

But New Orleans was hot, burning hot, and this could not be cold I felt. Ah, I had it, the water was cold going to Vincennes, so cold!

A voice called me. No matter where I had gone, I think I would have come back at the sound of it. I listened intently, that I might lose no word of what it said. I knew the voice. Had it not called to me many times in my life before? But now there was fear in it, and fear gave it a vibrant sweetness, fear gave it a quality that made it mine — mine.

“You are shivering.”

That was all it said, and it called from across the sea. And the sea was cold, — cold and green under the gray light. If she who called to me would only come with the warmth of her love! The sea faded, the light fell, and I was in the eternal cold of space between the whirling worlds. If she could but find me! Was not that her hand in mine? Did I not feel her near me, touching me? I wondered that I should hear myself as I answered her.

“I am not ill,” I said. “Speak to me again.”

She was pressing my hand now, I saw her bending over me, I felt her hair as it brushed my face. She spoke again. There was a tremor in her voice, and to that alone I listened. The words were decisive, of command, and with them some sense as of a haven near came to me. Another voice answered in a strange tongue, saying seemingly: —

“*Oui, Madame — malé couri — bon djé! — malé couri!*”

I heard the doors close, and the sound of footsteps running and dying along the banquette, and after that my shoulders were raised and something wrapped about them. Then stillness again, the stillness that comes between waking and sleeping, between pain and calm. And at times when I felt her hand fall into mine or press against my brow, the pain seemed more endurable. After that I recall being lifted, being borne along. I opened my eyes once and saw, above a tile-crowned wall, the moon all yellow and distorted in the sky. Then a gate clicked, dungeon blackness, half-light again, ascent, oblivion.

## CHAPTER XII

### VISIONS, AND AN AWAKENING

I HAVE still sharp memories of the tortures of that illness, though it befell so long ago. At times, when my mind was gone from me, I cried out I know not what of jargon, of sentiment, of the horrors I had beheld in my life. I lived again the pleasant scenes, warped and burlesqued almost beyond cognizance, and the tragedies were magnified a hundred fold. Thus it would be: on the low, white ceiling five cracks came together, and that was a device. And the device would take on color, red-bronze like the sumach in the autumn and streaks of vermilion, and two glowing coals that were eyes, and above them eagles' feathers, and the cracks became bramble bushes. I was behind the log, and at times I started and knew that it was a hideous dream, and again Polly Ann was clutching me and praying me to hold back, and I broke from her and splashed over the slippery limestone bed of the creek to fight single-handed. Through all the fearful struggle I heard her calling me piteously to come back to her. When the brute got me under water I could not hear her, but her voice came back suddenly (as when a door opens) and it was like the wind singing in the poplars. Was it Polly Ann's voice?

Again, I sat with Nick under the trees on the lawn at Temple Bow, and the world was dark with the coming storm. I knew and he knew that the storm was brewing that I might be thrust out into it. And then in the blackness, when the air was filled with all the fair things of the earth torn asunder, a beautiful woman came through the noise and the fury, and we ran to her and clung to

her skirts, thinking we had found safety. But she thrust us forth into the blackness with a smile, as though she were flinging papers out of the window. She, too, grew out of the design in the cracks of the ceiling, and a greater fear seized me at sight of her features than when the red face came out of the brambles.

My constant torment was thirst. I was in the prairie, and it was scorched and brown to the horizon. I searched and prayed pitifully for water,—for only a sip of the brown water with the specks in it that was in the swamp. There were no swamps. I was on the bed in the cabin looking at the shifts and hunting shirts on the pegs, and Polly Ann would bring a gourdful of clear water from the spring as far as the door. Nay, once I got it to my lips, and it was gone. Sometimes a young man in a hunting shirt, square-shouldered, clear-eyed, his face tanned and his fair hair bleached by the sun, would bring the water. He was the hero of my boyhood, and part of him indeed was in me. And I would have followed him again to Vincennes despite the tortures of the damned. But when I spoke his name he grew stouter before me, and his eyes lost their lustre and his hair turned gray; and his hand shook as he held out the gourd and spilled its contents ere I could reach them.

Sometimes another brought the water, and at sight of her I would tremble and grow faint, and I had not the strength to reach for it. She would look at me with eyes that laughed despite the resolution of the mouth. Then the eyes would grow pitiful at my helplessness, and she would murmur my name. There was some reason which I never fathomed why she could not give me the water, and her own suffering seemed greater than mine because of it. So great did it seem that I forgot my own and sought to comfort her. Then she would go away, very slowly, and I would hear her calling to me in the wind, from the stars to which I looked up from the prairie. It was she, I thought, who ordered the world. Who, when women were lost and men cried out in distress, came to them calmly, ministered to them deftly.

Once—perhaps a score of times, I cannot tell—was limned on the ceiling, where the cracks were, her miniature, and I knew what was coming and shuddered and cried aloud because I could not stop it. I saw the narrow street of a strange city deep down between high houses,—houses with gratings on the lowest windows, with studded, evil-looking doors, with upper stories that toppled over to shut out the light of the sky, with slated roofs that slanted and twisted this way and that and dormers peeping from them. Down in the street, instead of the King's white soldiers, was a foul, unkempt rabble, creeping out of its damp places, jesting, cursing, singing. And in the midst of the rabble a lady sat in a cart high above it unmoved. She was the lady of the miniature. A window in one of the jutting houses was flung open, a little man leaned out excitedly, and I knew him too. He was Jean Baptiste Lenoir, and he cried out in a shrill voice:—

“You must take off her ruff, citizens. You must take off her ruff!”

There came a blessed day when my thirst was gone, when I looked up at the cracks in the ceiling and wondered why they did not change into horrors. I watched them a long, long time, and it seemed incredible that they should still remain cracks. Beyond that I would not go, into speculation I dared not venture. They remained cracks, and I went to sleep thanking God. When I awoke a breeze came in cool, fitful gusts, and on it was the scent of camellias. I thought of turning my head, and I remember wondering for a long time over the expediency of this move. What would happen if I did? Perhaps the visions would come back, perhaps my head would come off. Finally I decided to risk it, and the first thing that I beheld was a palm-leaf fan, moving slowly. That fact gave me food for thought, and contented me for a while. Then I hit upon the idea that there must be something behind the fan. I was distinctly pleased by this astuteness, and I spent more time in speculation. Whatever it was, it had a tantalizing elusiveness, keeping the fan between it and me. This was not fair.

I had an inspiration. If I feigned to be asleep, perhaps the thing behind the fan would come out. I shut my eyes. The breeze continued steadily. Surely no human being could fan as long as that without being tired! I opened my eyes twice, but the thing was inscrutable. Then I heard a sound that I knew to be a footstep upon boards. A voice whispered: —

“The delirium has left him.”

Another voice, a man's voice, answered: —

“Thank God! Let me fan him. You are tired.”

“I am not tired,” answered the first voice.

“I do not see how you have stood it,” said the man's voice. “You will kill yourself, Madame la Vicomtesse. The danger is past now.”

“I hope so, Mr. Temple,” said the first voice. “Please go away. You may come back in half an hour.”

I heard the footsteps retreating. Then I said: “I am not asleep.”

The fan stopped for a brief instant and then went on vibrating inexorably. I was entranced at the thought of what I had done. I had spoken, though indeed it seemed to have had no effect. Could it be that I hadn't spoken? I began to be frightened at this, when gradually something crept into my mind and drove the fear out. I did not grasp what this was at first, it was like the first staining of wine on the eastern sky to one who sees a sunrise. And then the thought grew even as the light grows, tinged by prismatic colors, until at length a memory struck into my soul like a shaft of light. I spoke her name, unblushingly, aloud.

“Hélène!”

The fan stopped. There was a silence that seemed an eternity as the palm leaf trembled in her hand, there was an answer that strove tenderly to command.

“Hush, you must not talk,” she said.

Never, I believe, came such supreme happiness with obedience. I felt her hand upon my brow, and the fan moved again. I fell asleep once more from sheer weariness of joy. She was there, beside me. She had been

there, beside me, through it all, and it was her touch which had brought me back to life.

I dreamed of her. When I awoke again her image was in my mind, and I let it rest there in contemplation. But presently I thought of the fan, turned my head, and it was not there. A great fear seized me. I looked out of the open door where the morning sun threw the checkered shadows of the honeysuckle on the floor of the gallery, and over the railing to the tree-tops in the court-yard. The place struck a chord in my memory. Then my eyes wandered back into the room. There was a polished dresser, a crucifix and a *prie-dieu* in the corner, a fauteuil, and another chair at my bed. The floor was rubbed to an immaculate cleanliness, stained yellow, and on it lay clean woven mats. The room was empty!

I cried out, a yellow and red turban shot across the window, and I beheld in the door the spare countenance of the faithful Lindy.

“Marse Dave,” she cried, “is you feelin' well, honey?”

“Where am I, Lindy?” I asked.

Lindy, like many of her race, knew well how to assume airs of importance. Lindy had me down, and she knew it.

“Marse Dave,” she said, “doan yo' know better'n dat? Yo' know yo' ain't ter talk. Lawsy, I reckon I wouldn't be wuth pizen if she was to hear I let yo' talk.”

Lindy implied that there was tyranny somewhere.

“She?” I asked, “who's she?”

“Now yo' hush, Marse Dave,” said Lindy, in a shrill whisper, “I ain't er-gwine ter git mixed up in no disputation. Ef she was ter hear me er-disputin' wid yo', Marse Dave, I reckon I'd done git such er tongue-lashin'—” Lindy looked at me suspiciously. “Yo'er allus was powe'rful cute, Marse Dave.”

Lindy set her lips with a mighty resolve to be silent. I heard some one coming along the gallery, and then I saw Nick's tall figure looming up behind her.

“Davy,” he cried.

Lindy braced herself up doggedly.

"Yo' ain't er-gwine to git in thar nohow, Marse Nick," she said.

"Nonsense, Lindy," he answered, "I've been in there as much as you have." And he took hold of her thin arm and pulled her back.

"Marse Nick!" she cried, terror-stricken, "she'll done fin' out dat you've been er-talkin'."

"Pish!" said Nick with a fine air, "who's afraid of her?"

Lindy's face took on an expression of intense amusement.

"Yo' is, for one, Marse Nick," she answered, with the familiarity of an old servant. "I done seed yo' skedaddle when she comed."

"Tut," said Nick, grandly, "I run from no woman. Eh, Davy?" He pushed past the protesting Lindy into the room and took my hand.

"Egad, you have been near the devil's precipice, my son. A three-bottle man would have gone over." In his eyes was all the strange affection he had had for me ever since we had been boys at Temple Bow together. "Davy, I reckon life wouldn't have been worth much if you'd gone."

I did not answer. I could only stare at him, mutely grateful for such an affection. In all his wild life he had been true to me, and he had clung to me stanchly in this, my greatest peril. Thankful that he was here, I searched his handsome person with my eyes. He was dressed, as usual, with care and fashion, in linen breeches and a light gray coat and a filmy ruffle at his neck. But I thought there had come a change into his face. The reckless quality seemed to have gone out of it, yet the spirit and daring remained, and with these all the sweetness that was once in his smile. There were lines under his eyes that spoke of vigils.

"You have been sitting up with me," I said.

"Of course," he answered, patting my shoulder. "Of course I have. What did you think I would be doing?"

"What was the matter with me?" I asked.

"Nothing much," he said lightly, "a touch of the sun,

and a great deal of overwork in behalf of your friends. Now keep still, or I will be getting peppered."

I was silent for a while, turning over this answer in my mind. Then I said:—

"I had yellow fever."

He started.

"It is no use to lie to you," he replied; "you're too shrewd."

I was silent again for a while.

"Nick," I said, "you had no right to stay here. You have—other responsibilities now."

He laughed. It was the old buoyant, boyish laugh of sheer happiness, and I felt the better for hearing it.

"If you begin to preach, parson, I'll go; I vow I'll have no more sermonizing. Davy," he cried, "isn't she just the dearest, sweetest, most beautiful person in the world?"

I smiled.

"Where is she?" I asked, temporizing. Nick was not a subtle person, and I was ready to follow him at great length in the praise of Antoinette. "I hope she is not here."

"We made her go to Les Îles," said he.

"And you risked your life and stayed here without her?" I said.

"As for risking life, that kind of criticism doesn't come well from you. And as for Antoinette," he added with a smile, "I expect to see something of her later on."

"Well," I answered with a sigh of supreme content, "you have been a fool all your life, and I hope that she will make you sensible."

"You never could make me so," said Nick, "and besides, I don't think you've been so damned sensible yourself."

We were silent again for a space.

"Davy," he asked, "do you remember what I said when you had that miniature here?"

"You said a great many things, I believe."

"I told you to consider carefully the masterful features of that lady, and to thank God you hadn't married her. I vow I never thought she'd turn up. Upon my oath

I never thought I should be such a blind slave as I have been for the last fortnight. Faith, Monsieur de St. Gré is a strong man, but he was no more than a puppet in his own house when he came back here for a day. That lady could govern a province, — no, a kingdom. But I warrant you there would be no climbing of balconies in her dominions. I have never been so generalled in my life."

I had no answer for these comments.

"The deuce of it is the way she does it," he continued, plainly bent on relieving himself. "There's no noise, no fuss; but you must obey, you don't know why. And yet you may flay me if I don't love her."

"Love her!" I repeated.

"She saved your life," said Nick; "I don't believe any other woman could have done it. She hadn't any thought of her own. She has been here, in this room, almost constantly night and day, and she never let you go. The little French doctor gave you up — not she. She held on. Cursed if I see why she did it."

"Nor I," I answered.

"Well," he said apologetically, "of course I would have done it, but you weren't anything to her. Yes, egad, you were something to be saved, — that was all that was necessary. She had you brought back here — we are in Monsieur de St. Gré's house, by the way — in a litter, and she took command as though she had nursed yellow fever cases all her life. No flurry. I said that you were in love with her once, Davy, when I saw you looking at the portrait. I take it back. Of course a man could be very fond of her," he said, "but a king ought to have married her. As for that poor Vicomte she's tied up to, I reckon I know the reason why he didn't come to America. An ordinary man would have no chance at all. God bless her!" he cried, with a sudden burst of feeling, "I would die for her myself. She got me out of a barrel of trouble with his Excellency. She cared for my mother, a lonely outcast, and braved death herself to go to her when she was dying of the fever. God bless her!"

Lindy was standing in the doorway.

"Lan' sakes, Marse Nick, yo' gotter go," she said.

He rose and pressed my fingers. "I'll go," he said, and left me. Lindy seated herself in the chair. She held in her hand a bowl of beef broth. From this she fed me in silence, and when she left she commanded me to sleep, informing me that she would be on the gallery within call.

But I did not sleep at once. Nick's words had brought back a fact which my returning consciousness had hitherto ignored. The birds sang in the court-yard, and when the breeze stirred it was ever laden with a new scent. I had been snatched from the jaws of death, my life was before me, but the happiness which had thrilled me was gone, and in my weakness the weight of the sadness which had come upon me was almost unbearable. If I had had the strength, I would have risen then and there from my bed, I would have fled from the city at the first opportunity. As it was, I lay in a torture of thought, living over again every part of my life which she had touched. I remembered the first long, yearning look I had given the miniature at Madame Bouvet's. I had not loved her then. My feeling rather had been a mysterious sympathy with and admiration for this brilliant lady whose sphere was so far removed from mine. This was sufficiently strange. Again, in the years of my struggle for livelihood which followed, I dreamed of her; I pictured her often in the midst of the darkness of the Revolution. Then I had the miniature again, which had travelled to her, as it were, and come back to me. Even then it was not love I felt, but an unnamed sentiment for one whom I clothed with gifts and attributes I admired: constancy, an ability to suffer and to hide, decision, wit, refuge for the weak, scorn for the false. So I named them at random and cherished them, knowing that these things were not what other men longed for in women. Nay, there was another quality which I believed was there — which I knew was there — a supreme tenderness that was hidden like a treasure too sacred to be seen.

I did not seek to explain the mystery which had brought

her across the sea into that little garden of Mrs. Temple's and into my heart. There she was now enthroned, deified; that she would always be there I accepted. That I would never say or do anything not in consonance with her standards I knew. That I would suffer much I was sure, but the lees of that suffering I should hoard because they came from her.

What might have been I tried to put away. There was the moment, I thought, when our souls had met in the little parlor in the Rue Bourbon. I should never know. This I knew — that we had labored together to bring happiness into other lives.

Then came another thought to appall me. Unmindful of her own safety, she had nursed me back to life through all the horrors of the fever. The doctor had despaired, and I knew that by the very force that was in her she had saved me. She was here now, in this house, and presently she would be coming back to my bedside. Painfully I turned my face to the wall in a torment of humiliation — I had called her by her name. I would see her again, but I knew not whence the strength for that ordeal was to come.

## CHAPTER XIII

## A MYSTERY

I KNEW by the light that it was evening when I awoke. So prisoners mark the passing of the days by a bar of sunlight. And as I looked at the green trees in the courtyard, vaguely troubled by I knew not what, some one came and stood in the doorway. It was Nick.

"You don't seem very cheerful," said he; "a man ought to be who has been snatched out of the fire."

"You seem to be rather too sure of my future," I said, trying to smile.

"That's more like you," said Nick. "Egad, you ought to be happy — we all ought to be happy — she's gone."

"She!" I cried. "Who's gone?"

"Madame la Vicomtesse," he replied, rubbing his hands as he stood over me. "But she's left instructions with me for Lindy as long as Monsieur de Carondelet's *Bando de Buen Gobierno*. You are not to do this, and you are not to do that, you are to eat such and such things, you are to be made to sleep at such and such times. She came in here about an hour ago and took a long look at you before she left."

"She was not ill?" I said faintly.

"Faith, I don't know why she was not," he said. "She has done enough to tire out an army. But she seems well and fairly happy. She had her joke at my expense as she went through the court-yard, and she reminded me that we were to send a report by André every day."

Chagrin, depression, relief, bewilderment, all were struggling within me.

"Where did she go?" I asked at last.