

condition of flesh can perspire. To say that I was bewildered by this last evidence of the insight of the woman beside me would be to put it mildly. The Vicomtesse sat quietly watching him, the wonted look of repressed laughter on her face, and by degrees his Excellency grew calm again.

"*Mon Dieu*," said he, "I always like to cross swords with you, Madame la Vicomtesse, yet this encounter has been more pleasurable than any I have had since I came to Louisiana. But, *diable*," he cried, "just as I was congratulating myself that I was to have one American the less, you come and tell me that he has refused to flee. Out of consideration for the character and services of Monsieur Philippe de St. Gré I was willing to let them both escape. But now?"

"Mr. Temple is not known in New Orleans except to the St. Gré family," said the Vicomtesse. "He is a man of honor. Suppose Mr. Ritchie were to bring him to your Excellency, and he were to give you his word that he would leave the province at the first opportunity? He now wishes to see his mother before she dies, and it was as much as we could do this morning to persuade him from going to her openly in the face of arrest."

But the Baron was old in a service which did not do things hastily.

"He is well enough where he is for to-day," said his Excellency, resuming his official manner. "To-night after dark I will send down an officer and have him brought before me. He will not then be seen in custody by any one, and provided I am satisfied with him he may go to the Rue Bourbon."

The little Baron rose and bowed to the Vicomtesse to signify that the audience was ended, and he added, as he kissed her hand, "Madame la Vicomtesse, it is a pleasure to be able to serve such a woman as you."

CHAPTER X

THE SCOURGE

As we went through the court I felt as though I had been tied to a string, suspended in the air, and spun. This was undoubtedly due to the heat. And after the astonishing conversation from which we had come, my admiration for the lady beside me was magnified to a veritable awe. We reached the archway. Madame la Vicomtesse held me lightly by the edge of my coat, and I stood looking down at her.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Ritchie," she said, glancing at the few figures hurrying across the Place d'Armes; "those are only Americans, and they are too busy to see us standing here. What do you propose to do now?"

"We must get word to Nick as we promised, that he may know what to expect," I replied. "Suppose we go to Monsieur de St. Gré's house and write him a letter?"

"No," said the Vicomtesse, with decision, "I am going to Mrs. Temple's. I shall write the letter from there and send it by André, and you will go direct to Madame Gravois's."

Her glance rested anxiously upon my face, and there came an expression in her eyes which disturbed me strangely. I had not known it since the days when Polly Ann used to mother me. But I did not mean to give up.

"I am not tired, Madame la Vicomtesse," I answered, "and I will go with you to Mrs. Temple's."

"Give me your hand," she said, and smiled. "André and my maid are used to my vagaries, and your own countrymen will not mind. Give me your hand, Mr. Ritchie."

I gave it willingly enough, with a thrill as she took it

between her own. The same anxious look was in her eyes, and not the least embarrassment.

"There, it is hot and dry, as I feared," she said, "and you seem flushed." She dropped my hand, and there was a touch of irritation in her voice as she continued: "You seemed fairly sensible when I first met you last night, Mr. Ritchie. Are you losing your sanity? Do you not realize that you cannot take liberties with this climate? Do as I say, and go to Madame Gravois's at once."

"It is my pleasure to obey you, Madame la Vicomtesse," I answered, "but I mean to go with you as far as Mrs. Temple's, to see how she fares. She may be — worse."

"That is no reason why you should kill yourself," said Madame, coldly. "Will you not do as I say?"

"I think that I should go to Mrs. Temple's," I answered.

She did not reply to that, letting down her veil impatiently, with a deftness that characterized all her movements. Without so much as asking me to come after her, she reached the banquette, and I walked by her side through the streets, silent and troubled by her displeasure. My pride forbade me to do as she wished. It was the hottest part of a burning day, and the dome of the sky was like a brazen bell above us. We passed the *calabozo* with its iron gates and tiny grilled windows pierced in the massive walls, behind which Gignoux languished, and I could not repress a smile as I thought of him. Even the Spaniards sometimes happened upon justice. In the Rue Bourbon the little shops were empty, the doorstep where my merry fiddler had played vacant, and the very air seemed to simmer above the honeycombed tiles. I knocked at the door, once, twice. There was no answer. I looked at Madame la Vicomtesse, and knocked again so loudly that the little tailor across the street, his shirt opened at the neck, flung out his shutter. Suddenly there was a noise within, the door was opened, and Lindy stood before us, in the darkened room, with terror in her eyes.

"Oh, Marse Dave," she cried, as we entered, "oh, Madame, I'se so glad you'se come, I'se so glad you'se come."

She burst into a flood of tears. And Madame la Vicomtesse, raising her veil, seized the girl by the arm.

"What is it?" she said. "What is the matter, Lindy?"

Madame's touch seemed to steady her.

"Miss Sally," she moaned, "Miss Sally done got de yaller fever."

There was a moment's silence, for we were both too appalled by the news to speak.

"Lindy, are you sure?" said the Vicomtesse.

"Yass'm, yass'm," Lindy sobbed, "I reckon I'se done seed 'nuf of it, Mistis." And she went into a hysterical fit of weeping.

The Vicomtesse turned to her own frightened servants in the doorway, bade André in French to run for Dr. Perin, and herself closed the battened doors. There was a moment when her face as I saw it was graven on my memory, reflecting a knowledge of the evils of this world, a spirit above and untouched by them, a power to accept what life may bring with no outward sign of pleasure or dismay. Doubtless thus she had made King and Cardinal laugh, doubtless thus, ministering to those who crossed her path, she had met her own calamities. Strangest of all was the effect she had upon Lindy, for the girl ceased crying as she watched her.

Madame la Vicomtesse turned to me.

"You must go at once," she said. "When you get to Madame Gravois's, write to Mr. Temple. I will send André to you there."

She started for the bedroom door, Lindy making way for her. I scarcely knew what I did as I sprang forward and took the Vicomtesse by the arm.

"Where are you going?" I cried. "You cannot go in there! You cannot go in there!"

It did not seem strange that she turned to me without anger, that she did not seek to release her arm. It did not seem strange that her look had in it a gentleness as she spoke.

"I must," she said.

"I cannot let you risk your life," I cried, wholly forgetting myself; "there are others who will do this."

"Others?" she said.

"I will go. I—I have nursed people before this. And there is Lindy."

A smile quivered on her lips, — or was it a smile?

"You will do as I say and go to Madame Gravois's — at once," she murmured, striving for the first time to free herself.

"If you stay, I stay," I answered; "and if you die, I die."

She looked up into my eyes for a fleeting instant.

"Write to Mr. Temple," she said.

Dazed, I watched her open the bedroom doors, motion to Lindy to pass through, and then she had closed them again and I was alone in the darkened parlor.

The throbbing in my head was gone, and a great clearness had come with a great fear. I stood, I know not how long, listening to the groans that came through the wall, for Mrs. Temple was in agony. At intervals I heard Héléne's voice, and then the groans seemed to stop. Ten times I went to the bedroom door, and as many times drew away again, my heart leaping within me at the peril which she faced. If I had had the right, I believe I would have carried her away by force.

But I had not the right. I sat down heavily, by the table, to think, and it might have been a cry of agony sharper than the rest that reminded me once more of the tragedy of the poor lady in torture. My eye fell upon the table, and there, as though prepared for what I was to do, lay pen and paper, ink and sand. My hand shook as I took the quill and tried to compose a letter to my cousin. I scarcely saw the words which I put on the sheet, and I may be forgiven for the unwisdom of that which I wrote.

"The Baron de Carondelet will send an officer for you to-night so that you may escape observation in custody. His Excellency knew of your hiding-place, but is inclined to be lenient, will allow you to-morrow to go to the Rue Bourbon, and will without doubt permit you to leave the province. Your

mother is ill, and Madame la Vicomtesse and myself are with her.

"DAVID."

In the state I was it took me a long time to compose this much, and I had barely finished it when there was a knock at the outer door. There was André. He had the immobility of face which sometimes goes with the mulatto, and always with the trained servant, as he informed me that Monsieur le Médecin was not at home, but that he had left word. There was an epidemic, Monsieur, so André feared. I gave him the note and his directions, and ten minutes after he had gone I would have given much to have called him back. How about Antoinette, alone at Les Îles? Why had I not thought of her? We had told her nothing that morning, Madame la Vicomtesse and I, after our conference with Nick. For the girl had shut herself in her room, and Madame had thought it best not to disturb her at such a stage. But would she not be alarmed when Héléne failed to return that night? Had circumstances been different, I myself would have ridden to Les Îles, but no inducement now could make me desert the post I had chosen. After many years I dislike to recall to memory that long afternoon which I spent, helpless, in the Rue Bourbon. Now I was on my feet, pacing restlessly the short breadth of the room, trying to shut out from my mind the horrors of which my ears gave testimony. Again, in the intervals of quiet, I sat with my elbows on the table and my head in my hands, striving to allay the throbbing in my temples. Pains came and went, and at times I felt like a fagot flung into the fire, — I, who had never known a sick day. At times my throat pained me, an odd symptom in a warm climate. Troubled as I was in mind and body, the thought of Héléne's quiet heroism upheld me through it all. More than once I had my hand raised to knock at the bedroom door and ask if I could help, but I dared not; at length, the sun having done its worst and spent its fury, I began to hear steps along the banquette and voices almost at my elbow beyond the little window. At every noise I peered out, hoping for the doctor. But he did not come.

And then, as I fell back into the fauteuil, there was borne on my consciousness a sound I had heard before. It was the music of the fiddler, it was a tune I knew, and the voices of the children were singing the refrain: —

*“ Ne sait quand reviendra,
Ne sait quand reviendra.”*

I rose, opened the door, and slipped out of it, and I must have made a strange, hatless figure as I came upon the fiddler and his children from across the street.

“Stop that noise,” I cried in French, angered beyond all reason at the thought of music at such a time. “Idiots, there is yellow fever there.”

The little man stopped with his bow raised; for a moment they all stared at me, transfixed. It was a little elf in blue *indienne* who jumped first and ran down the street, crying the news in a shrill voice, the others following, the fiddler gazing stupidly after them. Suddenly he scrambled up, moaning, as if the scourge itself had fastened on him, backed into the house, and slammed the door in my face. I returned with slow steps to shut myself in the darkened room again, and I recall feeling something of triumph over the consternation I had caused. No sounds came from the bedroom, and after that the street was quiet as death save for an occasional frightened, hurrying footfall. I was tired.

All at once the bedroom door opened softly, and Héléne was standing there, looking at me. At first I saw her dimly, as in a vision, then clearly. I leaped to my feet and went and stood beside her.

“The doctor has not come,” I said. “Where does he live? I will go for him.”

She shook her head.

“He can do no good. Lindy has procured all the remedies, such as they are. They can only serve to alleviate,” she answered. “She cannot withstand this, poor lady.” There were tears on Héléne’s lashes. “Her sufferings have been frightful — frightful.”

“Cannot I help?” I said thickly. “Cannot I do something?”

She shook her head. She raised her hand timidly to the lapel of my coat, and suddenly I felt her palm, cool and firm, upon my forehead. It rested there but an instant.

“You ought not to be here,” she said, her voice vibrant with earnestness and concern. “You ought not to be here. Will you not go — if I ask it?”

“I cannot,” I said; “you know I cannot if you stay.”

She did not answer that. Our eyes met, and in that instant for me there was neither joy nor sorrow, sickness nor death, nor time nor space nor universe. It was she who turned away.

“Have you written him?” she asked in a low voice.

“Yes,” I answered.

“She would not have known him,” said Héléne; “after all these years of waiting she would not have known him. Her punishment has been great.”

A sound came from the bedroom, and Héléne was gone, silently, as she had come.

* * * * *

I must have been dozing in the fauteuil, for suddenly I found myself sitting up, listening to an unwonted noise. I knew from the count of the hoof-beats which came from down the street that a horse was galloping in long strides — a spent horse, for the timing was irregular. Then he was pulled up into a trot, then to a walk as I ran to the door and opened it and beheld Nicholas Temple flinging himself from a pony white with lather. And he was alone! He caught sight of me as soon as his foot touched the banquette.

“What are you doing here?” I cried. “What are you doing here?”

He halted on the edge of the banquette as a hurrying man runs into a wall. He had been all excitement, all fury, as he jumped from his horse; and now, as he looked at me, he seemed to lose his bearings, to be all bewildered. He cried out my name and stood looking at me like a fool.

“What the devil do you mean by coming here?” I

cried. "Did I not write you to stay where you were? How did you get here?" I stepped down on the banquette and seized him by the shoulders. "Did you receive my letter?"

"Yes," he said, "yes." For a moment that was as far as he got, and he glanced down the street and then at the heaving beast he had ridden, which stood with head drooping to the kennel. Then he laid hold of me. "Davy, is it true that she has yellow fever? Is it true?"

"Who told you?" I demanded angrily.

"André," he answered. "André said that the lady here had yellow fever. Is it true?"

"Yes," I said almost inaudibly.

He let his hand fall from my shoulder, and he shivered.

"May God forgive me for what I have done!" he said. "Where is she?"

"For what you have done?" I cried; "you have done an insensate thing to come here." Suddenly I remembered the sentry at the gate of Fort St. Charles. "How did you get into the city?" I said; "were you mad to defy the Baron and his police?"

"Damn the Baron and his police," he answered, striving to pass me. "Let me in! Let me see her."

Even as he spoke I caught sight of men coming into the street, perhaps at the corner of the Rue St. Pierre, and then more men, and as we went into the house I saw that they were running. I closed the doors. There were cries in the street now, but he did not seem to heed them. He stood listening, heart-stricken, to the sounds that came through the bedroom wall, and a spasm crossed his face. Then he turned like a man not to be denied, to the bedroom door. I was before him, but Madame la Vicomtesse opened it. And I remember feeling astonishment that she did not show surprise or alarm.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Temple?" she said.

"My mother, Madame! My mother! I must go to her."

He pushed past her into the bedroom, and I followed perforce. I shall never forget the scene, though I had but the one glimpse of it, — the raving, yellowed woman

in the bed, not a spectre nor yet even a semblance of the beauty of Temple Bow. But she was his mother, upon whom God had brought such a retribution as He alone can bestow. Lindy, faithful servant to the end, held the wasted hands of her mistress against the violence they would have done. Lindy held them, her own body rocking with grief, her lips murmuring endearments, prayers, supplications.

"Miss Sally, honey, doan you know Lindy? Gawd'll let you git well, Miss Sally, Gawd'll let you git well, honey, ter see Marse Nick — ter see — Marse — Nick —"

The words died on Lindy's lips, the ravings of the frenzied woman ceased. The yellowed hands fell limply to the sheet, the shrunken form stiffened. The eyes of the mother looked upon the son, and in them at first was the terror of one who sees the infinite. Then they softened until they became again the only feature that was left of Sarah Temple. Now, as she looked at him who was her pride, her honor, for one sight of whom she had prayed, — ay, and even blasphemed, — her eyes were all tenderness. Then she spoke.

"Harry," she said softly, "be good to me, dear. You are all I have now."

She spoke of Harry Riddle!

But the long years of penance had not been in vain. Nick had forgiven her. We saw him kneeling at the bedside, we saw him with her hand in his, and Hélène was drawing me gently out of the room and closing the door behind her. She did not look at me, nor I at her.

We stood for a moment close together, and suddenly the cries in the street brought us back from the drama in the low-ceiled, reeking room we had left.

"*Ici! Ici! Voici le cheval!*"

There was a loud rapping at the outer door, and a voice demanding admittance in Spanish in the name of his Excellency the Governor.

"Open it," said Hélène. There was neither excitement in her voice, nor yet resignation. In those two words was told the philosophy of her life.

I opened the door. There, on the step, was an officer, perspiring, uniformed and plumed, and behind him a crowd of eager faces, white and black, that seemed to fill the street. He took a step into the room, his hand on the hilt of his sword, and poured out at me a torrent of Spanish of which I understood nothing. All at once his eye fell upon Hélène, who was standing behind me, and he stopped in the middle of his speech and pulled off his hat and bowed profoundly.

"Madame la Vicomtesse!" he stammered. I was no little surprised that she should be so well known.

"You will please to speak French, Monsieur," she said; "this gentleman does not understand Spanish. What is it you desire?"

"A thousand pardons, Madame la Vicomtesse," he said. "I am the Alcalde de Barrio, and a wild Americano has passed the sentry at St. Charles's gate without heeding his Excellency's authority and command. I saw the man with my own eyes. I should know him again in a hundred. We have traced him here to this house, Madame la Vicomtesse. Behold the horse which he rode!" The Alcalde turned and pointed at the beast. "Behold the horse which he rode, Madame la Vicomtesse. The animal will die."

"Probably," answered the Vicomtesse, in an even tone.

"But the man," cried the Alcalde, "the man is here, Madame la Vicomtesse, here, in this house!"

"Yes," she said, "he is here."

"*Sancta Maria!* Madame," he exclaimed, "I—I who speak to you have come to get him. He has defied his Excellency's commands. Where is he?"

"He is in that room," said the Vicomtesse, pointing at the bedroom door.

The Alcalde took a step forward. She stopped him by a quick gesture.

"He is in that room with his mother," she said, "and his mother has the yellow fever. Come, we will go to him." And she put her hand upon the door.

"Yellow fever!" cried the Alcalde, and his voice was

thick with terror. There was a moment's silence as he stood rooted to the floor. I did not wonder then, but I have since thought it remarkable that the words spoken low by both of them should have been caught up on the banquette and passed into the street. Impassive, I heard it echoed from a score of throats, I saw men and women stampeding like frightened sheep, I heard their footfalls and their cries as they ran. A tawdry constable, who held with a trembling hand the bridle of the tired horse, alone remained.

"Yellow fever!" the Alcalde repeated.

The Vicomtesse inclined her head.

He was silent again for a while, uncertain, and then, without comprehending, I saw the man's eyes grow smaller and a smile play about his mouth. He looked at the Vicomtesse with a new admiration to which she paid no heed.

"I am sorry, Madame la Vicomtesse," he began, "but—"

"But you do not believe that I speak the truth," she replied quietly.

He winced.

"Will you follow me?" she said, turning again.

He had started, plainly in an agony of fear, when a sound came from beyond the wall that brought a cry to his lips.

Her manner changed to one of stinging scorn.

"You are a coward," she said. "I will bring the gentleman to you if he can be got to leave the bedside."

"No," said the Alcalde, "no. I—I will go to him, Madame la Vicomtesse."

But she did not open the door.

"Listen," she said in a tone of authority, "I myself have been to his Excellency to-day concerning this gentleman—"

"You, Madame la Vicomtesse?"

"I will open the door," she continued, impatient at the interruption, "and you will see him. Then I shall write a letter which you will take to the Governor. The gentle-

man will not try to escape, for his mother is dying. Besides, he could not get out of the city. You may leave your constable where he is, or the man may come in and stand at this door in sight of the gentleman while you are gone—if he pleases.”

“And then?” said the Alcalde.

“It is my belief that his Excellency will allow the gentleman to remain here, and that you will be relieved from the necessity of running any further risk.”

As she spoke she opened the door, softly. The room was still now, still as death, and the Alcalde went forward on tiptoe. I saw him peering in, I saw him backing away again like a man in mortal fear.

“Yes, it is he—it is the man,” he stammered. He put his hand to his brow.

The Vicomtesse closed the door, and without a glance at him went quickly to the table and began to write. She had no thought of consulting the man again, of asking his permission. Although she wrote rapidly, five minutes must have gone by before the note was finished and folded and sealed. She held it out to him.

“Take this to his Excellency,” she said, “and bring me his answer.” The Alcalde bowed, murmured her title, and went lamely out of the house. He was plainly in an agony of uncertainty as to his duty, but he glanced at the Vicomtesse—and went, flipping the note nervously with his finger nail. He paused for a few low-spoken words with the tawdry constable, who sat down on the banquette after his chief had gone, still clinging to the bridle. The Vicomtesse went to the doorway, looked at him, and closed the battened doors. The constable did not protest. The day was fading without, and the room was almost in darkness as she crossed over to the little mantel and stood with her head laid upon her arm.

I did not disturb her. The minutes passed, the light waned until I could see her no longer, and yet I knew that she had not moved. The strange sympathy between us kept me silent until I heard her voice calling my name.

“Yes,” I answered.

“The candle!”

I drew out my tinder-box and lighted the wick. She had turned, and was facing me even as she had faced me the night before. The night before! The greatest part of my life seemed to have passed since then. I remember wondering that she did not look tired. Her face was sad; her voice was sad, and it had an ineffable, sweet quality at such times that was all its own.

“The Alcalde should be coming back,” she said.

“Yes,” I answered.

These were our words, yet we scarce heeded their meaning. Between us was drawn a subtler communion than speech, and we dared—neither of us—to risk speech. She searched my face, but her lips were closed. She did not take my hand again as in the afternoon. She turned away. I knew what she would have said.

There was a knock at the door. We went together to open it, and the Alcalde stood on the step. He held in his hand a long letter on which the red seal caught the light, and he gave the letter to the Vicomtesse, with a bow.

“From his Excellency, Madame la Vicomtesse.”

She broke the seal, went to the table, and read. Then she looked up at me.

“It is the Governor’s permit for Mr. Temple to remain in this house. Thank you,” she said to the Alcalde; “you may go.”

“With my respectful wishes for the continued good health of Madame la Vicomtesse,” said the Alcalde.