

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,



to aspire to the love of such a creature? Was it likely that Hélène, Vicomtesse d'Ivry-le-Tour, would think twice of me? The powers of the world were making ready to crush the presumptuous France of the Jacobins, and the France of King and Aristocracy would be restored. Châteaux and lands would be hers again, and she would go back again to that brilliant life among the great to which she was born, for which nature had fitted her. Last of all was the thought of the Englishman whom I resembled. She would go back to him.

Nick was the first in my room the next morning. He had risen early (so he ingenuously informed me) because Antoinette had a habit of getting up with the birds, and as I drank my coffee he was emphatic in his denunciations of the customs of the country.

"It is a wonderful day, Davy," he cried; "you must hurry and get out. Monsieur de St. Gré sends his compliments, and wishes to know if you will pardon his absence this morning. He is going to escort Antoinette and me over to see some of my prospective cousins, the Bertrands." He made a face, and bent nearer to my ear. "I swear to you I have not had one moment alone with her. We have been for a walk, but Madame la Vicomtesse must needs intrude herself upon us. Egad, I told her plainly what I thought of her tyranny."

"And what did she say?" I asked, trying to smile.

"She laughed, and said that I belonged to a young nation which had done much harm in the world to everybody but themselves. Faith, if I wasn't in love with Antoinette, I believe I'd be in love with her."

"I have no doubt of it," I answered.

"The Vicomtesse is as handsome as a queen this morning," he continued, paying no heed to this remark. "She has on a linen dress that puzzles me. It was made to walk among the trees and flowers, it is as simple as you please; and yet it has a distinction that makes you stare."

"You seem to have stared," I answered. "Since when did you take such interest in gowns?"

"Bless you, it was Antoinette. I never should have known," said he. "Antoinette had never before seen the gown, and she asked the Vicomtesse where she got the pattern. The Vicomtesse said that the gown had been made by Léonard, a court dressmaker, and it was of the fashion the Queen had set to wear in the gardens of the Trianon when simplicity became the craze. Antoinette is to have it copied, so she says."

Which proved that Antoinette was human, after all, and happy once more.

"Hang it," said Nick, "she paid more attention to that gown than to me. Good-by, Davy. Obey the—the Colonel."

"Is—is not the Vicomtesse going with you?" I asked.

"No, I'm sorry for you," he called back from the gallery.

He had need to be, for I fell into as great a fright as ever I had had in my life. Monsieur de St. Gré knocked at the door and startled me out of my wits. Hearing that I was awake, he had come in person to make his excuses for leaving me that morning.

"*Bon Dieu!*" he said, looking at me, "the country has done you good already. Behold a marvel! *Au revoir, David.*"

I heard the horses being brought around, and laughter and voices. How easily I distinguished hers! Then I heard the hoof-beats on the soft dirt of the drive. Then silence,—the silence of a summer morning which is all myriad sweet sounds. Then Lindy appeared, starched and turbaned.

"Marse Dave, how you feel dis mawnin'? Yo' 'pears mighty peart, sholy. Marse Dave, yo' chair is sot on de gallery. Is you ready? I'll fotch dat yaller nigger, André."

"You needn't fetch André," I said; "I can walk."

"Lan' sakes, Marse Dave, but you is bumptious."

I rose and walked out on the gallery with surprising steadiness. A great cushioned chair had been placed there, and beside it a table with books, and another chair. I sat down. Lindy looked at me sharply, but I did not heed



her, and presently she retired. The day, still in its early golden glory, seemed big with prescience. Above, the saffron haze was lifted, and there was the blue sky. The breeze held its breath; the fragrance of grass and fruit and flowers, of the shrub that vied with all, languished on the air. Out of these things she came.

I knew that she was coming, but I saw her first at the gallery's end, the roses she held red against the white linen of her gown. Then I felt a great yearning and a great dread. I have seen many of her kind since, and none reflected so truly as she the life of the old régime. Her dress, her carriage, her air, all suggested it; and she might, as Nick said, have been walking in the gardens of the Trianon. Titles I cared nothing for. Hers alone seemed real, to put her far above me. Had all who bore them been as worthy, titles would have meant much to mankind.

She was coming swiftly. I rose to my feet before her. I believe I should have risen in death. And then she was standing beside me, looking up into my face.

"You must not do that," she said, "or I will go away."

I sat down again. She went to the door and called, I following her with my eyes. Lindy came with a bowl of water.

"Put it on the table," said the Vicomtesse.

Lindy put the bowl on the table, gave us a glance, and departed silently. The Vicomtesse began to arrange the flowers in the bowl, and I watched her, fascinated by her movements. She did everything quickly, deftly, but this matter took an unconscionable time. She did not so much as glance at me. She seemed to have forgotten my presence.

"There," she said at last, giving them a final touch. "You are less talkative, if anything, than usual this morning, Mr. Ritchie. You have not said good morning, you have not told me how you were—you have not even thanked me for the roses. One might almost believe that you are sorry to come to Les Îles."

"One might believe anything who didn't know, Madame la Vicomtesse."

She put her hand to the flowers again.

"It seems a pity to pick them, even in a good cause," she said.

She was so near me that I could have touched her. A weakness seized me, and speech was farther away than ever. She moved, she sat down and looked at me, and the kind of mocking smile came into her eyes that I knew was the forerunner of raillery.

"There is a statue in the gardens of Versailles which seems always about to speak, and then to think better of it. You remind me of that statue, Mr. Ritchie. It is the statue of Wisdom."

What did she mean?

"Wisdom knows the limitations of its own worth, Madame," I replied.

"It is the one particular in which I should have thought wisdom was lacking," she said. "You have a tongue, if you will deign to use it. Or shall I read to you?" she added quickly, picking up a book. "I have read to the Queen, when Madame Campan was tired. Her Majesty, poor dear lady, did me the honor to say she liked my English."

"You have done everything, Madame," I said.

"I have read to a Queen, to a King's sister, but never yet—to a King," she said, opening the book and giving me the briefest of glances. "You are all kings in America, are you not? What shall I read?"

"I would rather have you talk to me."

"Very well, I will tell you how the Queen spoke English. No, I will not do that," she said, a swift expression of sadness passing over her face. "I will never mock her again. She was a good sovereign and a brave woman, and I loved her." She was silent a moment, and I thought there was a great weariness in her voice when she spoke again. "I have every reason to thank God when I think of the terrors I escaped, of the friends I have found. And yet I am an unhappy woman, Mr. Ritchie."



"You are unhappy when you are not doing things for others, Madame," I suggested.

"I am a discontented woman," she said; "I always have been. And I am unhappy when I think of all those who were dear to me and whom I loved. Many are dead, and many are scattered and homeless."

"I have often thought of your sorrows, Madame," I said.

"Which reminds me that I should not burden you with them, my good friend, when you are recovering. Do you know that you have been very near to death?"

"I know, Madame," I faltered. "I know that had it not been for you I should not be alive to-day. I know that you risked your life to save my own."

She did not answer at once, and when I looked at her she was gazing out over the flowers on the lawn.

"My life did not matter," she said. "Let us not talk of that."

I might have answered, but I dared not speak for fear of saying what was in my heart. And while I trembled with the repression of it, she was changed. She turned her face towards me and smiled a little.

"If you had obeyed me you would not have been so ill," she said.

"Then I am glad that I did not obey you."

"Your cousin, the irrepressible Mr. Temple, says I am a tyrant. Come now, do you think me a tyrant?"

"He has also said other things of you."

"What other things?"

I blushed at my own boldness.

"He said that if he were not in love with Antoinette, he would be in love with you."

"A very safe compliment," said the Vicomtesse. "Indeed, it sounds too cautious for Mr. Temple. You must have tampered with it, Mr. Ritchie," she flashed. "Mr. Temple is a boy. He needs discipline. He will have too easy a time with Antoinette."

"He is not the sort of man you should marry," I said, and sat amazed at it.

She looked at me strangely.

"No, he is not," she answered. "He is more or less the sort of man I have been thrown with all my life. They toil not, neither do they spin. I know you will not misunderstand me, for I am very fond of him. Mr. Temple is honest, fearless, lovable, and of good instincts. One cannot say as much for the rest of his type. They go through life fighting, gaming, horse-racing, riding to hounds,—I have often thought that it was no wonder our privileges came to an end. So many of us were steeped in selfishness and vice, were a burden on the world. The early nobles, with all their crimes, were men who carved their way. Of such were the lords of the Marches. We toyed with politics, with simplicity, we wasted the land, we played cards as our coaches passed through famine-stricken villages. The reckoning came. Our punishment was not given into the hands of the bourgeois, who would have dealt justly, but to the scum, the *canaille*, the demons of the earth. Had our King, had our nobility, been men with the old fire, they would not have stood it. They were worn out with centuries of catering to themselves. Give me a man who will shape his life and live it with all his strength. I am tired of sham and pretence, of cynical wit, of mocking at the real things of life, of pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy. Give me a man whose existence means something."

Was she thinking of the Englishman of whom she had spoken? Delicacy forbade my asking the question. He had been a man, according to her own testimony. Where was he now? Her voice had a ring of earnestness in it I had never heard before, and this arraignment of her own life and of her old friends surprised me. Now she seemed lost in a reverie, from which I forebore to arouse her.

"I have often tried to picture your life," I said at last.

"You?" she answered, turning her head quickly. "Often?"

"Ever since I first saw the miniature," I said. "Monsieur de St. Gré told me some things, and afterwards I read 'Le Mariage de Figaro,' and some novels, and some



memoirs of the old courts which I got in Philadelphia last winter. I used to think of you as I rode over the mountains, as I sat reading in my room of an evening. I used to picture you in the palaces amusing the Queen and making the Cardinals laugh. And then I used to wonder—what became of you—and whether—” I hesitated, overwhelmed by a sudden confusion, for she was gazing at me fixedly with a look I did not understand.

“You used to think of that?” she said.

“I never thought to see you,” I answered.

Laughter came into her eyes, and I knew that I had not vexed her. But I had spoken stupidly, and I reddened.

“I had a quick tongue,” she said, as though to cover my confusion. “I have it yet. In those days misfortune had not curbed it. I had not learned to be charitable. When I was a child I used to ride with my father to the hunts at St. Gré, and I was too ready to pick out the weaknesses of his guests. If one of the company had a trick or a mannerism, I never failed to catch it. People used to ask me what I thought of such and such a person, and that was bad for me. I saw their failings and pretensions, but I ignored my own. It was the same at *Abbaye aux Bois*, the convent where I was taught. When I was presented to her Majesty I saw why people hated her. They did not understand her. She was a woman with a large heart, with charity. Some did not suspect this, others forgot it because they beheld a brilliant personage with keen perceptions who would not submit to being bored. Her Majesty made many enemies at court of persons who believed she was making fun of them. There was a dress-maker at the French court called Mademoiselle Bertin, who became ridiculously pretentious because the Queen allowed the woman to dress her hair in private. Bertin used to put on airs with the nobility when they came to order gowns, and she was very rude to me when I went for my court dress. There was a ball at Versailles the day I was presented, and my father told me that her Majesty wished to speak with me. I was very much frightened. The Queen was standing with her back to

the mirror, the Duchesse de Polignac and some other ladies beside her, when my father brought me up, and her Majesty was smiling.

“‘What did you say to Bertin, Mademoiselle?’ she asked.

“I was more frightened than ever, but the remembrance of the woman’s impudence got the better of me.

“‘I told her that in dressing your Majesty’s hair she had acquired all the court accomplishments but one.’

“‘I’ll warrant that Bertin was curious,’ said the Queen.

“‘She was, your Majesty.’

“‘What is the accomplishment she lacks?’ the Queen demanded; ‘I should like to know it myself.’

“‘It is discrimination, your Majesty. I told the woman there were some people she could be rude to with impunity. I was not one of them.’

“‘She’ll never be rude to you again, Mademoiselle,’ said the Queen.

“‘I am sure of it, your Majesty,’ I said.

“The Queen laughed, and bade the Duchesse de Polignac invite me to supper that evening. My father was delighted,—I was more frightened than ever. But the party was small, her Majesty was very gracious and spoke to me often, and I saw that above all things she liked to be amused. Poor lady! It was a year after that terrible affair of the necklace, and she wished to be distracted from thinking of the calumnies which were being heaped upon her. She used to send for me often during the years that followed, and I might have had a place at court near her person. But my father was sensible enough to advise me not to accept,—if I could refuse without offending her Majesty. The Queen was not offended; she was good enough to say that I was wise in my request. She had, indeed, abolished most of the ridiculous etiquette of the court. She would not eat in public, she would not be followed around the palace by ladies in court gowns, she would not have her ladies in the room when she was dressing. If she wished a mirror, she would not wait for it to be passed through half a dozen hands and handed



her by a Princess of the Blood. Sometimes she used to summon me to amuse her and walk with me by the water in the beautiful gardens of the *Petit Trianon*. I used to imitate the people she disliked. I disliked them, too. I have seen her laugh until the tears came into her eyes when I talked of Monsieur Necker. As the dark days drew nearer I loved more and more to be in the seclusion of the country at Montméry, at the St. Gré of my girlhood. I can see St. Gré now," said the Vicomtesse, "the thatched houses of the little village on either side of the high-road, the honest, red-faced peasants courtesying in their doorways at our *berline*, the brick wall of the park, the iron gates beside the lodge, the long avenue of poplars, the deer feeding in the beechwood, the bridge over the shining stream and the long, weather-beaten château beyond it. Paris and the muttering of the storm were far away. The mornings on the sunny terrace looking across the valley to the blue hills, the walks in the village, grew very dear to me. We do not know the value of things, Mr. Ritchie, until we are about to lose them."

"You did not go back to court?" I asked.

She sighed.

"Yes, I went back. I thought it my duty. I was at Versailles that terrible summer when the States General met, when the National Assembly grew out of it, when the Bastille was stormed, when the King was throwing away his prerogatives like confetti. Never did the gardens of the Trianon seem more beautiful, or more sad. Sometimes the Queen would laugh even then when I mimicked Bailly, Des Moulins, Mirabeau. I was with her Majesty in the gardens on that dark, rainy day when the fishwomen came to Versailles. The memory of that night will haunt me as long as I live. The wind howled, the rain lashed with fury against the windows, the mob tore through the streets of the town, sacked the wine-shops, built great fires at the corners. Before the day dawned again the furies had broken into the palace and murdered what was left of the Guard. You have heard how they carried off the King and Queen to Paris—how they bore

the heads of the soldiers on their pikes. I saw it from a window, and I shall never forget it."

Her voice faltered, and there were tears on her lashes. Some quality in her narration brought before me so vividly the scenes of which she spoke that I started when she had finished. There was much more I would have known, but I could not press her to speak longer on a subject that gave her pain. At that moment she seemed more distant to me than ever before. She rose, went into the house, and left me thinking of the presumptions of the hopes I had dared to entertain, left me picturing sadly the existence of which she had spoken. Why had she told me of it? Perchance she had thought to do me a kindness!

She came back to me—I had not thought she would. She sat down with her embroidery in her lap, and for some moments busied herself with it in silence. Then she said, without looking up:—

"I do not know why I have tired you with this, why I have saddened myself. It is past and gone."

"I was not tired, Madame. It is very difficult to live in the present when the past has been so brilliant," I answered.

"So brilliant!" She sighed. "So thoughtless,—I think that is the sharpest regret." I watched her fingers as they stitched, wondering how they could work so rapidly. At last she said in a low voice, "Antoinette and Mr. Temple have told me something of your life, Mr. Ritchie."

I laughed.

"It has been very humble," I replied.

"What I heard was—interesting to me," she said, turning over her frame. "Will you not tell me something of it?"

"Gladly, Madame, if that is the case," I answered.

"Well, then," she said, "why don't you?"

"I do not know which part you would like, Madame. Shall I tell you about Colonel Clark? I do not know when to begin—"

She dropped her sewing in her lap and looked up at me quickly.



"I told you that you were a strange man," she said. "I almost lose patience with you. No, don't tell me about Colonel Clark — at least not until you come to him. Begin at the beginning, at the cabin in the mountains."

"You want the whole of it!" I exclaimed.

She picked up her embroidery again and bent over it with a smile.

"Yes, I want the whole of it."

So I began at the cabin in the mountains. I cannot say that I ever forgot she was listening, but I lost myself in the narrative. It presented to me, for the first time, many aspects that I had not thought of. For instance, that I should be here now in Louisiana telling it to one who had been the companion and friend of the Queen of France. Once in a while the Vicomtesse would look up at me swiftly, when I paused, and then go on with her work again. I told her of Temple Bow, and how I had run away; of Polly Ann and Tom, of the Wilderness Trail and how I shot Cutcheon, of the fight at Crab Orchard, of the life in Kentucky, of Clark and his campaign. Of my doings since; how I had found Nick and how he had come to New Orleans with me; of my life as a lawyer in Louisville, of the conventions I had been to. The morning wore on to midday, and I told her more than I believed it possible to tell any one. When at last I had finished a fear grew upon me that I had told her too much. Her fingers still stitched, her head was bent and I could not see her face, — only the knot of her hair coiled with an art that struck me suddenly. Then she spoke, and her voice was very low.

"I love Polly Ann," she said; "I should like to know her."

"I wish that you could know her," I answered, quickening.

She raised her head, and looked at me with an expression that was not a smile. I could not say what it was, or what it meant.

"I do not think you are stupid," she said, in the same tone, "but I do not believe you know how remarkable

your life has been. I can scarcely realize that you have seen all this, have done all this, have felt all this. You are a lawyer, a man of affairs, and yet you could guide me over the hidden paths of half a continent. You know the mountain ranges, the passes, the rivers, the fords, the forest trails, the towns and the men who made them!" She picked up her sewing and bent over it once more. "And yet you did not think that this would interest me."

Perchance it was a subtle summons in her voice I heard that bade me open the flood-gates of my heart, — I know not. I know only that no power on earth could have held me silent then.

"Hélène!" I said, and stopped. My heart beat so wildly that I could hear it. "I do not know why I should dare to think of you, to look up to you — Hélène, I love you, I shall love you till I die. I love you with all the strength that is in me, with all my soul. You know it, and if you did not I could hide it no more. As long as I live there will never be another woman in the world for me. I love you. You will forgive me because of the torture I have suffered, because of the pain I shall suffer when I think of you in the years to come."

Her sewing dropped to her lap — to the floor. She looked at me, and the light which I saw in her eyes flooded my soul with a joy beyond my belief. I trembled with a wonder that benumbed me. I would have got to my feet had she not come to me swiftly, that I might not rise. She stood above me, I lifted up my arms; she bent to me with a movement that conferred a priceless thing.

"David," she said, "could you not tell that I loved you, that you were he who has been in my mind for so many years, and in my heart since I saw you?"

"I could not tell," I said. "I dared not think it. I — I thought there was another."

She was seated on the arm of my chair. She drew back her head with a smile trembling on her lips, with a lustre burning in her eyes like a vigil — a vigil for me.

"He reminded me of you," she answered.

I was lost in sheer, bewildering happiness. And she



who created it, who herself was that happiness, roused me from it.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

"I was thinking that a star has fallen, — that I may have a jewel beyond other men," I said.

"And a star has risen for me," she said, "that I may have a guide beyond other women."

"Then it is you who have raised it, Hélène." I was silent a moment, trying again to bring the matter within my grasp. "Do you mean that you love me, that you will marry me, that you will come back to Kentucky with me and will be content, — you, who have been the companion of a Queen?"

There came an archness into her look that inflamed me the more.

"I, who have been the companion of a Queen, love you, will marry you, will go back to Kentucky with you and be content," she repeated. "And yet not I, David, but another woman — a happy woman. You shall be my refuge, my strength, my guide. You will lead me over the mountains and through the wilderness by the paths you know. You will bring me to Polly Ann that I may thank her for the gift of you, — above all other gifts in the world."

I was silent again.

"Hélène," I said at last, "will you give me the miniature?"

"On one condition," she replied.

"Yes," I said, "yes. And again yes. What is it?"

"That you will obey me — sometimes."

"It is a privilege I long for," I answered.

"You did not begin with promise," she said.

I released her hand, and she drew the ivory from her gown and gave it me. I kissed it.

"I will go to Monsieur Isadore's and get the frame," I said.

"When I give you permission," said Hélène, gently.

I have written this story for her eyes.

## CHAPTER XV

### AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF A MAN

OUT of the blood and ashes of France a Man had arisen who moved real kings and queens on his chess-board — which was a large part of the world. The Man was Napoleon Buonaparte, at present, for lack of a better name, First Consul of the French Republic. The Man's eye, sweeping the world for a new plaything, had rested upon one which had excited the fancy of lesser adventurers, of one John Law, for instance. It was a large, unwieldy plaything indeed, and remote. It was nothing less than that vast and mysterious country which lay beyond the monster yellow River of the Wilderness, the country bordered on the south by the Gulf swamps, on the north by no man knew what forests, — as dark as those the Romans found in Gaul, — on the west by a line which other generations might be left to settle.

This land was Louisiana.

A future king of France, while an *émigré*, had been to Louisiana. This is merely an interesting fact worth noting. It was not interesting to Napoleon.

Napoleon, by dint of certain screws which he tightened on his Catholic Majesty, King Charles of Spain, in the Treaty of San Ildefonso on the 1st of October, 1800, got his plaything. Louisiana was French again, — whatever French was in those days. The treaty was a profound secret. But secrets leak out, even the profoundest; and this was wafted across the English Channel to the ears of Mr. Rufus King, American Minister at London, who wrote of it to one Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States. Mr. Jefferson was interested, not to say alarmed.