept me a bow, — "if a captain would risk taking a fugitive to France for eight hundred livres? *Pardieu*, I could get no farther than the Balize for that. Monsieur," he added meaningly, "you have an interest in this. There are two of us to go."

The amazing effrontery of this move made me gasp. Yet it was neither the Vicomtesse nor myself who answered him. We turned by common impulse to Antoinette, and she was changed. Her breath came quickly, her eyes flashed, her anger made her magnificent.

"It is not true," she cried, "you know it is not true."

He lifted his shoulders and smiled.

"You are my brother, and I am ashamed to acknowledge you. I was willing to give my last sou, to sell my belongings, to take from the poor to help you — until you defamed a good man. You cannot make me believe," she cried, unheeding the color that surged into her cheeks, "you cannot make me believe that he would use this money. You cannot make me believe it."

"Let us do him the credit of thinking that he means to repay it," said Auguste.

Antoinette's eyes filled with tears, — tears of pride, of humiliation, ay, and of an anger of which I had not thought her capable. She was indeed a superb creature then, a personage I had not imagined. Gathering up her gown, she passed Auguste and turned on him swiftly.

"If you were to bring that to him," she said, pointing to the bag in my hand, "he would not so much as touch it. To-morrow I shall go to the Ursulines, and I thank God I shall never see you again. I thank God I shall no longer be your sister. Give Monsieur the bundle," she said to the frightened André, who still stood by the hedge; "he may need food and clothes for his journey."

She left us. We stood watching her until her gown had disappeared amongst the foliage. André came forward and held out the bundle to Auguste, who took it mechanically. Then Madame la Vicomtesse motioned to André

to leave, and gave me a glance, and it was part of the deep understanding of her I had that I took its meaning. I had my forebodings of what this last conversation with Auguste might bring forth, and I wished heartily that we were rid of him.

"Monsieur de St. Gré," I said, "I understood you to say that a ship is lying at the English Turn some five leagues below us, on which you are to take passage at once."

He turned and glared at me, some devilish retort on his lips which he held back. Suddenly he became suave.

"I shall want two thousand livres, Monsieur; it was the sum I asked for."

"It is not a question of what you asked for," I answered.

"Since when did Monsieur assume this intimate position in my family?" he said, glancing at the Vicomtesse.

"Monsieur de St. Gré," I replied with difficulty, "you will confine yourself to the matter in hand. You are in no situation to demand terms; you must take or leave what is offered you. Last night the man called Gignoux, who was of your party, was at the Governor's house."

At this he started perceptibly.

"Ha, I thought he was a traitor," he cried. Strangely enough, he did not doubt my word in this.

"I am surprised that your father's house has not been searched this morning," I continued, astonished at my own moderation. "The sentiments of the Baron de Carondelet are no doubt known to you, and you are aware that your family or your friends cannot save you if you are arrested. You may have this money on two conditions. The first is that you leave the province immediately. The second, that you reveal the whereabouts of Mr. Nicholas Temple."

"Monsieur is very kind," he replied, and added the taunt, "and well versed in the conduct of affairs of money."

"Does Monsieur de St. Gré accept?" I asked.

He threw out his hands with a gesture of resignation.

"Who am I to accept?" he said, "a fugitive, an out-cast. And I should like to remind Monsieur that time passes."

"It is a sensible observation," said I, meaning that it was the first. His sudden docility made me suspicious.

"What preparations have you made to go?"

"They are not elaborate, Monsieur, but they are complete. When I leave you I step into a pirogue which is tied to the river bank."

"Ah," I replied. "And Mr. Temple?"

Madame la Vicomtesse smiled, for Auguste was fairly caught. He had not the astuteness to be a rogue; oddly, he had the sense to know that he could fool us no longer.

"Temple is at Lamarque's," he answered sullenly.

I glanced questioningly at the Vicomtesse.

"Lamarque is an old pensioner of Monsieur de St. Gré's," said she; "he has a house and an arpent of land not far below here."

"Exactly," said Auguste, "and if Mr. Ritchie believes that he will save money by keeping Mr. Temple in Louisiana instead of giving him this opportunity to escape, it is no concern of mine."

I reflected a moment on this, for it was another sensible remark.

"It is indeed no concern of yours," said Madame la Vicomtesse.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"And now," he said, "I take it that there are no further conscientious scruples against my receiving this paltry sum."

"I will go with you to your pirogue," I answered; "when you embark you shall have it."

"I, too, will go," said Madame la Vicomtesse.

"You overwhelm me with civility, Madame," said the Sieur de St. Gré, bowing low.

"Lead the way, Monsieur," I said.

He took his bundle, and started off down the garden path with a grand air. I looked at the Vicomtesse inquiringly, and there was laughter in her eyes.

"I must show you the way to Lamarque's." And then she whispered, "You have done well, Mr. Ritchie."

I did not return her look, but waited until she took the

path ahead of me. In silence we followed Auguste through the depths of the woods, turning here and there to avoid a fallen tree or a sink-hole where the water still remained. At length we came out in the glare of the sun and crossed the dusty road to the levee bank. Some forty yards below us was the canoe, and we walked to it, still in silence. Auguste flung in his bundle, and turned to us.

"Perhaps Monsieur is satisfied," he said.

I handed him the bag, and he took it with an elaborate air of thankfulness. Nay, the rascal opened it as if to assure himself that he was not tricked at the last. At the sight of the gold and silver which Antoinette had hastily collected, he turned to Madame la Vicomtesse.

"Should I have the good fortune to meet Monsieur le Vicomte in France, I shall assure him that Madame is in good hands" (he swept an exultant look at me) "and enjoying herself."

I could have flung him into the river, money-bag and all. But Madame la Vicomtesse made him a courtesy there on the levee bank, and said sweetly:—

"That is very good of you, Auguste."

"As for you, Monsieur," he said, and now his voice shook with uncontrolled rage, "I am in no condition to repay your kindnesses. But I have no doubt that you will not object to keeping the miniature a while longer."

I was speechless with anger and shame, and though I felt the eyes of the Vicomtesse upon me, I dared not look at her. I heard Auguste but indistinctly as he continued:—

"Should you need the frame, Monsieur, you will doubtless find it still with Monsieur Isadore, the Jew, in the Rue Toulouse." With that he leaped into his boat, seized the paddle, and laughed as he headed into the current. How long I stood watching him as he drifted lazily in the sun I know not, but at length the voice of Madame la Vicomtesse aroused me.

"He is a pleasant person," she said.