

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.

"To Les Îles," he said. "You are to be brought there as soon as you are strong enough."

"Do you happen to know why she went?" I said.

"Now how the deuce should I know?" he answered. "I've done everything with blind servility since I came into this house. I never asked for any reason — it never would have done any good. I suppose she thought that you were well on the road to recovery, and she knew that Lindy was an old hand. And then the doctor is to come in."

"Why didn't you go?" I demanded, with a sudden remembrance that he was staying away from happiness.

"It was because I longed for another taste of liberty, Davy," he laughed. "You and I will have an old-fashioned time here together, — a deal of talk, and perhaps a little piquet, — who knows?"

My strength came back, bit by bit, and listening to his happiness did much to ease the soreness of my heart — while the light lasted. It was in the night watches that my struggles came — though often some unwitting speech of his would bring back the pain. He took delight in telling me, for example, how for hours at a time I had been in a fearful delirium.

"The Lord knows what foolishness you talked, Davy," said he. "It would have done me good to hear you had you been in your right mind."

"But you did hear me," I said, full of apprehensions.

"Some of it," said he. "You were after Wilkinson once, in a burrow, I believe, and you swore dreadfully because he got out of the other end. I can't remember all the things you said. Oh, yes, once you were talking to Auguste de St. Gré about money."

"Money?" I repeated in a sinking voice.

"Oh, a lot of jargon. The Vicomtesse pushed me out of the room, and after that I was never allowed to be there when you had those flights. Curse the mosquitoes!" He seized a fan and began to ply it vigorously. "I remember. You were giving Auguste a lecture. Then I had to go."

These and other reminiscences gave me sufficient food for reflection, and many a shudder over the possibilities of my ravings. She had put him out! No wonder.

After a while I was carried to the gallery, and there I would talk to the little doctor about the yellow fever which had swept the city. Monsieur Perrin was not much of a doctor, to be sure, and he had a heartier dread of the American invasion than of the scourge. He worshipped the Vicomtesse, and was so devoid of professional pride as to give her freely all credit for my recovery. He, too, clothed her with the qualities of statesmanship.

"Ha, Monsieur," he said, "if that lady had been King of France, do you think there would have been any States General, any red bonnets, any Jacobins or Cordeliers? *Parbleu*, she would have swept the vicemongers and traitors out of the Palais Royal itself. There would have been a house-cleaning there. I, who speak to you, know it."

Every day Nick wrote a bulletin to be sent to the Vicomtesse, and he took a fiendish delight in the composition of these. He would come out on the gallery with ink and a blank sheet of paper and try to enlist my help. He would insert the most ridiculous statements, as for instance, "Davy is worse to-day, having bribed Lindy to give him a pint of Madeira against my orders." Or, "Davy feigns to be sinking rapidly because he wishes to have you back." Indeed, I was always in a torture of doubt to know what the rascal had sent.

His company was most agreeable when he was recounting the many adventures he had had during the five years after he had left New Orleans and been lost to me. These would fill a book, and a most readable book it would be if written in his own speech. His love for the excitement of the frontier had finally drawn him back to the Cumberland country near Nashville, and he had actually gone so far as to raise a house and till some of the land which he had won from Darnley. It was perhaps characteristic of him that he had named the place "Rattle-and-Snap" in honor of the game which had put him in possession of it, and "Rattle-and-Snap" it remains to this day. He was

going back there with Antoinette, so he said, to build a brick mansion and to live a respectable life the rest of his days.

There was one question which had been in my mind to ask him, concerning the attitude of Monsieur de St. Gré. That gentleman, with Madame, had hurried back from Pointe Coupée at a message from the Vicomtesse, and had gone first to Les Îles to see Antoinette. Then he had come, in spite of the fever, to his own house in New Orleans to see Nick himself. What their talk had been I never knew, for the subject was too painful to be dwelt upon, and the conversation had been marked by frankness on both sides. Monsieur de St. Gré was a just man, his love for his daughter was his chief passion, and despite all that had happened he liked Nick. I believe he could not wholly blame the younger man, and he forgave him.

Mrs. Temple, poor lady, had died on that first night of my illness, and it was her punishment that she had not known her son or her son's happiness. Whatever sins she had committed in her wayward life were atoned for, and by her death I firmly believe that she redeemed him. She lies now among the Temples in Charleston, and on the stone which marks her grave is cut no line that hints of the story of these pages.

One bright morning, when Nick and I were playing cards, we heard some one mounting the stairs, and to my surprise and embarrassment I beheld Monsieur de St. Gré emerging on the gallery. He was in white linen and wore a broad hat, which he took from his head as he advanced. He had aged somewhat, his hair was a little gray, but otherwise he was the firm, dignified personage I had admired on this same gallery five years before.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said in English; "ha, do not rise, sir" (to me). He patted Nick's shoulder kindly, but not familiarly, as he passed him, and extended his hand.

"Mr. Ritchie, it gives me more pleasure than I can express to see you so much recovered."

"I am again thrown on your hospitality, sir," I said, flushing with pleasure at this friendliness. For I admired and respected the man greatly. "And I fear I have been a burden and trouble to you and your family."

He took my hand and pressed it. Characteristically, he did not answer this, and I remembered he was always careful not to say anything which might smack of insincerity.

"I had a glimpse of you some weeks ago," he said, thus making light of the risk he had run. "You are a different man now. You may thank your Scotch blood and your strong constitution."

"His good habits have done him some good, after all," put in my irrepressible cousin.

Monsieur de St. Gré smiled.

"Nick," he said (he pronounced the name quaintly, like Antoinette), "his good habits have turned out to be some advantage to you. Mr. Ritchie, you have a faithful friend at least." He patted Nick's shoulder again. "And he has promised me to settle down."

"I have every inducement, sir," said Nick.

Monsieur de St. Gré became grave.

"You have indeed, Monsieur," he answered.

"I have just come from Dr. Perrin's, David,"—he added, "May I call you so? Well, then, I have just come from Dr. Perrin's, and he says you may be moved to Les Îles this very afternoon. Why, upon my word," he exclaimed, staring at me, "you don't look pleased. One would think you were going to the *calabozo*."

"Ah," said Nick, slyly, "I know. He has tasted freedom, Monsieur, and Madame la Vicomtesse will be in command again."

I flushed. Nick could be very exasperating.

"You must not mind him, Monsieur," I said.

"I do not mind him," answered Monsieur de St. Gré, laughing in spite of himself. "He is a sad rogue. As for Hélène—"

"I shall not know how to thank the Vicomtesse," I said. "She has done me the greatest service one person can do another."

"Hélène is a good woman," answered Monsieur de St. Gré, simply. "She is more than that, she is a wonderful woman. I remember telling you of her once. I little thought then that she would ever come to us."

He turned to me. "Dr. Perrin will be here this afternoon, David, and he will have you dressed. Between five and six if all goes well, we shall start for Les Îles. And in the meantime, gentlemen," he added with a stateliness that was natural to him, "I have business which takes me to-day to my brother-in-law's, Monsieur de Beauséjour's."

Nick leaned over the gallery and watched meditatively his prospective father-in-law leaving the court-yard.

"He got me out of a devilish bad scrape," he said.

"How was that?" I asked listlessly.

"That fat little Baron, the Governor, was for deporting me for running past the sentry and giving him all the trouble I did. It seems that the Vicomtesse promised to explain matters in a note which she wrote, and never did explain. She was here with you, and a lot she cared about anything else. Lucky that Monsieur de St. Gré came back. Now his Excellency graciously allows me to stay here, if I behave myself, until I get married."

I do not know how I spent the rest of the day. It passed, somehow. If I had had the strength then, I believe I should have fled. I was to see her again, to feel her near me, to hear her voice. During the weeks that had gone by I had schooled myself, in a sense, to the inevitable. I had not let my mind dwell upon my visit to Les Îles, and now I was face to face with the struggle for which I felt I had not the strength. I had fought one battle, — I knew that a fiercer battle was to come.

In due time the doctor arrived, and while he prepared me for my departure, the little man sought, with misplaced kindness, to raise my spirits. Was not Monsieur going to the country, to a paradise? Monsieur — so Dr. Perrin had noticed — had a turn for philosophy. Could two more able and brilliant conversationalists be found than Philippe de St. Gré and Madame la Vicomtesse? And there was the happiness of that strange but lovable young

man, Monsieur Temple, to contemplate. He was in luck, *ce beau garçon*, for he was getting an angel for his wife. Did Monsieur know that Mademoiselle Antoinette was an angel?

At last I was ready, arrayed in my best, on the gallery, when Monsieur de St. Gré came. André and another servant carried me down into the court, and there stood a painted sedan-chair with the St. Gré arms on the panels.

"My father imported it, David," said Monsieur de St. Gré. "It has not been used for many years. You are to be carried in it to the levee, and there I have a boat for you."

Overwhelmed by this kindness, I could not find words to thank him as I got into the chair. My legs were too long for it, I remember. I had a quaint feeling of unreality as I sank back on the red satin cushions and was borne out of the gate between the lions. Monsieur de St. Gré and Nick walked in front, the faithful Lindy followed, and people paused to stare at us as we passed. We crossed the Place d'Armes, the Royal Road, gained the willow-bordered promenade on the levee's crown, and a wide barge was waiting, manned by six negro oarsmen. They lifted me into its stern under the awning, the barge was cast off, the oars dipped, and we were gliding silently past the line of keel boats on the swift current of the Mississippi. The spars of the shipping were inky black, and the setting sun had struck a red band across the waters. For a while the three of us sat gazing at the green shore, each wrapped in his own reflections, — Philippe de St. Gré thinking, perchance, of the wayward son he had lost; Nick of the woman who awaited him; and I of one whom fate had set beyond me. It was Monsieur de St. Gré who broke the silence at last.

"You feel no ill effects from your moving, David?" he asked, with an anxious glance at me.

"None, sir," I said.

"The country air will do you good," he said kindly.

"And Madame la Vicomtesse will put him on a diet," added Nick, rousing himself.

"Hélène will take care of him," answered Monsieur de St. Gré.

He fell to musing again. "Madame la Vicomtesse has seen more in seven years than most of us see in a lifetime," he said. "She has beheld the glory of France, and the dishonor and pollution of her country. Had the old order lasted her salon would have been famous, and she would have been a power in politics."

"I have thought that the Vicomtesse must have had a queer marriage," Nick remarked.

Monsieur de St. Gré smiled.

"Such marriages were the rule amongst our nobility," he said. "It was arranged while Hélène was still in the convent, though it was not celebrated until three years after she had been in the world. There was a romantic affair, I believe, with a young gentleman of the English embassy, though I do not know the details. He is said to be the only man she ever cared for. He was a younger son of an impoverished earl."

I started, remembering what the Vicomtesse had said. But Monsieur de St. Gré did not appear to see my perturbation.

"Be that as it may, if Hélène suffered, she never gave a sign of it. The marriage was celebrated with great pomp, and the world could only conjecture what she thought of the Vicomte. It was deemed on both sides a brilliant match. He had inherited vast estates, *Ivry-le-Tour*, *Montméry*, *Les Saillantes*, I know not what else. She was heiress to the Château de St. Gré with its wide lands, to the château and lands of the *Côte Rouge* in Normandy, to the hotel St. Gré in Paris. Monsieur le Vicomte was between forty and fifty at his marriage, and from what I have heard of him he had many of the virtues and many of the faults of his order. He was a bachelor, which does not mean that he had lacked consolations. He was reserved with his equals, and distant with others. He had served in the Guards, and did not lack courage. He dressed exquisitely, was inclined to the Polignac party, took his ease everywhere, had a knowledge

of cards and courts, and little else. He was cheated by his stewards, refused to believe that the Revolution was serious, and would undoubtedly have been guillotined had the Vicomtesse not contrived to get him out of France in spite of himself. They went first to the Duke de Ligne, at Bel Oeil, and thence to Coblenz. He accepted a commission in the Austrian service, which is much to his credit, and Hélène went with some friends to England. There my letter reached her, and rather than be beholden to strangers or accept my money there, she came to us. That is her story in brief, Messieurs. As for Monsieur le Vicomte, he admired his wife, as well he might, respected her for the way she served the gallants, but he made no pretence of loving her. One affair—a girl in the village of Montméry—had lasted. Hélène was destined for higher things than may be found in Louisiana," said Monsieur de St. Gré, turning to Nick, "but now that you are to carry away my treasure, Monsieur, I do not know what I should have done without her."

"And has there been any news of the Vicomte of late?"

It was Nick who asked the question, after a little. Monsieur de St. Gré looked at him in surprise.

"Eh, *mon Dieu*, have you not heard?" he said. "*C'est vrai*, you have been with David. Did not the Vicomtesse mention it? But why should she? Monsieur le Vicomte died in Vienna. He had lived too well."

"The Vicomte is dead?" I said.

They both looked at me. Indeed, I should not have recognized my own voice. What my face betrayed, what my feelings were, I cannot say. My heart beat no faster, there was no tumult in my brain, and yet—my breath caught strangely. Something grew within me which is beyond the measure of speech, and so it was meant to be.

"I did not know this myself until Hélène returned to Les Îles," Monsieur de St. Gré was saying to me. "The letter came to her the day after you were taken ill. It was from the Baron von Seckenbrück, at whose house the Vicomte died. She took it very calmly, for Hélène is not a woman to pretend. How much better, after all, if she

had married her Englishman for love! And she is much troubled now because, as she declares, she is dependent upon my bounty. That is my happiness, my consolation," the good man added simply, "and her father, the Marquis, was kind to me when I was a young provincial and a stranger. God rest his soul!"

We were drawing near to Les Îles. The rains had come during my illness, and in the level evening light the forest of the shore was the tender green of spring. At length we saw the white wooden steps in the levee at the landing, and near them were three figures waiting. We glided nearer. One was Madame de St. Gré, another was Antoinette, — these I saw indeed. The other was Hélène, and it seemed to me that her eyes met mine across the waters and drew them. Then we were at the landing. I heard Madame de St. Gré's voice, and Antoinette's in welcome — I listened for another. I saw Nick running up the steps; in the impetuosity of his love he had seized Antoinette's hand in his, and she was the color of a red rose. Creole decorum forbade further advances. André and another lifted me out, and they gathered around me, — these kind people and devoted friends, — Antoinette calling me, with exquisite shyness, by name; Madame de St. Gré giving me a grave but gentle welcome, and asking anxiously how I stood the journey. Another took my hand, held it for the briefest space that has been marked out of time, and for that instant I looked into her eyes. Life flowed back into me, and strength, and a joy not to be fathomed. I could have walked; but they bore me through the well-remembered vista, and the white gallery at the end of it was like the sight of home. The evening air was laden with the scent of the sweetest of all shrubs and flowers.

CHAPTER XIV

"TO UNPATHED WATERS, UNDREAMED SHORES"

MONSIEUR and Madame de St. Gré themselves came with me to my chamber off the gallery, where everything was prepared for my arrival with the most loving care, — Monsieur de St. Gré supplying many things from his wardrobe which I lacked. And when I tried to thank them for their kindness he laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"*Tenez, mon ami,*" he said, "you got your illness by doing things for other people. It is time other people did something for you."

Lindy brought me the daintiest of suppers, and I was left to my meditations. Nick looked in at the door, and hinted darkly that I had to thank a certain tyrant for my abandonment. I called to him, but he paid no heed, and I heard him chuckling as he retreated along the gallery. The journey, the excitement into which I had been plunged by the news I had heard, brought on a languor, and I was between sleeping and waking half the night. I slept to dream of her, of the Vicomte, her husband, walking in his park or playing cards amidst a brilliant company in a great candle-lit room like the drawing-room at Temple Bow. Doubt grew, and sleep left me. She was free now, indeed, but was she any nearer to me? Hope grew again, — why had she left me in New Orleans? She had received a letter, and if she had cared she would not have remained. But there was a detestable argument to fit that likewise, and in the light of this argument it was most natural that she should return to Les Îles. And who was I, David Ritchie, a lawyer of the little town of Louisville,