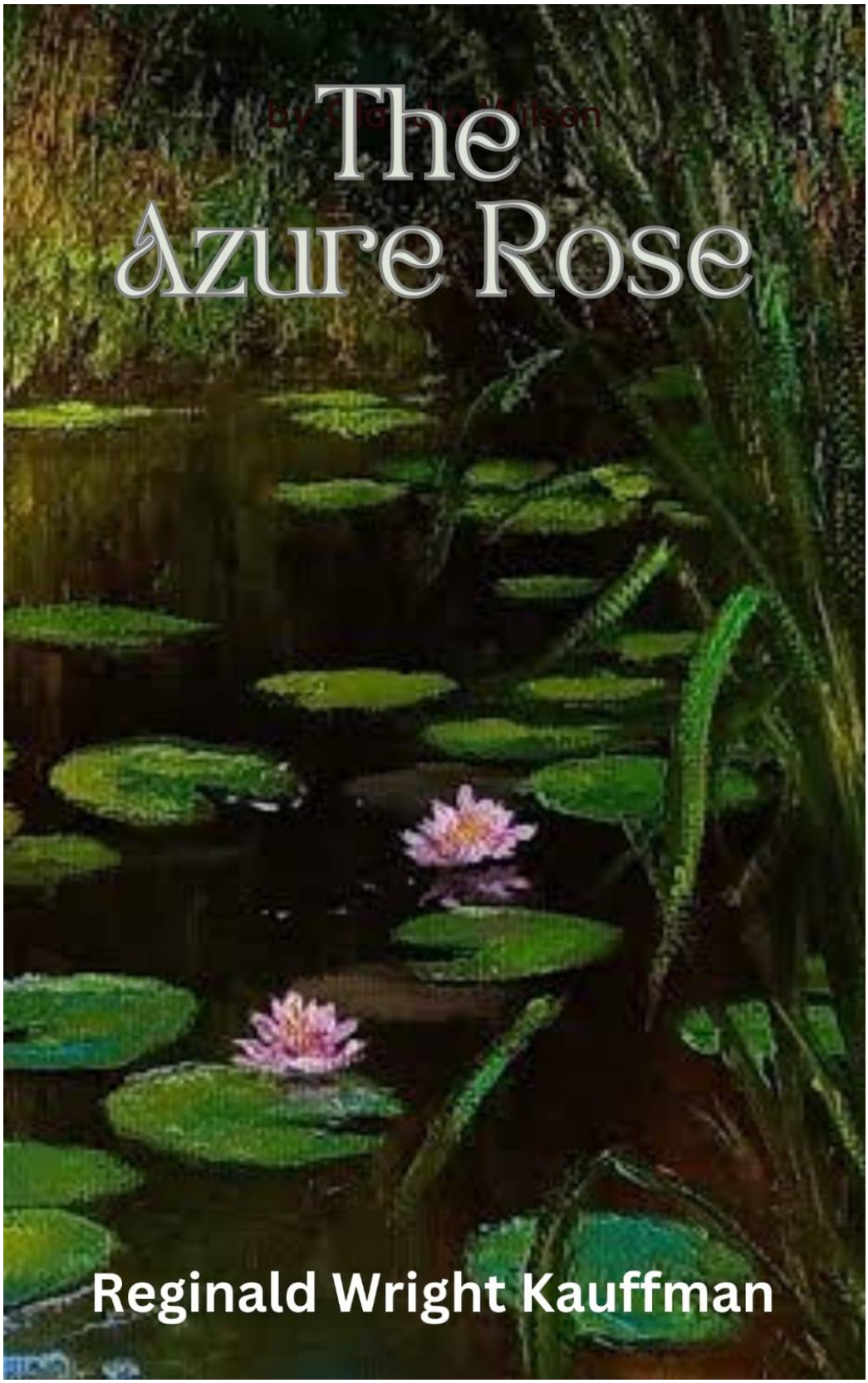
The
Azure Rose
Reginald Wright Kauffman

The Azure Rose

A Novel

BY

REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

www.saptarshee.in

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Phone:02188-299295
Email:saptarsheeprakashan@gmail.com

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CHAPTER I

IN WHICH, IF NOT LOVE, AT LEAST ANGER, LAUGHS AT LOCKSMITHS

Je ne connais point la nature des anges, parce que je ne suis qu'homme; il n'y a que les théologiens qui la connaissent.—Voltaire: *Dictionnaire Philosophique*.

He did not know why he headed toward his own room—it could hold nothing that he guessed of to welcome him, except further tokens of the dejection and misery he carried in his heart—but thither he went, and, as he drew nearer, his step quickened. By the time that he entered the rue du Val de Grâce, he was moving at something close upon a run.

He hurried up the rising stairs and into the dark hall, and, as he did so, was possessed by the sense that somebody had as hurriedly ascended just ahead of him. The door to his room was never locked, and now he flung it wide.

The last of the afterglow had all but faded from the sky, and only the faintest twilight, a rose-pink twilight, came into the studio. Rose-pink: he thought of that at once and thought, too, that these sky-roses had a sweeter scent than the roses of earth, for there was about this once-familiar place an odor more delicate and tender than any he had ever known before. It was dim, illusive; it was like a musical poem in an unknown tongue, and yet, unlike French scents and hot-house flowers, it subtly suggested open spaces and mountain-peaks. Cartaret had a quick vision of sunlight upon snow-crests. He wondered how such a perfume could find its way through the narrow, dirty streets of the Latin Quarter and into his poor room.

And then, in the dim light, he saw a figure standing there.

Cartaret stopped short.

An hour ago he had left the place empty. Now, when he so wanted solitude, it had been invaded. There was an intruder. It was—— yes, the Lord have mercy on him, it was a girl!

"Who's there?" demanded Cartaret.

He was so startled that he asked the question in English and with his native American accent. The next moment, he was more startled when the strange girl answered him in English, though an English oddly precise.

"It is I," she said.

"It is I," was what she said first, and, as she said it, Cartaret noted that her voice was a wonderfully soft contralto. What she next said was uttered as he further discovered himself to her by an involuntary movement that brought him within the rear window's shaft of afterglow. It was:

"What are you doing here?"

She spoke with patent amazement, and there were, between the words, four perceptible pauses.

What was he doing there? What was *she*? What light there was came from behind her: he could not at all make out her features; he had only her voice to go by—only her voice and her manner of regal possession—and with neither was he acquainted. Good Heavens, hadn't he a right to come unannounced into the one place in Paris that he might still call his own? It surely *was* his own. He looked distractedly about him.

"I thought," said Cartaret, "that this was my room."

His glance, bewildered as it was, nevertheless assured him that he had not been mistaken. His accustomed eye detected everything that the twilight might hide from the eye of a stranger.

Here was all his student-litter. Here were the good photographs of good pictures, bought second-hand; the bad copies of good pictures, made by Cartaret himself during long mornings in the Louvre, where impudent tourists, staring at his work, jolted his elbow and craned their necks beside his cheek; there were the plaster-casts on brackets—casts of antiques more mutilated than the antiques themselves; and here, too, were the rows of lost endeavors in the shape of discarded canvases banked on the floor along the walls and sometimes jutting far out into the room. Two or three chairs were scattered about, one with a broken leg—he remembered the party at which it was broken; across from the fire-place was Cartaret's bed that a tarnished Oriental cover (made in Lyons) converted by day into a divan; and close beside the rear window, flanked by the table on which he mixed his colors, stood, almost at the elbow of this imperious intruder, Cartaret's own easel with a virgin canvas in position, waiting to receive the successor to that picture which he had sold for a song a few hours ago.

What was he doing here, indeed! He liked that.

And she was still at it:

"How dare you think so?" she persisted.

The slight pauses between her words lent them more weight than, even in his ears, they otherwise would have possessed. She came a step nearer, and Cartaret saw that she was breathing quickly and that the bit of lace above her heart rose and fell irregularly.

"How dare you?" she repeated.

She was close enough now for him to decide that she was quite the most striking girl he had ever seen. Her figure, without a touch of exaggeration, was full and yet lithe: it moved with the grace of the athlete. Her skin was rosy and white—the rose of health and the clear cream of sane living.

It was, however, her manner that had led Cartaret first to doubt his own senses, and then to doubt hers. This girl spoke like a queen resenting a next-to-impossible familiarity. He had half a mind to leave the place and allow her to discover her own

mistake, the nature of which—his room ran the length of the old house and half its width, being separated from a similar room by only a dark and draughty hallway—now suddenly revealed itself to him. He seriously considered leaving her alone to the advent of her humiliation.

Then he looked at her again. Her hair, in sharp contrast to the tint of her face, was a shining blue-black; though her features were almost classical in their regularity, her mouth was generous and sensitive, and, under even black brows and through long, curling lashes, her eyes shone frank and blue. Cartaret decided to remain.

"You are an artist?" he inquired.

"Leave this room!" She stamped a little foot. "Leave this room instantly!"

Cartaret stooped to one of the canvases that were piled against the wall nearest him. He turned its face to her.

"And this is some of your work?" he asked.

He had meant to be only light and amusing, but when he saw the effect of his action, he cursed himself for a heavy-witted fool: the girl glanced first at the picture and then wildly about her. She had at last realized her mistake.

"Oh!" she cried. Her delicate hands went to her face. "I had just come in and I thought—I thought it was *my* room!"

He registered a memorandum to kick himself as soon as she had gone. He moved awkwardly forward, still between her and the door.

"It's all right," he said. "Everybody drops in here at one time or another, and I never lock my door."

"But you do not understand!" She was still speaking through her unjeweled fingers: "Sir, we moved into this house only this morning. I went out for the first time ten minutes since. My maid did not want me to go, but I would do it. Our room—I understand now that our room is the other one: the one across the hallway. But I came back hurriedly, a little frightened by the streets, and I turned—Oh-h!" she ended, "I must go—I must go immediately!"

She dropped her hands and darted forward, turning to her right. Cartaret lost his head: he turned to his right. Each saw the mistake and sought the left; then darted to the right again.

"Let me pass!" commanded the girl.

Cartaret, inwardly condemning his stupidity, suddenly backed. He backed into the half open door; it shut behind him with a sharp snap.

"I'm not dancing," he said. "I know it looks like it, but I'm not—truly."

"Then stand aside and let me pass."

He stood aside.

"Certainly," said he; "that is what I was trying to do."

With her head high, she walked by him to the door and turned the knob: the door would not open.

Than the scorn that she turned upon him then, he had never seen anything more magnificent—or more beautiful. “What is this?” she asked.

He did not know.

“It’s probably stuck,” he suggested. She was beginning to terrify him. “If you’ll allow me——”

He bent to the knob, his hand just brushing hers, which was quickly withdrawn. He pulled: the door would not give. He took the knob in both hands and raised it: no success. He bore all his weight down upon the knob: the door remained shut.

He looked up at her attempting the smile of apology, but her eyes, as soon as they encountered his, were raised to a calm regard of the panel above his head. Cartaret’s gaze returned to the door and, presently, encountered the old deadlatch that antedated his tenancy and that he had never once used: it was a deadlatch of a type antiquated even in the Latin Quarter, tough and enduring; years ago it had been pushed back and held open by a small catch; the knob whereby it was originally worked from inside the room had been broken off; and now the catch had slipped, the spring-bolt had shot home and, the knob being broken, the girl and Cartaret were as much prisoners in the room as if the lock had been on the other side of the door.

The American broke into a nervous laugh.

“What now?” asked the girl, her eyes hard.

“We’re caught,” said Cartaret.

She could only repeat the word:

“Caught?”

“Yes. I’m sorry. It was my stupidity; I suppose I jolted the door rather hard when I bumped into it, doing that tango just now. Anyhow, this old lock’s sprung into action and we’re fastened in.”

The girl looked at him sharply. A difficult red climbed her cheeks.

“Open that door,” she ordered.

“But I can’t—not right away. I’ll have to try to——”

“Open that door instantly.”

“But I tell you I can’t. Don’t you see?” He pointed to the offending deadlatch. In embarrassed sentences, he explained the situation.

She did not appear to listen. She had the air of one who has prejudged a case.

“You are trying to keep me in this room,” she said.

Her tone was steady, and her eyes were brave; but it was evident that she quite believed her statement.

Cartaret colored in his turn.

“Nonsense,” said he.

“Then open the door.”

“I tell you the lock has slipped.”

“If that is so, use your key.”

“I haven’t any key,” protested Cartaret. “And even if I had——”

"You have no key to your own room?" She raised her eyes scornfully. "I understood you to say very positively that I was trespassing in *your* room."

"Great Scott!" cried Cartaret. "Of course it's my room. You make me wish it wasn't, but it is. It is my room, but you can see for yourself there's no keyhole to the confounded lock on this side of the door, and never was. Look here." Again he pointed to the deadlatch: "If you'll only come a little nearer and look——"

"Thank you," she said. "I shall remain where I am." She had put her hand among the lace over her breast; now the hand, withdrawn, held an unsheathed knife. "And if you come one step nearer to me," she calmly concluded, "I will kill you."

It was the sole dream-touch needed to perfect his sense of the entire episode's unreality. In his poor room, a princess that he had never seen before—that, surely, he was not seeing now!—some royal figure out of a lost Hellenic tragedy; her breast visibly cumbered by the heavy air of modern Paris, her wonderful eyes burning with the cold fire of resolution, she told him that she would kill him if he approached her. And she would do it; she would kill him with less compunction than she would feel in crushing an offending moth!

Cartaret had instinctively jumped at the first flash of the weapon. Now his laughter returned. A vision could not be impeded by a sprung lock.

"But you're not here," he said.

She did not shift by so much as a hairbreadth her position of defense, yet, ever so slightly, her eyes widened.

"And I'm not, either," he persisted. "Don't you see? Things like this don't happen. One of us is asleep and dreaming—and I must be that one."

Plainly she did not follow him, but his laughter had been so boyishly innocent as to make her patently doubtful of her own assumption. He crowded that advantage.

"Honestly," he said, "I didn't mean any harm——"

"You at least place yourself in a strange position," the girl interrupted, though the hand that held the knife was lowered to her side.

"But if you really doubt me," he continued, "and don't want to wait until I pick this lock, let me call from the window and get somebody in the street to send up the concierge."

"The street?" She evidently did not like this idea. "No, not the street. Why do you not ring for him?"

Cartaret's gesture included the four walls of the room:

"There's no bell."

Still a little suspicious of him, her blue eyes scanned the room to confirm his statement.

"Then why not call him from the window in the back?"

"Because his quarters are at the front of the house, and he wouldn't hear."

"Would no one hear?"

“There’s nobody in the garden at this time of day. You had really better let me call to the first person that goes along the street. Somebody is always going along, you know.”

He made two strides toward the front window.

“Come back!”

He turned to find her with her face scarlet. She had raised the knife.

“Break the lock,” she said.

“But that will take time.”

“Break the lock.”

“All right; only why don’t you want me to call for help?”

“And humiliate me still further?” One small foot, cased in an absurdly light patent-leather slipper with a flashing buckle, tapped the floor angrily. “I have been foolish, and your folly has made me more foolish, but I will not have it known to all the world *how* foolish I have been. Break the lock at once—now—immediately.”

Cartaret divined that this was eminently a time for silence: she was alive, she was real, and she was human. He opened a drawer in the table, dived under the divan, plunged behind a curtain in one corner, and at last found a shaky hammer and a nicked chisel with which he returned to the locked door.

“I’m not much of a carpenter,” he said, by way of preparatory apology.

The girl said nothing.

He was angry at himself for having appeared to such heavy disadvantage. Consequently, he was unsteady. His first blow missed. His strength turned to mere violence, and he showered futile blows upon the butt of the chisel. Then a misdirected blow hit the thumb of his left hand. He swore softly and, having sworn, heard her laugh.

He looked up: the knife had disappeared. He was pleased at the change to merriment that her face discovered; but, as he looked, he realized that her mirth was launched against his efforts, and he was pleased no longer. His rage directed itself from him to her.

“I’m sorry you don’t approve,” he said sulkily. “For my part, I am quite willing to stop, I assure you.”

If an imperious person may be said to have tossed her head, then it should here be said that this imperious person now tossed hers.

“Now, shall I go to the window and yell into the street?” he savagely inquired.

Her high-tilted chin, her crimsoned cheeks and the studiously managed lack of expression in her eyes were proofs that she had heard him. Nevertheless, she persisted in her disregard of his suggestion.

Cartaret’s mood became more ugly. He resolved to make her pay attention.

“I’ll do it,” he said, and turned away from the door.

That brought the answer. She looked at him in angry horror.

“And make us the laughing-stock of the neighborhood?” she cried. “Is it not enough that you have shut me in here, that you have insulted me, that——”

“Insulted you?” He stood with the hammer in one hand and the chisel in the other, a rather unromantic figure of protest. “I never did anything of the sort.”

He made a flourish and dropped the hammer. When he picked it up, he saw that she stood there, looking over his bent head, with eyes sternly kept serene; but he saw also that her cheeks remained aglow and that her breath came short.

“I never did anything of the sort,” he went on. “How could I?”

“How could you?” She clenched her hands.

“I don’t mean that.” He could have bitten out his tongue. He floundered in a marsh of confusion. “I mean—I mean—Oh, I don’t know what I mean, except that I beg you to believe I am incapable of the impudence you charge! I came in here and found the most beautiful woman——”

She recoiled.

“You speak so to me?”

It was out: he had to go ahead now. He did not at all recognize himself: this was not American; it was wholly Gallic.

“I can’t help it,” he said, “you are.”

“Go to work,” said the girl.

“But I want you to understand——”

Two tears, twin diamonds of mortification, shone in her blue eyes.

“You have humiliated me, and mortified me, and insulted me!” she persisted. Her white throat swallowed the chagrin, and anger returned to take its place. “If you are what you pretend to be, you will go back to your work of opening that door. If I were the strong man that you are, I should have broken it open long ago.”

She had a handsome ferocity. Cartaret put one broad shoulder to the door and both hands to the knob. There was a tremendous wrenching and splitting: the door swung open. He turned and bowed.

“It’s open,” he said.

To his amazement, her mood had entirely changed. Whether his action had served as proof of his declared sincerity, or whether her brief reflection on his words had itself served him this good turn, he could not guess; but he saw now that her eyes had softened and that her underlip quivered.

“Good afternoon,” said Cartaret.

“Good-by,” said she.

She moved toward the door, then stopped.

“I hope that you will pardon me,” she said, and she spoke as if she were not accustomed to asking pardon. “I have been too quick and very foolish. You must know that I am new to Paris—new to France—new to cities—and that I have heard strange stories of Parisians and of the men of the large towns.”

Cartaret was more than mollified, but he took a grip upon his emotions and resolved to pursue this advantage.

"At least," he said, "you should have seen that I was your own sort."

"My own—my own sort?" She did not seem to comprehend.

"Well, of your own class, then." This girl had an impish faculty for making him say things that sounded priggish: "You should have seen I was of your own class."

Again her eyes widened. Then she tossed her head and laughed a little silvery laugh.

He fancied the laugh disdainful, and thought so the more when she seemed to detect his suspicion and tried to allay it by an alteration of tone.

"I mean exactly that," he said.

She bit her red lip, and Cartaret noted that her teeth were even and white.

"Forgive me," she begged.

She put out her hand so frankly that he would have forgiven her anything. He took the hand and, as it nestled softer than any satin in his, he felt his heart hammer in his breast.

"Forgive me," she was repeating.

"I hope *you'll* forgive *me*," he muttered. "At any rate, you can't forget me: you'll have to remember me as the greatest boor you ever met."

She shook her head.

"It was I that was foolish."

"Oh, but it wasn't! I——"

He stopped, for her eyes had fallen from his and rested on their clasped hands. He released her instantly.

"Good-by," she said again.

"Good—— But surely I'm to see you once in a while!"

"I do not know."

"Why, we're neighbors! You can't mean that you won't let me——"

"I do not know," she said. "Good-by."

She went out, drawing-to the shattered door behind her.

Cartaret leaned against the panel and listened shamelessly.

He heard her cross the hall and open the door to the opposite room; he heard her suspiciously greeted by another voice—a voice that he gladly recognized as feminine—and in a language that was wholly unfamiliar to him: a language that sounded somehow Oriental. Then he heard the other door shut, and he turned to the comfortless gloom of his own quarters.

He sat down on the bed. He had forgotten a riotous dinner that was to have been his final Parisian folly, forgotten his poverty, forgotten his day of disappointment and his desire to go back to Ohio and the law. He remembered only the events of the last quarter-hour and the girl that had made them what they were.

As he sat there, there seemed to come again into the silent room the perfume he had noticed when he returned. It seemed to float in on the twilight, still dimly pink behind the roofs of the gray houses along the Boul' Miche': subtle, haunting, an odor more delicate and tender than any he had ever known before.

He raised his head. He saw something white lying on the floor—lying where, a few moments since, he had stood. He went forward and picked it up.

It was a flower like a rose—a white rose—but unlike any rose of which Cartaret had any knowledge. It was small, but perfect, its pure petals gathered tight against its heart, and from its heart came the perfume that had seemed to him like a musical poem in an unknown tongue.

For a second time Cartaret had that quick vision of the sunlight upon snow-crests and the virgin sheen of unattainable mountain tops....

CHAPTER II

PROVIDING THE GENTLE READER WITH A CARD OF ADMISSION TO THE NEST OF THE TWO DOVES

Dans ces questions de crédit, il faut toujours frapper l'imagination. L'idée de génie, c'est de prendre dans la poche des gens l'argent qui n'y est pas encore.—Zola: *L'Argent*.

Until just before the appearance of Charlie Cartaret's rosy vision, this had been a day of darkness and wet. Rain—a dull, hopeless, February rain—fell with implacable monotony. It descended in fine spray, as if too lazy to hurry, yet too spiteful to stop. It made all Paris miserable; but, as is the way with Parisian rains, it was a great deal wetter on the Left Bank of the Seine than on the Right.

No rain—not even in those happy times before the great war—ever washed the Left Bank clean, and this one only made it a marsh. A curtain of fog fell sheer between the Isle de la Cité and the Quai des Augustins; the twin towers of St. Sulpice staggered up into a pall of fog and were lost in it. The gray houses hunched their shoulders, lowered their heads, drew their mansard hats and gabled caps over their noses and stood like rows of patient horses at a cabstand under the gray downpour. Now and again a real cab scuttled along the streets, its skinny beast clop-clopping over the wooden paving, or slipping among the cobbled ways, its driver hidden under a mountainous pile of woolen great-coat and rubber cape. Even the taxis lacked the proud air with which they habitually splash pedestrians, and such pedestrians as business forced upon the early afternoon thoroughfares went with heads bowed like the houses' and umbrellas leveled like flying-jibs.

In front of the little Café Des Deux Colombes, the two marble-topped tables which occupied its scant frontage on the rue Jacob were deserted by all save their four iron-backed chairs with wet seats and their twin water-bottles into which, with mathematical precision, water dropped from a pair of holes in the sagging canvas overhead. Inside, however, there were lighted gas-jets, the proprietor and the proprietor's wife—presumably the pair of doves for whom the Café was named—and a man that was trying to look like a customer.

Gaston François Louis Pasbeaucoup had an apron tied about his middle, and, standing before the intended patron's table, leaned what weight he had—it was not much—upon his finger-tips. His mustache was fierce enough to grace the upper lip of a deputy from the Bouches-du-Rhône and generous enough to spare many a contribution to the *plat-du-jour*; but his mustache was the only large thing about him—always excepting Madame his wife, who was ever somewhere about him and

who was just now, two hundred and twenty pounds of evidence to the good food of the Deux Colombes, stuffed into a wire cage at one end of the bar, and bulging out of it, her eyebrows meeting over her pug-nose and the heap of hair leaping from her head nearly to the ceiling, while her lips and fingers were busy adding the bills from *déjeuner*.

"It would greatly pleasure me to accommodate monsieur," Pasbeaucoup was whispering, "but monsieur must know that already——"

The sentence ended in a deprecating glance over the speaker's shoulder in the general direction of mighty Madame.

"Already? Already what then?" demanded the intending customer.

He was lounging on the wall-seat behind his table, and he had an aristocratic air surprisingly at variance with his garments. His black jacket shone too highly at the elbows, and its short sleeves betrayed an unnecessary length of red wrist. His black boots gasped for repair; a soft black hat, pushed to the back of his black hair, still dripped from an unprotected voyage along the rainy street, and his neckcloth, which was also long and soft and black, showed a spot or two not put there by its makers. These were patently matters beyond their owner's command and beneath the dignity of his attention. Against them one was compelled to set a manner truly lofty, which was enhanced by a pair of burning, deep-placed eyes, a thin white face and, sprouting from either side of his lower jaw, near the chin, two wisps of ebon whisker. He frowned majestically, and he smoked a caporal cigarette as if it were a Havana cigar.

"Already what?" he loudly repeated. "If it is possible! I patronize your cabbage of a café for five years, and now you put me off with your alreadys!"

Pasbeaucoup, his fingers still resting on the table, danced in embarrassment and rolled his eyes in a manner that plainly enough warned monsieur not to let his voice reach the caged lady.

"I was but about to say that monsieur already owes us the trifling sum of——"

"*Sixty francs, twenty-five!*"

The tone that announced these fateful numerals was so tremendous a contralto as to be really bass. It came from the wire cage and belonged to Madame.

Pasbeaucoup sank into the nearest chair. He spread out his hands in a gesture that eloquently said:

"Now you've done it! I can't shield you any longer!"

The debtor, albeit he was still a young man, did not appear unduly impressed. The table was across his knees, but he rose as far as it would permit and removed his hat with a flourish that sent a spray of water directly over Madame's monument of hair. Disregarding the blatant fact that she was quite the most remarkable feature of the room, he vowed that he had not observed her upon entering, was desolated because of his oversight and ravished now to have the pleasure of once more beholding her in all her accustomed grace and charm.

Madame shrugged her shoulders higher than the walls of the cage.

"Sixty francs, twenty-five," she said, without looking up from her task.

Ah, yes: his little account. Monsieur recalled that: there was a little account; but, so truly as his name was Seraphin and his passion Art, what a marvelous head Madame had for figures. It was of an exactitude magnificent!

When he paused, Madame said:

"Sixty francs, twenty-five."

"But surely, Madame——" Seraphin Dieudonné was politely amazed; he did not desire to credit her with an impoliteness, and yet she seemed to imply that, unless he paid this absurdly little sum, there might be some delay in serving him in this so excellent establishment.

"*C'est ça*," said Madame. "The delay will be entire."

"Incomprehensible!" Seraphin put a bony hand to his heart. "Do you not know—all the world of the *Quartier* knows—that I have, Madame, but three days' work more upon my *magnum opus*—a week at the utmost—and that then it can sell for not a sou less than fifteen thousand francs?"

Madame's face never changed expression when she talked; it always seemed set at the only angle that would balance her monument of hair. She now said:

"What all the world of the *Quartier* knows is that your last *magnum opus* you sold to that simpleton Fourget in the rue St. André des Arts; that even from him you could squeeze but a hundred francs for it; and that he has not yet been able to find a customer."

At first Seraphin seemed slow to credit the scorn that Madame was at such pains to reveal. He made one valiant effort to overlook it, and failed; then he made an effort no less valiant to meet her with the ridiculous majesty in which he habitually draped himself. It was as if, unable to make her believe in him, he at least wanted her to believe that his long struggle with poverty and an indifferent public had served only to increase his confidence in his own genius and to rear between him and the world a wall through which the arrows of the scornful could hardly pass. But this attempt succeeded no more than its predecessor: as he half stood, half bent before this landlady of a fifth-rate café, a tardy pink crept up his white face and painted the skin over his cheek-bones; his eyelids fluttered, and his mouth worked. The man was hungry.

"Madeleine!" whispered Pasbeaucoup, compassion for the debtor almost overcoming fear of the wife.

Seraphin wet his lips.

"Madame——" he began.

"Sixty francs, twenty-five," said Madame. "*Ca y est!*"

As she said it, the door of the Deux Colombes opened and another patron, at once evidently a more welcome patron, presented himself. He was a plump little man with hands that were thinly at contrast with the rest of him. He was fairly well dressed, but far better fed, and so contented with his lot as to have no eye for the

evident lot of Seraphin. He was Maurice Houdon, who had decided some day to be a great composer and who meanwhile overcharged a few English and American pupils for lessons on the piano and borrowed money from any that would trust him. He stormed Dieudonné, leaned over the intervening table and embraced him.

"My dear friend!" he cried, his arms outflung, his fingers rattling rapid arpeggios upon invisible pianos. "You are indeed well found. I have news—such news!" He thrust back his head and warbled a laugh worthy of the mad-scene in *Lucia*. "Listen well." Again he embraced the unresisting Seraphin. "This night we dine here; we make a collation—a symposium: we feed both our bodies and our souls. I shall sit at the head of the table in the little room on the first floor, and you will sit at the foot. Armand Garnier will read his new poem; Devignes will sing my latest song; Philippe Varachon and you will discourse on your arts; and I—perhaps I shall let you persuade me to play the fugue that I go to write for the death of the President: it is all but ready against the day that a president chooses to die."

But Seraphin's thoughts were fixed on the food for the body.

"You make no jest with me, Maurice?"

"Jest with you? I jest with you? No, my friend. I do not jest when I invite a guest to dine with me."

"I comprehend," said Dieudonné; "but who is to be the host?"

At that question, Pasbeaucoup rose from his chair, and Madame, his wife, tried to thrust her nose, which was too short to reach, through the bars of her cage. The composer struck a chord on his breast and bowed.

"True: the host," said he. "I had forgotten. I have found a veritable patron of my art. He has had the room above mine for two years, and I did not once before suspect him. He is an American of the United States."

Madame's contralto shook her prison bars:

"There is no American that can appreciate art."

"True, Madame," admitted Houdon, bowing profoundly; "there is no American that can appreciate art, and there is no American millionaire that can help patronizing it."

"Eh, he is a millionaire, then, this American?" demanded Madame, audibly mollified.

"He has that honor."

"And his name?"—Madame wanted to make a memorandum of that name.

Houdon struck another chord. It was as if he were sounding a fanfare for the entrance of his hero.

"Charles Cartaret." He pronounced the first name in the French fashion and the second name "Cartarette."

Seraphin's reply to this announcement rather spoiled its effect. He laughed, and his laughter was high and mocking.

"Cartaret!" he cried. "Charlie Cartaret! But I know him well."

“Eh?”—The composer was reproachful—“And you never presented him to me?”

“It never happened that you were by.”

“My faith! Why should I be? Am I not Houdon? You should have brought him to me. Is it that you at the same time consider yourself my friend and do not bring to me your millionaire?”

Seraphin’s laughter waxed.

“But he is not my millionaire: he is your millionaire only. I know well that he is as poor as we are.”

The musician’s imaginary melody ceased: one could almost hear it cease. He gazed at Seraphin as he might have gazed at a madman.

“But that room rents for a hundred francs a month!”

“He is in debt for it.”

“And his name is that of a rich American well known.”

“An uncle who does not like him.”

“And he has offered to provide this collation.”

Seraphin shrugged.

“M. Cartaret’s credit,” said he, with a glance at Madame, “seems to be better than mine. I tell you he is only a young art-student, enough genteel, and the relation of a man enough rich, but for himself—poof!—he is one of us.”

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH A FOOL AND HIS MONEY ARE SOON PARTED

Money's the still sweet-singing nightingale.—Herrick: *Hesperides*.

Seraphin Dieudonné told the truth: at that moment Charlie Cartaret—for all this, remember, preceded the coming of the Vision—at that moment Cartaret was seated in his room in the rue du Val-de-Grâce, wondering how he was to find his next month's rent. His trouble was that he had just sold a picture, for the first time in his life, and, having sold it, he had rashly engaged to celebrate that good fortune by a feast which would leave him with only enough to buy meals for the ensuing three weeks.

He was a rather fine-looking, upstanding young fellow of a type essentially American. In the days, not long distant, when the goal at the other end of the gridiron had been the only goal of his ambition, he had put hard muscles on his hardy frame; later he had learned to shoot in Arizona; and he even now would have looked more at home along Broadway or Halsted Street than he did in the rue St. Jacques or the Boulevard St. Michel. He was tow-haired and brown-eyed and clean-shaven; he was generally hopeful, which is another way of saying that he was still upon the flowered slope of twenty-five.

Cartaret had inherited his excellent constitution, but his family all suffered from one disease: the disease of too much money on the wrong side of the house. When oil was found in Ohio, it was found in land belonging to his father's brother, but Charlie's father remained a poor lawyer to the end of his days. Uncle Jack had children of his own and a deserved reputation for holding on to his pennies. He sent his niece to a finishing-school, where she could be properly prepared for that state of life to which it had not pleased Heaven to call her, and he sent his nephew to college. When the former child was finished, he found her a place as companion to an ancient widow in Toledo and dismissed her from his thoughts; when Charlie was through with college—which is to say, when the faculty was through with him for endeavoring to plant a fraternity in a plot of academic soil that forbade the seed of Greek-letter societies—he asked him what he intended to do now—and asked it in a tone that plainly meant:

"What further disgrace are you planning to bring upon our name?"

Charlie replied that he wanted to be an artist.

"I might have guessed it," said his uncle. "How long'll it take?"

Young Cartaret, knowing something about art, had not the slightest idea.

"Well," said the by-product of petroleum, "if you've got to be an artist, be one as far away from New York as you can. They say Paris is the best place to learn the business."

"It is one of the best places," said Charlie.

The elder Cartaret wrote a check.

"Take a boat to-morrow," he ordered. "I'll pay your board and tuition for two years: that's time enough to learn any business. After two years you'll have to make out for yourself."

So Charlie had worked hard for two years. That period ended a week ago, and his uncle's checks ended with it. He had stayed on and hoped. To-day he had carried a picture through the rain to Seraphin's benefactor, the dealer Fourget; and the soft-hearted Fourget had bought it. Cartaret, on his return, met Houdon in the lower hall and before the American was well aware of it, he was pledged to the feast of which Maurice was bragging to Dieudonné.

Charlie dug into his pocket and fished out all that was in it: a matter of two hundred and ten francs. He counted it twice over.

"No use," he said. "I can't make it any larger. I wonder if I ought to take a smaller room."

Certainly there was more room here than he wanted, but he had grown to love the place: even then, when he had still to see it in the rose-pink twilight of romance, in the afterglow that was a dawn—even then, before the apparition of the strange Lady—he loved it as his sort of man must love the scenes of those struggles which have left him poor. Its front windows opened upon the street full of student-life and gossip, its rear windows looked on a little garden that was pretty with the concierge's flowers all Summer long and merry with the laughter of the concierge's children on every fair day the whole year round. The light was good enough, the location excellent; the service was no worse than the service in any similar house in Paris.

"But I have been a fool," said Cartaret.

He looked again at his money, and then he looked again about the room. The difference between a fool and a mere dilettante in folly is this: that the latter knows his folly as he indulges it, whereas the former recognizes it, if ever, only too late.

"If I'd been able to study for only one year more," he said.

It was the wail of retrospection that, sooner or later, every man, each in his own way and according to his chances and his character for seizing them, is bound to utter. It was what we all say and what, in saying, we each think unique. Happy he that says it, and means it, in time to profit!

"Yes," said Cartaret, "I've been a fool. But I won't be a quitter," he added. "I'll go and order that dinner."

Thus Charles Cartaret in the afternoon.

He had put on a battered, broad-brimmed hat of soft black felt, which was picturesquely out of place above his American features, and a still more battered

English rain-coat, which did not at all belong with the hat, and, thus fortified against the rain, he hurried into the hall. As he closed the door of his studio behind him, he fancied that he heard a sound from the room across from his own, and so stood listening, his hand upon the knob.

"That's queer," he reflected. "I thought that room was still to let."

He listened a moment longer, but the sound, if sound there had been, was not repeated, so he pulled his hat-brim over his eyes and descended to the street.

The rain had lessened, but the fog held on, and the thoroughfares were wet and dismal. Cartaret cut down the rue du Val-de-Grâce to the Avenue de Luxembourg and through the gardens with their dripping statues and around the museum, whence he crossed to the sheltered way between those bookstalls that cling like ivy to the walls of the Odéon, and so, by the steep descent of the rue de Tournon and the rue de Seine, came to the rue Jacob and the Café Des Deux Colombes.

Seraphin and Maurice were still there. They received him as their separate natures dictated, the former with a restrained dignity, the latter with the dignity of a monarch so secure of his title that he can afford to condescend to an air of democracy. Seraphin bowed; Maurice embraced and, embracing, tapped the diatonic scale along Cartaret's vertebræ. Pasbeaucoup, in trembling obedience to a cryptic nod from the caged Madame, hovered in the background.

"I have come," said Cartaret, whose French was the easy and inaccurate French of the American art-student, "to order that dinner." He half turned to Pasbeaucoup, but Houdon was before him.

"It is done," announced the musician, as if announcing a favor performed. "I have relieved you of that tedium. We are to begin with an *hors-d'oeuvre* of anchovies and——"

Madame had again nodded, this time less cryptically and more violently, at her husband, and Pasbeaucoup, between twin terrors, timidly suggested:

"Monsieur Cartaret comprehends that it is only because of the so high cost of necessities that it is necessary for us to request——"

He stopped there, but the voice from the cage boomed courageously:

"The payment in advance!"

"A custom of the establishment," explained Houdon grandly, but shooting a venomous glance in the direction of Madame.

Seraphin came quietly from behind his table and, slipping a thin arm through Cartaret's, drew him, to the speechless amazement of the other participants in this scene, toward the farthest corner of the café.

"My friend," he whispered, "you must not do it."

"Eh?" said Cartaret. "Why not? It's a queer thing to be asked, but why shouldn't I do it?"

Seraphin hesitated. Then, regaining the conquest over self, he put his lips so close to the American's ear that the Frenchman's wagging wisps of whisker tickled his auditor's cheek.

"This Houdon is but a pleasant *coquin*," he confided. "He will suck from you the last sou's worth of your blood."

Cartaret smiled grimly.

"He won't get a fortune by it," he said.

"That is why I do not wish him to do it: I know well that you cannot afford these little dissipations. I do not wish to see my friend swindled by false friendship. Houdon is a good boy, but, Name of a Name, he has the conscience of a pig!"

"All right," said Cartaret suddenly, for Seraphin was appealing to a sense of economy still fresh enough to be sensitive, "since he's ordered the dinner, we'll let him pay for it."

"Alas," declared Dieudonné, sadly shaking his long hair, "poor Maurice has not the money."

"Oh!"—A gleam of gratitude lighted Cartaret's blue eyes—"Then you are proposing that you do it?"

"My friend," inquired Seraphin, flinging out his arms as a man flings out his arms to invite a search of his pockets, "you know me: how can I?"

Cartaret blushed at his ineptitude. He knew Dieudonné well enough to have been aware of his poverty and liked him well enough to be tender toward it. "But," he nevertheless pardonably inquired, "if that's the way the thing stands, who's to pay? One of the other guests?"

"We are all of the same financial ability."

"Then I don't see——"

"Nor do I. And"—Seraphin's high resolution clattered suddenly about his ears—"after all, the dinner has been ordered, and I am very hungry. My friend," he concluded with a happy return of his dignity, "at least I have done you this service: you will buy the dinner, but you will not both buy it and be deceived."

Cartaret turned, with a smile no longer grim, to the others.

"Seraphin," he said, "has persuaded me. Madame, *l'addition*, if you please."

Pasbeaucoup trotted to the cage, bringing back to Cartaret the long slip of paper that Madame had ready for him. Cartaret glanced at only the total and, though he flushed a little, paid without comment.

"And now," suggested Houdon, "now let us play a little game of dominoes."

Seraphin, from the musician's shoulder, frowned hard at Cartaret, but Cartaret was in no mood to heed the warning. He was angry at himself for his extravagance and decided that, having been such a fool as to fling away a great deal of his money, he might now as well be a greater fool and fling it all away. Besides, he might be able to win from Houdon, and, even if Houdon could not pay, there would be the satisfaction of revenge. So he sat down at one of the marble-topped tables and began,

with a great clatter, to shuffle the dominoes that obsequious Pasbeaucoup hurriedly fetched. Within two hours, Seraphin was head over ears in the musician's debt, and the American was paying into Houdon's palm all but about ten francs of the money that he had so recently earned. He rose smilingly.

"You do not go?" inquired Houdon.

Cartaret nodded.

"But the dinner?"

"Don't you worry; I'll be back for that—I don't know when I'll get another."

"Then permit me," Houdon condescended, "to order a bock. For the three of us." He generously included the hungry Seraphin. "Come, we shall drink to your better fortune next time."

But Cartaret excused himself. He said that he had an engagement with a dealer, which was not true, and which was understood to be false, and he went into the street.

The last of the rain, unnoticed during Cartaret's fevered play, had passed, and a red February sun was setting across the Seine, behind the higher ground that lies between L'Etoile and the Place du Trocadero. The river was hidden by the point of land that ends in the Quai D'Orsay, but, as Cartaret crossed the broad rue de Vaugirard, he could see the golden afterglow and, silhouetted against it, the high filaments of the Eiffel Tower.

What an ass he had been, he bitterly reflected, as he passed again through the Luxembourg Gardens, where now the statues glistened in the fading light of the dying afternoon. What a mad ass! If a single stroke of almost pathetically small good luck made such a fool of him, it was as well that his uncle and not his father had come into a fortune.

His thought went back with a new tenderness to his father and to his own and his sister Cora's early life in that small Ohio town. He had hated the dull routine and narrow conventionality of the place. There the most daring romance of youth had been to walk with the daughter of a neighbor along the shaded streets in the Summer evenings, and to hang over the gate to the front yard of the house in which she lived, tremblingly hinting at a delicious tenderness, which one never dared more adequately to express, until a threatening parental voice called the girl to shelter. His life, since those days, had been more stirring, and sometimes more to be regretted; but he had loved it and thought it absurd sentiment on Cora's part to insist that their tiny income go to keeping up the little property—the three-story brick house and wide front and back-yard along Main Street—which had been their home. Yet now he felt, and was half ashamed of feeling, a strong desire to go back there, a pull at his heartstrings for a return to all that he was once so anxious to quit forever.

He wondered if it could be possible that he was tired of Paris. He even wondered if it were possible that he could not be a successful artist—he had never wanted to be a rich one—whether the sensible course would not be to go home and study law while there was yet time....

And then——

Then, in the rose-pink twilight, the beginning of the Dream Wonderful: that scent of the roses from the sky; that quick memory of sunlight upon snow-crests; that first revelation of the celestial Lady transfiguring the earthly commonplace of his room!

CHAPTER IV

A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

... AdowneThey prayd him sit, and gave him for to feed.—Spenser: *Faerie Queene*.

Charlie Cartaret would have told you—indeed, he frequently did tell his friends—that the mere fact of a man being an artist was no proof that he lacked in the uncommon sense commonly known as common. Cartaret was quite insistent upon this and, as evidence in favor of his contention, he was accustomed to point to C. Cartaret, Esq. He, said Cartaret, was at once an artist and a practical man: it was wholly impossible, for instance, to imagine him capable of any silly romance.

Nevertheless, when left alone in his room by the departure of the Lady on that February evening, he sat for a long time with the strange rose between his fingers and a strange look in his eyes. He regarded the rose until the last ray of light had altogether faded from the West. Only then did he recall that he had invited sundry persons to dine with him at the Café Des Deux Colombes, and when he had made ready to go to them, the rose was still in his reluctant hand.

Cartaret looked about him stealthily. He had been in the room for some hours and he should have been thoroughly aware that he was alone in it; but he looked, as all guilty men do, to right and left to make sure. Then, like a naughty child, he turned his back to the street-window.

He stood thus a bare instant, yet in that instant his hand first raised something toward his lips, and then bestowed that same something somewhere inside his waistcoat, a considerable distance from his heart, but directly over the rib beneath which ill-informed people believe the heart to be. This accomplished, he exhibited a rigorously practical face to the room and swaggered out of it, ostentatiously humming a misogynistic drinking-song:

"There's nothing, friend, 'twixt you and meExcept the best of company.(There's just one bock 'twixt you and me,and I'll catch up full soon!)What woman's lips compare to this:This sturdy seidel's frothy kiss——"

Armand Garnier, one of the men that were to dine with Cartaret to-night, had written the words of which this is a free translation, and Houdon had composed the air—he composed it impromptu for Devignes over an absinthe, after laboring upon it in secret for an entire week—but Cartaret, when he reached the note that stood for the last word here given, came to an abrupt stop; he was facing the door of the room opposite his own. He continued facing it for quite a minute, but he heard nothing.

"M. Refrogné," he said, when he thrust his head into the concierge's box downstairs, "if—er—if anybody should inquire for me this evening, you will please tell them that I am dining at the Café Des Deux Colombes."

Nothing could be seen in the concierge's box, but from it came a grunt that might have been either assent or dissent.

"Yes," said Cartaret, "in the rue Jacob."

Again the ambiguous grunt.

"Exactly," Cartaret agreed; "the Café Des Deux Colombes, in the rue Jacob, close by the rue Bonaparte. You—you're quite sure you won't forget?"

The grunt changed to an ugly chuckle, and, after the chuckle, an ugly voice said:

"Monsieur expects something unusual: he expects an evening visitor?"

"Confound it, no!" snapped Cartaret. He had been wildly hoping that perhaps The Girl might need some aid or direction that evening and might seek it of him. "Not at all," he pursued, "but you see——"

"How then?" inquired the voice.

Cartaret's hand went to his pocket and drew forth one of the few franc-pieces that remained there.

"Just, please, remember what I've said," he requested.

In the darkness of the box into which it was extended, his hand was grasped by a larger and rougher hand, and the franc was deftly extracted.

"*Merci, monsieur.*"

A barely appreciable softening of the tone encouraged Cartaret. He balanced himself from foot to foot and asked:

"Those people—the ones, you understand, that have rented the room opposite mine?"

Refrogné understood but truly.

"Well—in short, who are they, monsieur?"

"Who knows?" asked Refrogné in the darkness. Cartaret could feel him shrug.

"I rather thought you might," he ventured.

The darkness was silent; a good concierge answers questions, not general statements.

"Where—don't you know where they come from?"

There was speech once more. Refrogné, it said, neither knew nor cared. In the rue du Val de Grâce people continually came and went—all manner of people from all manner of places—so long as they paid their rent, it was no concern of Refrogné's. For all the information that he possessed, the two people of whom monsieur inquired might be natives of Cochin-China. Mademoiselle evidently wanted to be an artist, as scores of other young women, and Madame, her guardian and sole companion, evidently wanted Mademoiselle to be nothing at all. There were but two of them, thank God! The younger spoke much French with an accent terrible; the elder understood French, but spoke only some pig of a language that no civilized man could comprehend. That was all that Refrogné had to tell.

Cartaret went on toward the scene of his dinner-party. He wished he did not have to go. On the other hand, he was sure he had thrown Refrogné a franc to no purpose: the Lady of the Rose was little likely to seek him! He found the evening cold and his rain-coat inadequate. He began humming the drinking-song again.

They were singing it outright, in a full chorus, when he entered the little room on the first floor of the Café Des Deux Colombes. The table was already spread, the feast already started. The unventilated room was flooded with light and full of the steam of hot viands.

Maurice Houdon, his red cheeks shining, his black mustache stiffly waxed, sat at the head of the table as he had promised to do, performing the honors with a regal grace and playing imaginary themes with every flourish of address to every guest: a different theme for each. On his right was a vacant place, the sole apparent reference to the host of the evening; on his left, Armand Garnier, the poet, very thin and cadaverous, with long dank locks and tangled beard, his skin waxen, his lantern-jaw emitting no words, but working lustily upon the food. Next to Cartaret's place bobbed the pear-shaped Devignes, leading the chorus, as became the only professional singer in the company. Across from him was Philippe Varachon, the sculptor, whose nose always reminded Cartaret of an antique and long lost bit of statuary, badly damaged in exhumation; and at the foot Seraphin was seated, the first to note Cartaret's arrival and the only one to apologize for not having delayed the dinner.

He got up immediately, and his whiskers tickled the American's cheek with the whisper:

"It was ready to serve, and Madame swore that it would perish. My faith, what would you?"

Pasbeaucoup was darting among the guests, wiping fresh plates with a napkin and his dripping forehead with his bare hand. Cartaret felt certain that the little man would soon confuse the functions of the two.

"Ah-h-h!" cried Houdon. He rose from his place and endeavored to restore order by beating with a fork upon an empty tumbler, as an orchestral conductor taps his baton—at the same time nodding fiercely at Pasbeaucoup to refill the tumbler with red wine. He was the sole member of the company not long known to their host, but he said: "Messieurs, I have the happiness to present to you our distinguished American fellow-student, M. Charles Cartar*ette*. Be seated among us, M. Cartarette," he graciously added; "pray be seated."

Cartaret sat down in the place kindly reserved for him, and the interruption of his appearance was so politely forgotten that he wished he had not been such a fool as to make it. The song was resumed. It was not until the salad was served and Pasbeaucoup had retired below-stairs to assist in preparing the coffee, that Houdon turned again to Cartaret and executed what was clearly to be the Cartaret theme.

"We had despaired of your arrival, Monsieur," said he.

Cartaret said he had observed signs of something of the sort.

"Truly," nodded Houdon. His tongue rolled a ball of salad into his cheek and out of the track of speech. "Doubtless you had the one living excuse, however."

"I don't follow you," said Cartaret.

Houdon leered. His fingers performed on the table-cloth something that might have been the *motif* of Isolde.

"I have heard," said he, "your American proverb that there are but two adequate excuses for tardiness at dinner—death and a lady—and I am charmed, monsieur, to observe that you are altogether alive."

If Cartaret's glance indicated that he would like to throttle the composer, Cartaret's glance did not misinterpret.

"We won't discuss that, if you please," said he.

But Houdon was incapable of understanding such glances in such a connection. He tapped for the attention of his orchestra and got it.

"Messieurs," he announced, "our good friend of the America of the North has been having an adventure."

Everybody looked at Cartaret and everybody smiled.

"Delicious," squeaked Varachon through his broken nose.

"Superb," trilled the pear-shaped singer Devignes.

Garnier's lantern-jaws went on eating. Seraphin Dieudonné caught Cartaret's glance imploringly and then shifted, in ineffectual warning, to Houdon.

"But that was only what was to be expected, my children," the musician continued. "What can we poor Frenchmen look for when a blond Hercules of an American comes, rich and handsome, to our dear Paris? Only to-day I observed, renting an abode in the house that Monsieur and I have the honor to share, a young mademoiselle, the most gracious and beautiful, accompanied by a *tuteur*, the most ferocious; and I noted well that they went to inhabit the room but across the landing from that of M. Cartarette. Behold all! At once I said to myself: 'Alas, how long will it be before this confiding——'"

He stopped short and looked at Cartaret, for Cartaret had grasped the performing hand of the composer and, in a steady grip, forced it quietly to the table.

"I tell you," said Cartaret, gently, "that I don't care to have you talk in this strain."

"How then?" blustered the amazed musician.

"If you go on," Cartaret warned him, "you will have to go on from the floor; I'll knock you there."

"Maurice!" cried Seraphin, rising from his chair.

"Messieurs!" piped Devignes.

Varachon growled at Houdon, and Garnier reached for a water-bottle as the handiest weapon of defense. Houdon and Cartaret were facing each other, erect, each waiting for the other to make a further move, the former red, the latter white, with anger. There followed that flashing pause of quiet which is the precursor of battle.

The battle, however, was not forthcoming. Instead, through the silence, there came a roar of voices that diverted the attention of even the chief combatants. It was a roar of voices from the café below: a heavy rumble that was unmistakably Madame's and a clatter of unintelligible shrieks and demands that were feminine but unclassifiable. Now one voice shouted and next the other. Then the two joined in a mighty explosion, and little Pasbeaucoup was shot up the stairs and among the diners as if he were the first rock from the crater of an emptying volcano.

He staggered against the table and jolted the water-bottle out of the poet's hand.

"Name of a Name!" he gasped. "She is a veritable tigress, that woman there!"

They had no time then to inquire whom he referred to, though they knew that, however justly he might think it, he would never, even in terror like the present, say such a thing of his wife. The words were no sooner free of his lips than a larger rock was vomited from the volcano, and a still larger, the largest rock of the three, came immediately after.

Everybody was afoot now. They saw that Pasbeaucoup cowered against the wall in a fear terrible because it was greater than his fear for Madame; they saw that Madame, who was the third rock, was clinging to the apron-strings of another woman, who was rock number two, and they saw that this other woman was a stocky figure, who carried in her hand a curious, wide head-dress, and who wore a parti-colored apron that began over her ample breasts and ended by brushing against her equally ample boots, and a black skirt of simple stuff and extravagant puffs, surmounted by a short-skirted blouse or basque of the same material. Her face was round and wrinkled like a last winter's apple on the kitchen-shelf; but her eyes shone red, her hands beat the air vigorously, and from her lips poured a lusty torrent of sounds that might have been protestations, appeals or curses, yet were certainly, considered as words, nothing that any one present had ever heard before.

She ran forward; Madame ran forward. The stranger shouldered Madame; Madame dragged her back. The stranger cried out more of her alien phrases; Madame shouted French denunciations. The Gallic diners formed a grinning circle, eager to lose no detail of the sort of wrangle that a Frenchman loves best to watch: a wrangle between women.

Cartaret made his way through the ring and put his hand on the stranger's shoulder. She seemed to understand, and relapsed into quiet, attentive but alert.

"Now," said Cartaret, "one at a time, please. Madame, what is the trouble?"

"Trouble?" roared Madame. Her face did not change expression, but she held her arms akimbo, pug-nose and strong chin poked defiantly at the strange interloper. "You may well say it, trouble!"

She put her position strongly and at length. She had been in the *caisse*, with no one of the world in the café, when, crying barbarous threats incomprehensible, this she-bandit, this—this *anarchiste infâme*, had burst in from the street, disrupting the

peace of the Deux Colombes and endangering its well-known quiet reputation with the police.

That was the gist of it. When it was delivered, Cartaret faced the stranger.

"And you, Madame?" he asked, in French.

The stranger strode forward as a pugilist steps from his corner for the round that he expects to win the fight for him. She clapped her wide head-dress upon her head, where it settled itself with a rakish tilt.

"Holy pipe!" cried Houdon. "In that I recognize her. It is the ferocious *tuteur*!"

Cartaret's interest became tense.

"What did you want here?" he urged, still speaking French.

The stranger said, twice over, something that sounded like "Kar-kar-tay."

"She is mad," squeaked Varachon.

"She is worse; she is German," vowed Madame.

Cartaret raised his hand to silence these contentions.

"Do you understand me?" he urged.

The wide head-dress flapped a vehement assent.

"But you can't answer?"

The head-dress fluttered a negative, and the mouth mumbled a negative in a French so thick, hesitant and broken as to be infinitely less expressive than the shake of the head.

Cartaret remembered what the concierge Refrogné had told him. To the circle of curious people he explained:

"She can understand a little French, but she cannot speak it."

Madame snorted. "Why then does she come to this place so respectable if she cannot talk like a Christian?"

"Because," said Cartaret, "she evidently thought she would be intelligently treated."

It was clear to him that she would not have come had her need not been desperate. He made another effort to discover her nationality.

"Who of you speaks something besides French?" he asked of the company.

Not Madame; not Seraphin or Houdon: they were ardent Parisians and of course knew no language but their own. As for Garnier, as a French poet and a native of the pure-tongued Tours, he would not have soiled his lips with any other speech had he known another. Varachon, it turned out, was from the Jura, and had picked up a little Swiss-German during a youthful *liaison* at Pontarlier. He tried it now, but the stranger only shook her head-dress at him.

"She knows no German," said Varachon.

"Such German!" sniffed Houdon.

"Chut! This proves rather that she knows it too well," grumbled Madame. "She but wishes to conceal it; probably she is a German spy."

Devignes said he knew Italian, and he did seem to know a sort of Opera-Italian, but it, too, was useless.

Cartaret had an inspiration.

"Spanish!" he suggested. "Does any one know any Spanish?"

Pasbeaucoup did; he knew two or three phrases—chiefly relating to prices on the menu of the Deux Colombes—but to him also the awful woman only shook her head in ignorance.

Cartaret took up the French again.

"Can you not tell me what you want here?" he pleaded.

"Kar-kar-tay," said the stranger.

"Ah!" cried Seraphin, clapping his hands. "Does not Houdon say that she makes her abode in the same house that you make yours? She seeks you, monsieur. 'Kar-kar-tay,' it is her manner of endeavoring to say Cartar*ette*."

At the sound of that name, the stranger nodded hard.

"*Oui, oui!*" she cried.

She understood that her chief inquisitor was Cartaret, and it was indeed Cartaret that she sought. She flung herself on her knees to him. When he hurriedly raised her, she caught at the skirt of his coat and nearly pulled it from him in an attempt to drag him to the stairs.

Cartaret looked sharply at Houdon. The musician having been so recently saved from the wrath of his host, was momentarily discreet: he hid his smile behind one of the thin bands that contrasted so sharply with his plump cheeks.

"Messieurs," said Cartaret, "I am going with this lady."

They all edged forward.

"And I am going alone," added the American. "I wish you good-night."

"You will be knifed in the street," said Madame. Her tone implied: "And it will serve you right."

None of the others seemed to mind his going; the wrangle over, they were ready for their coffee and liqueurs. Houdon was frankly relieved. Only Seraphin protested.

"And you will leave your dinner unfinished?" he cried.

Cartaret was taking his hat and rain-coat from the row of pegs on the wall where, among the other guests', he had hung them when he entered. He nodded his answer to Seraphin's query.

"Leave your dinner?" said Seraphin. "But my God, it is paid for!"

"Good-night," said Cartaret, and was plunged down the stairs by the strangely-garbed woman tugging at his hand.

CHAPTER V

WHICH TELLS HOW CARTARET RETURNED TO THE RUE DU VAL-DE-GRÂCE, AND WHAT HE FOUND THERE

La timidité est un grand péché contre l'amour.—Anatole France: *La Rotisserie de la Reine Pédauque*.

If that strange old woman in the rakish head-dress was in a hurry, Cartaret, you may be sure, was in no mood for tarrying by the way. He left the Café des Deux Colombes, picturing The Girl of the Rose desperately ill, and he was resolved not only to be the first to come to her aid, but to have none of the restaurant's suspicious company for a companion. Then, no sooner had he passed through the empty room on the ground-floor of Mme. Pasbeaucoup's establishment and gone a few steps toward the rue de Seine, than he began to fear that perhaps the house to which he was apparently being conducted—The Girl's house and his own—had taken fire; or that the cause of the duenna's mission was some like misfortune which would be better remedied, so far as The Girl's interests were concerned, if there were more rescuers than one.

"What is the matter?" he begged his guide to inform him, as they hurried through the darkened streets.

His guide lifted both hands to her face.

"Is mademoiselle ill?"

The duenna shook her head in an emphatic negative.

"The place isn't on fire?" His tone was one of petition, as if, should he pray hard enough, she might avert the catastrophe he now dreaded; or as if, by touching her sympathies, he could release some hidden spring of intelligible speech.

The old woman, however, only shook her head again and hurried on. Cartaret was glad to find that she possessed an agility impossible for a city-bred woman of her apparent age, and he was still more relieved when they reached their lodging-house and discovered it in apparently the same condition as that in which he had left it.

Their ascent of the stairs was like a race—a race ending in a dead-heat. At the landing, Cartaret turned, of course, toward his neighbor's door; to his amazement, the old woman pulled him to his own.

He opened it and struck a match: the room was empty. He held the match until it burnt his fingers.

The old woman pushed him toward his table, on which stood a battered lamp. She pointed to the lamp.

"But your mistress?" asked Cartaret.

The duenna pointed to the lamp.

"Shall I light it?"

She nodded.

He lit the lamp. The flame grew until it illuminated a small circle about the table.

"Now what?" Cartaret inquired.

Again that odd gesture toward the nose and mouth.

"I don't understand," said Cartaret.

She picked up the lamp and made as if to search the floor for something. Then she held out the lamp to him.

"Oh"—it began to dawn on Cartaret—"you've lost something?"

"*Oui, oui!*"

He took the lamp, and they both fell on their knees. Together they began a minute inspection of the dusty floor. Cartaret's mind was more easy now: at least his Lady suffered no physical distress.

"It's like a sort of religious ceremony," muttered the American, as, foot by foot, they crawled and groped over the grimy boards....

"Was it money you lost?" he inquired.

No, it was not money.

The search continued. Cartaret crawled under the divan, while the duenna held the cover high to admit the light. He blackened his hands in the fire-place and transferred a little of the soot to his few extra clothes that hung behind the corner curtain—but only a little; most of the soot preferred his hands.

"I never knew before that the room was so large," he gasped.

They had covered two-thirds of the floor-space when a new thought struck him. Still crouching on his knees, he once more tried his companion.

"I can't find it," he said; "but I'd give a good deal to know what I'm looking for. What were you doing in here when you lost it, anyway?"

She shook her head, with her hand on her breast. Then she pointed to the door and nodded.

"You mean your mistress lost it?"

"*Oui.*"

"Well, then, let's get her. She can tell me what I'm after."

He half rose; but the woman seized his arm. She broke into loud sounds, patently protestations.

"Nonsense," said Cartaret. "Why not? Come on; I'll knock at her door."

The duenna would not have her mistress disturbed. The ancient voice rose to a shriek.

"But I say yes."

The shriek grew louder. With amazing strength, the old woman forced his unsuspecting body back to its former position; she came near to jolting the lamp from his hand.

It was then that Cartaret heard a lesser noise behind them: a voice, the low sweet voice of The Rose-Lady, asked, in the duenna's strange tongue, a question from the doorway. Cartaret turned his head.

She was standing there in the dim light, a sort of kimono gathered about her, her sandaled feet peeping from its lower folds, the lovely arm that held the curious dressing-gown in place bare to the elbow. She was smiling at the answer that her guardian had already given her; Cartaret thought her even more beautiful than when he had seen her before.

The duenna had scuttled forward on her knees and, amid a series of cries, was pressing the hem of the kimono to her lips. The Girl's free hand was raising the petitioner.

"I am sorry that you have been disturbed by Chitta," she was saying.

Cartaret understood then that he was addressed. Moreover, he became conscious that he was by no means at his best on his knees, with his clothes even more rumpled than usual, his hands black and, probably, his face no better. He scrambled to his feet.

"It's been no trouble," he said awkwardly.

"I should say that it had been a good deal," said the Girl. "Chitta is so very superstitious. Did you find it?"

"No," said Cartaret. "At least I don't think so."

The Girl puckered her pretty brow.

"I mean," explained Cartaret, coming nearer, but thankful that he had left the lamp on the floor behind him, whence its light would least reveal his soiled hands and face—"I mean that I haven't the least idea what I was looking for."

The Girl burst into rippling laughter.

"Not the least," pursued the emboldened American. "You see, I left word with Refrogné—that's the concierge—that I was dining with some friends at the Deux Colombes—that's a café—when I went out; and I suppose she—I mean your—your maid, isn't it?—made him understand that she—I mean your maid again—wanted me—you know, I don't generally leave word; but this time I thought that perhaps you—I mean she—or, anyhow, I had an idea——"

He knew that he was making a fool of himself, so he was glad when she came serenely to his assistance and gallantly shifted the difficulty to her own shoulders.

"It was too bad of Chitta to take you away from your dinner."

Chitta had slunk into the shadows, but Cartaret could descry her glaring at him.

"That was of no consequence," he said; he had forgotten what the dinner cost him.

“But, sir, for a reason of so great an absurdity!” She put one hand on the table and leaned on it. “I must tell you that there is in my country a superstition——”

She hesitated. Cartaret, his heart leaping, leaned forward.

“What is your country, mademoiselle?” he asked.

She did not seem to hear that. She went on:

“It is really a superstition so much absurd that I am slow to speak to you of it. They believe, our peasants, that it brings good luck when they take it with them across our borders; that only it can ensure their return, and that, if it is lost, they will never come back to their home-land.” Her blue eyes met his gaze. “They, sir, love their home-land.”

Cartaret was certain that the land which could produce this presence, at once so human and so spiritual, was well worth loving. He wanted to say so, but another glance at her serene face checked any impulse that might seem impertinent.

“I, too, love my country, although I am not superstitious,” the Girl pursued, “so I had brought it with me from my country. I brought it with me to Paris, and I lost it. We go early to sleep, the people of my race; I had not missed it when I went to bed; but then Chitta missed it; and I told her that I thought that I had perhaps dropped it here. She ran before I could recall her—and I fell straightway asleep. She tells me that she had seen you go out, sir, and that she went to the concierge, as you supposed, to discover where you had gone, for she thought, she says, that your door was locked.” The corners of the Girl’s mouth quivered in a smile. “I trust that she would not have trespassed when you were gone, even if your door *was* open. Until I heard her shriek but now, I had no idea that she would pursue you. I regret for your sake that she disturbed you, but I also regret for her sake that it was not found.”

Cartaret had guessed the answer to his question before he asked it. His cheeks burned for the consequences, but he put the query:

“What was lost?” he inquired.

“Ah, I thought that I had said it: a flower.”

“A—a rose?”

The hand that held her kimono pressed a little closer to her breast.

“Then you have found it?”

Mountain-peaks and glaciers in the sun: Cartaret, being a practical man, was distinctly aware of not wanting her to know the present whereabouts of that flower. He fenced for time.

“Was it a rose?” he repeated.

“Yes,” she said, “the Azure Rose.”

“What?” Perhaps, after all, he was wrong. “I’ve never heard of a blue rose.”

“It is not blue,” she said; “we call it the azure rose as you, sir, would say the rose of azure, or the rose of heaven. We call it the azure rose because it grows only in our own land, where the mountains are blue, and only high, high up on those mountains, near to the blue of the sky. It is a white rose.”

“Yes. Of course,” said Cartaret. “A white rose.”

He stood uncertainly before her. For a reason that he would have hesitated long to define, he hated to part with that rose; for a reason concerning which he was quite clear, he did not want to produce it there and then.

“You have it?” asked The Girl.

“Er—do you want it?” countered Cartaret.

A shade of impatience crossed her face. She tried to master it.

“I gather from your speech that you, sir, are American, not English. You are the first American that ever I have met, and I do not seem well to understand the motives of all that you say, although I do understand perfectly the words. You ask do I want this rose. But of course I want it! Have I not asked for it? I want it because Chitta will be distressed if we lose it, but also I want it for myself, to whom it belongs, since it is a souvenir already dear to me.”

Her face was alight. Cartaret looked at it; then his glance fell.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t mean to offend you. I’m forever putting my foot in things.”

“You have trodden on my rose?” Her voice discovered her dismay.

“No, no! I wouldn’t—I couldn’t. I meant that I was always making mistakes. This afternoon, for instance—And now——”

To the rescue of his embarrassment came the thought that indeed he obviously could not tread on the rose, unless he were a contortionist, because the rose was——

Among the smudges of black, his cheeks burned a hot red. He thrust a hand between his shirt and waistcoat and produced the coveted flower: a snow-rose in the center of his grimy palm.

Again the perfume, subtle, haunting. Again the pure mountain-peaks. Again the music of a poem in a tongue unknown....

At first he did not dare to look at her; he kept his gaze lowered. Had he looked, he would have seen her wide eyes startle, then change to amusement, and then to a doubting tenderness. He felt her delicate fingers touch his palm and he thrilled at the touch as she recaptured her rose. He did not see that, in welcome to the returned prodigal, she started to raise to her own lips those petals, gathered so tight against the flower’s heart, which he had lately kissed. When at last he glanced up, she had recovered her poise and was again looking like some sculptured Artemis that had wandered into his lonely room from the gardens of the Luxembourg.

Then he saw a much more prosaic thing. He saw the hand that held the rose and saw it discolored.

“Will you ever forgive me?” he cried. “You’ve been leaning on my table, and I mix my paints on it!”

The speech was not precisely pellucid, but she followed his eyes to the hand and understood.

“The fault was mine,” she said.

Cartaret was searching among the tubes and bottles on the table. He searched so nervously that he knocked some of them to the floor.

"If you'll just wait a minute." He found the bottle he wanted. "And if you don't mind the turpentine.... It smells terribly, but it will evaporate soon, and it cleans you up before you know it."

He lifted one of the rags that lay about, and then another. He discarded both as much too soiled, hesitated, ran to the curtained corner and returned with a clean towel.

She had hidden the flower. She extended her hand.

"Do you mind?" he asked.

"Do I object? No. You are kind."

He took the smudged hand—took it with a hand that trembled—and bent his smudged face so close to it that she must have felt his breath beating on it, hot and quick. He made two dabs with the end of the towel.

Chitta, whom they had both sadly neglected, pounced upon them from her lair among the shadows. She seized the hand and, jabbering fifty words in the time for two, pushed Cartaret from his work.

"I'm not going to hurt anybody," said Cartaret. "Do, please, get away."

The Girl laughed.

"Chitta trusts no foreigners," she explained.

She spoke to Chitta, but Chitta, glowering at Cartaret, shook her head and grumbled.

"I do not any more desire to order her about," said The Girl to Cartaret. "Already this evening I have wounded her feelings, I fear. She says she will allow none but herself to minister to me. You, sir, will forgive her? After all, it is her duty."

Cartaret inwardly cursed Chitta's fidelity. What he said was: "Of course." He knew that just here he might say something gallant, and that he would think of that something an hour hence; but he could not think of it now.

The Girl touched the turpentine bottle.

"And may we take it to our room?"

"Eh? Oh, certainly," said Cartaret.

She held out her hand, the palm lowered.

"Good-night," she said.

Cartaret's heart bounded: this time she had not said "Good-by." He seized the hand. Chitta growled, and he released it with a conventional handshake.

The Girl smiled.

"Ah, yes," she said; "this afternoon it puzzled me, but now I recollect: you Americans, sir, shake one's hand, do you not?"

She was gone, and glowering Chitta with her, before he could answer.

Cartaret stood where she had left him, his brows knitted. He heard Chitta double-lock the door to their rooms. He was thinking thoughts that his brain was not accustomed to. It was some time before they became more familiar. Then he gasped:

“I wonder if my face is dirty!”

He took the lamp and sought the sole mirror that his room boasted. His face was dirty.

“Damn!” said Cartaret.

Down in the narrow street, an uncertain chorus was singing:

“There’s nothing, friend, ’twixt you and meExcept the best of company.(There’s just one bock ’twixt you and me,and I’ll catch up full soon!)What woman’s lips compare to this:This sturdy seidel’s frothy kiss——”

His guests were coming to seek him. They had remembered him at last.

Cartaret’s mind, however, was busy with other matters. He had not thought of the gallant thing that he might have said to The Girl, but he had thought of something equally surprising.

“Gee whiz!” he cried. “I understand now—it’s probably the custom of her country: she expected me to kiss her hand. Kiss her hand—and I missed the chance!”

CHAPTER VI

CARTARET SETS UP HOUSEKEEPING

Que de femmes il y a dans une femme! Et c'est bien heureux.—Dumas, Fils: *La Dame Aux Perles*.

Cartaret did not see the Lady of the Rose next day, though his work suffered sadly through the worker's jumping from before his easel at the slightest sound on the landing, running to his door, and sometimes himself going to the hall and standing there for many minutes, trying, and not succeeding, to look as if he had just come in, or were just going out, on business of the first importance. He concluded, for the hundredth time, that he was a fool; but he persevered in his folly. He asked himself why he should feel such an odd interest in an unknown girl practically alone in Paris; but he found no satisfactory answer. He declared that it was madness in him to suppose that she could want ever to see him again, and madness to suppose that a penniless failure had anything to gain by seeing her; but he continued to try.

On the night following the first day of his watch, Cartaret went to bed disappointed and slept heavily. On the second night he went to bed worried, and dreamed of scaling a terrible mountain in quest of a flower, and of falling into a hideous chasm just as the flower turned into a beautiful woman and smiled at him. On the third night, he surrendered to acute alarm and believed that he did not sleep at all.

The morning of the fourth day found him knocking on the panel of that magic door opposite. Chitta opened the door a crack, growled, and shut it in his face.

"I wonder," reflected Cartaret, "what would be the best means of killing this old woman. I wonder if the hyena would eat candy sent her by mail."

He had been watching, all the previous day, for the Lady of the Rose to go out, and she did not leave her room. Now it occurred to him to watch for Chitta's exit on a forage foray and to renew his attack during her absence. This he accomplished. From a front window, he had no sooner seen the duenna swing into the rue du Val de Grâce, with her head-dress bobbing and a shopping-net on her arm, than he was again knocking at the door across the landing.

He knew now, did Cartaret, that, on whatever landing of life he had lived, there was always that door opposite, the handle of which he had never dared to turn, the key to which he had never yet found. He knew, on this morning—a clear, windy morning, for March had come in like a lion—that, for the door of every heart in the world, or high or low, or cruel or tender, there is a heart opposite with a door not inaccessible.

The pale yellow sun sang of it: Marvelous Door Opposite!—it seemed to sing—how, when they pass that portal, the commonplace becomes the unusual and reality is turned into romance. Lead becomes silver then, and copper—gold. Magical Door Opposite! All the possibilities of life—aye, and what is better, all life's

impossibilities—are behind you, and all life's fears and hopes before. All our young dreams, our mature ambitions, our old regrets, curl in incense from our brains and struggle to pass that keyhole. Unhappy he for whom the door never opens; more unhappy, often, he for whom it does open; but most unhappy he who never sees that it is there: the Door across the Landing.

Cartaret knocked as if he were knocking at the gate of Paradise, and, perhaps again as if he were knocking at the gate of Paradise, he got no answer. He knocked a second time and heard the rustle of a woman's skirt.

"Who is there?"—She spoke in French now, but he would have known her voice had she talked the language of Grand Street.

"Cartaret," he answered.

She opened the door. A ray of light beat its way through a grimy window in the hall to welcome her—Cartaret was sure that no light had passed that window for years and years—and rested on the beauty of her pure face, her calm eyes, her blue-black hair.

"Good morning," said the Lady of the Rose.

It sounded wonderful to him. When *he* replied "Good morning"—and could think of nothing else to say—the phrase sounded less remarkable.

She waited a moment. She looked a little doubtful. She said:

"You perhaps wanted Chitta?"

Were her eyes laughing? Her lips were serious, but he was uncertain of her eyes.

"Certainly not," said he.

"Oh, you wanted me?"

"Yes!" said Cartaret, and blushed at the vehemence of the monosyllable.

"Why?"

For what, indeed, had he come there? He vividly realized that he should have prepared some excuse; but, having prepared none, he could offer only the truth—or so much of it as seemed expedient.

"I wanted to see if you were all right," he said.

"But certainly," she smiled. "I thank you, sir; but, yes, I am—all right."

She said no more; Cartaret felt as if he could never speak again. However, speak he must.

"Well, you know," he said, "I hadn't seen you anywhere about, and I was rather worried."

"Chitta takes of me the best care."

"Yes, but, you see, I didn't know and I—Oh, yes: I wanted to see whether that turpentine worked."

"The turpentine!" All suspicion of amusement fled her eyes: she was contrite. "I comprehend. How careless of Chitta not at once to have returned it to you."

Turpentine! What a nectar for romance! Cartaret made a face that could not have been worse had he swallowed some of the liquid. He tried to protest, but she did not heed him. Instead, she left him standing there while she went to hunt for that accursed bottle. In five minutes she had found it, returned it, thanked him and sent him back to his own room, no further advanced in her acquaintance than when he knocked at her door.

She had laughed at him. He returned fiercely to his work, convinced that she had been laughing at him all the while. Very well: what did he care? He would forget her.

He concentrated all his thoughts upon the idea of forgetting the Lady of the Rose. In order to assist his purpose, he set a new canvas on his easel and fell to work to make a portrait of her as she should be and was not. The contrast would help him, and the plan was cheap, because it needed no model. By the next afternoon he had completed the portrait of a beautiful woman with a white rose at her throat. It was quite his best piece of work, and an excellent likeness of the girl in the room opposite.

He saw that it was a likeness and thought of painting it out, but it would be a pity to destroy his best work, so he merely put it aside. He decided to paint a purely imaginative figure. He squeezed out some paints, almost at haphazard, and began painting in that mood. After forty-eight hours of this sort of thing, he had produced another picture of the same woman in another pose.

In more ways than one, Cartaret's position was growing desperate. His money was almost gone. He must paint something that Fourget, or some equally kind-hearted dealer, would buy, and these two portraits he would not offer for sale.

Telling himself that it was only to end his obsession, he tried twice again to see the Lady of the Rose, who was now going out daily to some master's class, and each time he gained nothing by his attempt. First, she would not answer his knock, though he could hear her moving about and knew that she must have heard him crossing the hall from his own room and be aware of her caller's identity. On the next occasion, he waited for her at the corner of the Boul' Miche' when he knew that she would be returning from the class, and was greeted by nothing save a formal bow. So he had to force himself to pot-boilers by sheer determination, and finally turned out something that then seemed poor enough for Fourget to like.

Houdon came in and found him putting on the finishing touches. The plump musician, frightened by his impudence, had stopped below at his own room on the night of the dinner when the revelers at last came to seek their host. Now it appeared that he was anxious to apologize. He advanced with the dignity befitting a monarch kindly disposed, and his gesturing hands beat the score of the kettle-drums for the march of the priests in *Aïda*.

"My very dear Cartarette!" cried Houdon. "Ah, but it is good again to see you! I so regretted myself not to ascend with our friends to call upon you the evening of our little collation." He sought to dismiss the subject with a run on the invisible piano

and the words: “But I was slightly indisposed: without doubt our good comrades informed you that I was slightly indisposed. I am very sensitive, and these communions of high thought are too much for my delicate nerves.”

His good comrades had told Cartaret that Houdon was very drunk; but Cartaret decided that to continue his quarrel would be an insult to its cause. After all, he reflected, this was Houdon’s conception of an apology. Cartaret looked at the composer, who was a walking symbol of good feeding and iron nerves, and replied:

“Don’t bother to mention it.”

Houdon seized both of Cartaret’s hands and pressed them fondly.

“My friend,” said Houdon magnanimously, “we shall permit ourselves to say no more about it. What sings your sublime poet, Henri Wadsworth Longchap? ‘I shall allow the decomposed past to bury her dead.’—Or do I mistake: was it Whitman, *hein*?”

He gestured his way to Cartaret’s easel, much as if the air were water and he were swimming there. He praised extravagantly the picture that Cartaret now knew to be bad. Finally he began to potter about the room with a pretense of admiring the place and looking at its other canvases, but all the while conveying the feeling that he was apprising the financial status of its occupant. Cartaret saw him drawing nearer and nearer to the two canvases that, their faces toward the wall, bore the likeness of the Lady of the Rose.

“I am just going out,” said Cartaret. He hurried to his visitor and took the fellow’s arm. “I must take that picture on the easel to the rue St. André des Arts. Will you come along?”

Houdon seemed suspicious of this sudden friendliness. He cast a curious glance at the canvases he had been about to examine, but his choice was obviously Hobson’s.

“Gladly,” he flourished. “To my *cher ami* Fourget, is it? But I know him well. Perhaps my influence may assist you.”

“Perhaps,” said Cartaret. He doubted it, but he hoped that something would assist him.

He held the picture, still wet of course, exposed for all the world of the Quarter to see, hurried Houdon past the landing and could have sworn that the composer’s eyes lingered at the sacred door.

“But it is an infamy,” said Houdon, when they had walked as far down the Boul’ Miche’ as the Musée Cluny—“it is an infamy to sell at once such a superb work to such a little cow of a dealer. Why then?”

“Because I must,” said Cartaret.

Houdon laughed and wagged his head.

“No, no,” said he; “you deceive others: not Houdon. I know well the disguised prince. Come”—he looked up and down the Boulevard St. Germain before he ventured to cross it—“trust your friend Houdon, my dear Cartarette.”

“I am quite honest with you.”

“Bah! Have your own way, then. Pursue your fancy of self-support for a time. It is noble, that. But think not that I am deceived. Me, Houdon: I know. Name of an oil-well, you should send this masterpiece to the Salon!”

But just at the corner of the rue St. André des Arts, the great composer thought that he saw ahead of him a friend with whom he had a pressing engagement of five minutes. He excused himself with such a wealth of detail that Cartaret was convinced of the slightness of the Fourget acquaintanceship, which Houdon had not again referred to.

“I shall be finished and waiting at this corner long ere you return,” vowed Houdon. “Go, my friend, and if that little dealer pays you one third of what your picture is worth, my faith, he will bankrupt himself.”

So Cartaret went on alone, and was presently glad that he was unaccompanied.

For Fourget would not buy the picture. It was a silly sketch of a pretty boy pulling to tatters the petals of a rose, and the gray-haired dealer, although he had kindly eyes under his bristling eyebrows, behind his glistening spectacles, shook his head.

“I am sorry,” he said: so many of these hopeful young fellows brought him their loved work, and he had so often, but never untruthfully, to say that he was sorry. “I am very sorry, but this is not the real you, monsieur. The values—you know better than that. The composition—it is unworthy of you, M. Cartarette.”

Cartaret was in no mood to try elsewhere. He wanted to fling the thing into the Seine. He certainly did not want Houdon to see him return with it. Might he leave it with Fourget? Perhaps some customer might see and care for it?

No, Fourget had his reputation to sustain; but there was that rascal Lepoittevin across the street——

Cartaret went to the rascal, a most amiable man, who would buy no more than would Fourget. He was willing, however, to have the picture left there on the bare chance of picking up a sale—and a commission—and there Cartaret left it.

Houdon wormed the truth out of him as easily as if Cartaret had come back carrying the picture under his arm: the young American was too disconsolate to hide his chagrin. Houdon was at first incredulous and then overcome; he asked his dear friend to purchase brandy for the two of them at the Café Pantheon: such treatment of a veritable masterpiece was too much for his sensitive nerves.

With some difficulty, Cartaret got rid of the composer. On a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens, he took account of his resources. They were shockingly slender and, if they were to last him any time at all, he must exercise the most stringent economy. He must buy no more brandy for musical geniuses. Indeed, he must buy no more café dinners for himself....

It struck him, as a happy thought, that he might save a little if he lived on such cold solids as he could buy at the fruit-stand and *pâtisseries* and such liquids as he might warm in a tin-cup over his lamp. Better men than he was had lived thus in the

Quarter, and Cartaret, as the thought took shape, rather enjoyed the prospect: it made him feel as if he were another martyr to Art, or as if—though he was not clear as to the logic of this—he were another martyr to Love. He considered going to Père la Chaise and putting violets on the tomb of Héloise and Abelard; but he decided that he could not afford the tram-fare, and he was already too tired to walk, so he made his scanty purchases instead, and had rather a good time doing it.

He passed Chitta on his way up the stairs to his room, with his arms full of edibles, and he thought that she frowned disapproval. He supposed she would tell her mistress scornfully, and he hoped that her mistress would understand and pity him.

He got a board and nailed it to the sill of one of the rear windows. On that he stored his food and, contemplating it, felt like a successful housekeeper.

CHAPTER VII

OF DOMESTIC ECONOMY, OF DAY-DREAMS, AND OF A FAR COUNTRY AND ITS SOVEREIGN LADY

L'indiscrétion d'un de ces amis officieux qui ne sauraient garder inédite la nouvelle susceptible de vous causer un chagrin.—Murger: *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*.

You would have said that it behooved a man in Charlie Cartaret's situation to devote his evenings to a consideration of its difficulties and his days to hard work; but Cartaret, though he did, as you will see, try to work, devoted the first evening of his new régime to thoughts that, if they affected his situation at all, tended only to complicate it. He thought, as he had so much of late, and as he was to think so much more in the future, of the Lady of the Rose.

Who was she? Whence did she come? What was this native land of hers that she professed to love so well? And, if she did love it so well, why had she left it and come to Paris with a companion that appeared to be some strange compromise between guardian and servant?

He wondered if she were some revolutionary exile: Paris was always full of revolutionary exiles. He wondered if she were a rightful heiress, dispossessed of a foreign title. Perhaps she was the lovely pretender to a throne. In that mysterious home of hers, she must have possessed some exalted position, or the right to it, for Chitta had kneeled to her on the dusty floor of this studio, and the Lady's manner, he now recalled, was the manner of one accustomed to command. Her beauty was of a type that he had read of as Irish—the beauty of fair skin, hair black and eyes of deepest blue; but the speech was the English of a woman born to another tongue.

What was her native speech? Both her French and her English were innocent of alien accent—he had heard at least a phrase or two of the former—yet both had a precision that betrayed them as not her own and both had a foreign-born construction. Her frequent use of the word "sir" in addressing him was sufficiently peculiar. She employed the word not as one that speaks frequently to a superior, but rather as if she were used to it in a formal language, or a grade of life, in which it was a common courtesy. It was something more usual than the French "monsieur," even more usual than the Spanish "señor."

Cartaret leaned from a window. The air was still keen, but the night was clear. The rue du Val de Grâce was deserted, its houses dark and silent. Overhead, in the narrow ribbon of indigo sky, hung a pallid moon: a disk of yellow glass.

What indeed was she, this Lady of the Rose? He pictured as hers a distant country of deep valleys full of clamoring streams and high mountains where white roses grew. He pictured her as that country's sovereign. Yet the rose which she treasured had not yet faded on the day of her arrival: she could not come from anywhere so far away.

He was cold. He closed the window, shivering. He was ridiculous: why, he had been in danger of falling in love with a woman of whom he knew nothing! He did not even know her name....

The passage of slow-footed time helped him, however, not at all. He would sit for hours, idle before his easel, listening for her light step on the stair and afraid to go to meet her when at last he heard it, for he was desperately poor now, and poverty was making him the coward that it will sooner or later make any man.

He had antagonized the concierge by preparing his own coffee in the morning instead of continuing to pay Mme. Refrogné for it. When he had something to cook, he cooked badly; but there were days when he had nothing, and lived on pastry and bricks of chocolate, and others when it seemed to him that such supplies as he could buy and store on that shelf outside the window were oddly short-lived.

For a while he called daily at the shop of M. Lepoittevin, but that absurd picture of a boy tearing a rose would not sell, and Cartaret soon grew ashamed of calling there; Fourget he would not face. He managed at first to dispose of one or two sketches and so kept barely alive, yet, as the days went by, his luck dwindled and his greatest energy was expended in keeping up a proud pretense of comfort to his friends of the Quarter.

Pear-shaped Devignes was easy to deceive: the opera-singer lived too well to want to believe that anybody in the world could starve. Garnier, the cadaverous poet, saved trouble, indulging his dislike of other people's poverty by remaining away from it; but Seraphin, who came often and sat about the studio in a silence wholly uncharacteristic, was difficult. Houdon, finally, was frequent and expensive: he always foraged about what he called Cartaret's "tempting window-buffet," but he regarded the condition of affairs as the passing foible of a young man temporarily wearied by the pleasures of wealth.

"Ah," he snorted one day when he had come in with Varachon, "you fail wholly to deceive me, Cartarette. You say you are not well-to-do so that we shall think that you are not, but I know, I! Had you not your own income, you would try to sell more pictures, and your pictures are superb. They would fetch a pretty sum. Believe not that because I have a great musical genius I have no eye for painting. I know good painting. All Arts are one, my brother."

He jabbed Cartaret's empty stomach and, whistling a theme and twisting his little mustache, went to the window and took a huge bite of the last apple there.

Cartaret watched the composer toss half the apple into the concierge's garden.

Varachon, the sculptor, grunted through his broken nose.

"Your work is bad," he whispered to Cartaret—"very bad. You require a long rest. Go to Nice for a month."

The weeks passed. Cartaret was underfed and discouraged. He was too discouraged now to attempt to renew his acquaintance with the Lady of the Rose. He was pale and thin, and this from reasons wholly physical.

Meanwhile, through the scented dawns, April was coming up to that city in which April is most beautiful and most seductive. From the spicy Mediterranean coasts, along the Valley of the Rhone, Love was dancing upon Paris with laughing Spring for his partner. Already the trees had blossomed between the Place de La Concorde and the Rond Point, and out in the Bois the birds were singing to their mates.

One morning, when Cartaret, with unsteady hand, drew back his curtain, *rouge-gorges* were calling from the concierge's garden, and seemed to be calling to him.

"Seize hold of love!" they chorused in that garden. "Life is short; time flies, and love flies with it. Love will pass you by. Take it, take it, take it, while there still is time! Like us, it is a bird that flies, but, unlike us, it never more returns. It is a rose that withers—a white rose: take it while it blooms. Take it, though it leave you soon; take it, though it scratch your fingers. Take it, take it, take it now!"

On that day the annual siege of Paris ended, the city fell before her invaders, and by the time that Cartaret went into the streets, the army of occupation was in possession. The Luxembourg Gardens, the very benches along the Boul' Miche' were full of lovers: he could not stir from the house without encountering them.

From it, however, he had to go: the Spring called him with a sad seductiveness that he could no longer resist. He wandered aimlessly, trying the impossible: trying to keep his eyes from the couples that also wandered, but wandered hand in hand, and trying to keep his thoughts from roses and the Lady of the Rose.

He found himself before one of the riverside bookstalls, fingering an old book, leather-bound. The text, he realized, was English, or what once was so: it was a volume of Maundeville, and Cartaret was reading:

"Betwene the cytee and the chirche of Bethlehem is the felde Floridus; that is to seyne, the field florsched. For als moche as a fayre mayden was blamed with wrong ... for whiche cause sche was demed to the dethe, and to be brent in that place, to the which she was ladd. And, as the fyre began to brenne about hire, she made her preyeres to oure Lord, that als wissely as sche was not gylty ... that he would help hire, and make it to be knowen to alle men of his mercyfulle grace. And, whanne sche had thus seyd, sche entered into the fuyer; and anon was the fuyer quenched and oute, and the brondes that weren brennynge becomen white roseres, full of roses; and theise werein the first roseres and roses, both white and rede, that ever ony man saughe. And thus was this mayden saved by the grace of God." ...

All that week—while the contents of his window-sideboard dwindled, he was sure, faster than he ate from it—he had tried to forget everything by painting heavily

at pot-boilers. He had begun with the aim of earning enough to resume his studies; he had continued with the hope of getting together enough to keep alive—in Paris. And yet, fleeing from that bookstall, he was fool enough to walk all the way to Les Halles, to walk into Les Halles, and to stop, fascinated by a counter laden with boxes of strawberries, odorous and red, the smallest box of which was beyond the limits of his economy.

That was bad enough—it was absurd that his will should voluntarily play the Barmecide for the torture of his unrewarded Shacabac of a stomach—but worse, without fault of his own, was yet to follow this mere aggravation of his baser appetites. Spring and Paris are an irresistible combination on the side of folly, and that evening another sign of them presented itself: there was a burst of music; a hurdy-gurdy was playing in the rue du Val de Grâce, and Cartaret, from his window, listened eagerly. It has been intimated from the best of sources that all love lives on music, and it is the common experience that when any love cannot get the best music, it takes what it can get:

"Her brow is like the snaw-drift;Her throat is like the swan;Her face it is the fairestThat e'er the sun shone on—That e'er the sun shone on—And dark blue is her e'e——"

That French hurdy-gurdy was playing "Annie Laurie," and, since the lonely artist's heart ached to hear the old, familiar melody, when the bearded grinder looked aloft, Cartaret drew a coin from his pocket. Anxious to pay for his pain, as the human kind always is, he tossed his last franc to that vendor of emotions in the twilit street.

He was drunk at last with the wine that his own misery distilled. He abandoned himself to the admission that he was in love: he abandoned himself to his dream of the Lady of the Rose.

Seraphin, in a wonderful new suit of clothes, found him thus the next morning—it was a Friday—and found him accordingly resentful of intrusion. Cartaret was sitting before an empty easel, his hands clasped in his lap, his eyes looking vacantly through the posts of the easel.

"Good-day," said Seraphin.

Cartaret said "Good-day" as if it were a form of insult.

Seraphin's hands tugged at his two wisps of whisker.

"You are not well, *hein*?"

"I was never better in my life," snapped Cartaret, turning upon his friend a face that was peaked and drawn.

The Frenchman came timidly nearer.

"My friend," he said, "I have completed my *magnum opus*. It has not sold quite so well as I hoped, not of course one thousandth of its value. That is this Spanish cow of a world. But I have three hundred francs. If you need——"

"Go away," said Cartaret, looking at his empty easel. "Can't you see I'm trying to begin work?"

Seraphin himself had suffered. His dignity was not offended: he kept it for only his creditors and other foes. He guessed that Cartaret was at last penniless, and he guessed rightly.

"Come, my friend," he began; "none shall know. Will you not be so kind as to let me——"

Cartaret got up and, for all his weakness, gripped the Frenchman's hand until Dieudonné nearly screamed.

"I'm a beast, Seraphin!" said Cartaret. "I'm a beast to treat a friendly offer this way. Forgive me. It's just that I feel a bit rocky this morning. I drank too much champagne last night. I do thank you, Seraphin. You're a good fellow, the best of the lot, and a sight better than I am. But I'm not hard up; really I'm not. I'm poor, but I'm not a sou poorer than I was this time last year."

It was a magnificent lie. Seraphin could only shrug, pretend to believe it, and go away.

Cartaret scarcely heeded the departure. He had relapsed into his day-dream. He took from against the wall the two portraits that he had painted of the Lady of the Rose and hung them, now here, now there, trying them in various lights. There were at least ten more sketches of her by this time, and these, too, he hung in first one light and then another. He studied them and tried to be critical, and forgot to be.

His thoughts of her never took the shape of conscious words—he loved her too much to attempt to praise her—but, as he looked at his endeavors to portray her, his mind was busy with his memories of all that loveliness—and passed from memories to day-dreams. He saw her as something that might fade before his touch. He saw her as a Princess, incognito, learning his plight, buying his pictures secretly, and, when she came to her throne, letting him serve her and worship from afar. And then he saw her even as a Galatea possible of miraculous awakening. Why not? Her eyes were the clear eyes of a woman that has never yet loved, but they were also, he felt, the eyes of one of those rare women who, when they love once, love forever. Cartaret dared, in his thoughts, to lift the heavy plaits of her blue-black hair and, with trembling fingers, again to touch that hand at the recollection of touching which his own hand tingled.

Why not, indeed? Already a stranger thing had happened in his meeting her. Until that year he had not guessed at her existence; oceans divided them; the barriers of alien race and alien speech were raised high between them, and all of these things had been in vain. The existence was revealed, the ocean was crossed, the bar of sundering speech was down. He was here, close beside her, as if every event of his life had been intended to bring him. Through blind ways and up ascents misunderstood, unattracted by the many and lonely among the crowd, he had, somehow, always been making his way toward—Her.

Thus Cartaret dreamed while Seraphin made a hurried journey to the rue St. André des Arts and the shop of M. Fourget.

“But no, but no, but no!” Fourget’s bushy brows met in a frown. “It is out of the question. Something has happened to the boy. He can no longer paint.”

Oh, well, at least monsieur could go to the boy’s rooms and see what he had there.

“No. Am I then a silly philanthropist?”

Seraphin tried to produce his false dignity. What he brought out was something genuine.

“I ask it from the heart,” he pleaded. “Do not I, my God, know what it is to be hungry?”

“Hungry?” said the dealer. “Hungry! The boy has an uncle famously rich. What is an uncle for? Hungry? You make *une bêtise*. Hungry.” He called his clerk and took up his hat. “I will not go,” he vowed. “Hungry, *par example*!”

“Truly you will not,” smiled Seraphin. “And do not tell him that I sent you: he is proud.”

The sound of the door opening interrupted Cartaret’s dream. He turned, a little sheepish, wholly annoyed. Spectacled Fourget stood there, looking very severe.

“I was passing by,” he explained. “I have not come to purchase anything, but I grow old: I was tired and I climbed your stairs to rest.”

It was too late to hide those portraits. Cartaret could only place for Fourget a chair with its back to them.

“What have you been doing?” asked the dealer.

He swung ’round toward the portraits.

“Don’t look at them!” said Cartaret. “They’re merely sketches.”

But Fourget had already looked. He was on his feet. He was bobbing from one to the other, his lean hands adjusting his glasses, his shoulders stooped, his nose thrust out. He was uttering little cries of approval.

“But this is good! It is good, then. This is first-rate. This is of an excellence!”

“They’re not for sale,” said Cartaret.

“*Hein?*” Fourget wheeled. “If they are not for sale, they are for what, then?”

“They—they are merely sketches, I tell you. I was trying my hand at a new method; but I find there is nothing in it.”

Fourget was unbuttoning his short frock-coat. He was reaching for his wallet.

“I tell you there is everything in it. There is the sure touch in it, the clear vision, the sympathy. There is reputation in it. In fine, there is money.”

He had the wallet out as he concluded.

Cartaret shook his head.

“Oh,” said Fourget, the dealer in him partially overcoming the lover of art, “not much as yet; not a great deal of money. You have still a long way to go; but you have found the road, monsieur, and I want to help you on your journey. Come, now.” He nodded to the first portrait. “What do you ask for that?”

“I don’t want to sell it.”

“Poof! We shall not haggle. Tell Fourget what you had thought of asking. Do not be modest. Tell me—and I will give you half.”

He kept it up as long as he could; he tried at last to buy the least of the preliminary sketches of the Rose-Lady; he offered what, to Cartaret, were dazzling prices; but Cartaret was not to be shaken: these experiments were not for sale.

Fourget was first disappointed, then puzzled. His enthusiasm had been genuine; but could it be possible that Dieudonné was mistaken? Was Cartaret not starving? The old man was beginning to button his coat when a new idea struck him.

“Who was your model?” he asked abruptly.

“I—I had none,” Cartaret stammered.

“Ah!”—Fourget peered hard at him through those glistening spectacles. “You painted them from memory?”

“Yes.” Cartaret felt his face redden. “From imagination, I mean.”

Then Fourget understood. Perhaps he had merely the typical Frenchman’s love of romance, which ceases only with the typical Frenchman’s life; or perhaps he remembered his own youth in Besançon, when he, too, had wanted to be an artist and when, among the vines on the hillside, little Rosalie smiled at him and kissed his ambition away—little Rosalie Poullot, dust and ashes these twenty years in the Cimetière du Mont Parnasse....

He turned to a pile of pot-boilers. He took one almost at random.

“This one,” he said, “I should like to buy it.”

It was the worst pot-boiler of the lot. Before the portraits, it was hopeless.

Cartaret half understood.

“No,” he said; “you don’t really want it.”

Seraphin had been right: the young man was proud. “How then?” demanded Fourget. “This also did you paint not-to-sell?”

“I painted it to sell,” said Cartaret miserably, “but it doesn’t deserve selling—perhaps just because I did paint it to sell.”

To his surprise, Fourget came to him and put an arm on his shoulder, a withered hand patting the American’s back.

“Ah, if but some more-famous artists felt as you do! Come; let me have it. That is very well. I shall sell it to a fool. Many fools are my patrons. How else could I live? There is not enough good art to meet all demands, or there are not enough demands to meet all good art. Who shall say? Suffice it there are demands of sorts. Daily I thank the good God for His fools....”

Cartaret went to Les Halles and bought a large box of strawberries.

He had put them carefully on his window-shelf and covered them with a copy of a last week’s *Matin*—being an American, he of course read the *Matin*—for he was resolved that, now he again had a little money, these strawberries should be his final extravagance and should be treasured accordingly—he had just anchored the paper against the gentle Spring breeze when he became aware that he had another visitor.

Standing by his table, much as she had stood there on the night of his second sight of her, was the Lady of the Rose.

Cartaret thought that his eyes were playing him tricks. He rubbed his eyes.

"It is I," she said.

He thought that again he could detect the perfume of the Azure Rose. He again thought that he could see white mountain-tops in the sun. He could have sworn that, in the street, a hurdy-gurdy was playing:

"Her brow is like the snaw-drift;Her throat is like the swan——"

"I came in," she was saying, "to see how you were. I should have sent Chitta, but she was so long coming back from an errand."

"Thank you," he said—he was not yet certain of himself—"I'm quite well. But I'm very glad you called."

"Yet you, sir, look pale, and your friend"—her forehead puckered—"told me that you had been ill."

"My friend?" He spoke as if he had none in the world, though now he knew better.

"Yes: such a pleasant old gentleman with gray hair and glasses. As I came in half an hour ago, I met him on the stairs."

"Fourget!"

"Was that his name? He seemed most anxious about you."

"He is my friend."

"I like him," said the Lady of the Rose.

"Then you understand him. I didn't understand him—till this morning. He is an art-dealer: those that he won't buy from think him hard; the friends of those that he buys from think him a fool."

Although he had reassured her of his health, she seemed charmingly willing to linger. Really, she was looking at Cartaret's haggard cheeks with a wonderful sympathy.

"So he bought from you?"

Cartaret nodded.

"Only I hope *you* won't think him a fool," he said.

"I shall consider," she laughed. "I must first see some of your work, sir."

She came farther into the room. She moved with an easy dignity, her advance into the light displaying the lines of her gracile figure, the turn of her head discovering the young curve of her throat; her eyes, as they moved about his studio, were clear and starry.

In the presence of their original, Cartaret had forgotten the portraits. Now she saw them and turned scarlet.

It was a time for no more pride on the part of the painter: already, head high in air, she had turned to go. It was a time for honest dealing. Cartaret barred her way.

"Forgive me!" he cried. "Won't you please forgive me?"

She tried to pass him without a word.

"But listen. Only listen a minute! You didn't think—oh, you didn't think I'd sold him one of those? They were on the wall when he came in, and I couldn't get them away in time. I'd put them up—Well, I'd put them up there because I—because I couldn't see you, so I wanted to see them."

His voice trembled; he looked ill now: she hesitated.

"What right had you, sir, to paint them?"

"I don't know. I hadn't any. Of course, I hadn't any! But I wouldn't have sold them to the Luxembourg."

What was it that Fourget had told her when he met her on the stair?—"Mademoiselle, you will pardon an old man: that Young Cartarette cannot paint pot-boilers, and in consequence he starves. For more things than money, mademoiselle. But because he cannot paint pot-boilers and get money, he starves literally."—Her heart smote her now, but she could not refrain from saying:

"Perhaps the Luxembourg did not offer—in the person of M. Fourget?"

The last vestige of his pride left Cartaret.

"He wanted to buy those portraits," he said. "I know that my action loses by the telling of it whatever virtue it might have had, but I'd rather have that happen than have you think what you've been thinking. He offered me more for them than for all my other pictures together, but I couldn't sell."

It was a mood not to be denied: she forgave him.

"But you, sir, must take them all down," she said, "and you must promise to paint no more of them."

He would have promised anything: he promised this, and he had an immediate reward.

"To-morrow," she asked, "perhaps you will eat *déjeuner* with Chitta and me?"

Would he! He did not know that she invited him because of Fourget's use of the phrase "starving literally." He accepted, declaring that he would never more call Friday unlucky.

"At eleven o'clock?" she asked.

"At eleven," he bowed.

When she was gone, Cartaret went again to the window that looked on the concierge's garden. The robins were still singing:

"Seize hold of love! It is a rose—a white rose. Take it—take it—take it now!"

CHAPTER VIII

CHIEFLY CONCERNING STRAWBERRIES

Theft in its simplicity—however sharp and rude, yet if frankly done, and bravely—does not corrupt men's souls; and they can, in a foolish, but quite vital and faithful way, keep the feast of the Virgin Mary in the midst of it.—Ruskin: *Fors Clavigera*.

It was quite true that he had resolved to be careful of the money that old Fourget had paid him for the pot-boiler. He still meant to be careful of it. But he was to be a guest at *déjeuner* next morning, and a man must not breakfast with a Princess and wear a costume that is really shockingly shabby. Cartaret therefore set about devising some means of bettering his wardrobe.

His impulse was to buy a new suit of clothes, as Seraphin had done when he sold his picture. Seraphin, however, had received a good deal more money than Cartaret, and Cartaret was really in earnest about his economies: when he had spent half the afternoon in the shops, and found that most of the ready-made suits there exposed for sale would cost him the bulk of his new capital, he decided to sponge his present suit, sew on a few buttons and then sleep with it under his mattress by way of pressing it. A new necktie was, nevertheless, imperative: he had been absent-mindedly wiping his brushes on the old, and it would not do to smell more of turpentine than the exigencies of his suit made necessary; the scent of turpentine is not appetizing.

If you have never been in love, you may suppose that the selection of so small a thing as a necktie is trivial; otherwise, you will know that there are occasions when it is no light matter, and you will then understand why Cartaret found it positively portentous. The first score of neckties that he looked at were impossible; so were the second. In the third he found one that would perhaps just do, and this he had laid aside for him while he went on to another shop. He went to several other shops. Whereas he had at first found too few possibilities, he was now embarrassed by too many. There was a flowing marine-blue affair with white *fleur-de-lys* that he thought would do well for Seraphin and that he considered for a moment on his own account. He went back to the first shop and so through the lot again. In the end, his American fear of anything bright conquered, and he bought a gray "four-in-hand" that might have been made in Philadelphia.

On his return he went to the window to see how his strawberries were doing. He remembered the anecdote about the good cleric, who said that doubtless God could have made a better berry, but that doubtless God never did. Cartaret wondered if it would be an impertinence to offer his strawberries to the Lady of the Rose.

They were gone.

He went down the stairs in two jumps. He thrust his head into the concierge's cavern.

"Who's been to my room?" he shouted. He was still weak, but anger lent him strength.

Refrogné growled.

"Tell me!" insisted Cartaret.

"How should I know?" the concierge countered.

"It's your business to know. You're responsible. Who's come in and gone out since I went out?"

"Nobody."

"There must have been somebody! Somebody has been to my room and stolen something."

Thefts are not so far removed from the sphere of a concierge's natural activities as unduly to excite him.

"To rob it is not necessary that one come in from without," said he.

"You charge a tenant?"

"I charge nobody. It is you that charge, monsieur. I did not know that you possessed to be stolen. A thief of a tenant? But certainly. One cannot inquire the business of one's tenants. What house is without a little thief?"

"I believe you did it!" said Cartaret.

Refrogné whistled, in the darkness, a bar of "Margarita."

Houdon was passing by. He made suave enquiries.

"But not Refrogné," he assured Cartaret. "You do an injustice to a worthy man, my dear friend. Besides, what is a box of strawberries to you?"

Cartaret felt that he was in danger of making a mountain of a molehill; he had the morbid fear, common to his countrymen, of appearing ridiculous. It occurred to him that it would not have been beyond Houdon to appropriate the berries, if he had happened into the room and found its master absent; but to bother further was to be once more absurd.

"I don't suppose it does matter," he said; "but my supplies have been going pretty fast lately, and if I was to catch the thief, I'd hammer the life out of him."

"Magnificent!" gurgled Houdon as he passed gesturing into the street.

Cartaret returned toward his room. The dusk had fallen and, if he had not known the way so well, he would have had trouble in finding it. He was tired, too, and so he went slowly. That he also went softly he did not realize until he gently pushed open the door to his quarters.

A shadowy figure was silhouetted against the window out of which Cartaret kept his supplies, and the figure seemed to have some of them in its hands.

Cartaret's anger was still hot. Now it flamed to a sudden fury. He did not pause to consider the personality, or even the garb, of the thief. He saw nothing, thought nothing, save that he was being robbed. He charged the dim figure; tackled it as he

once tackled runners on the football-field; fell with it much as he had fallen with those runners in the days of old—except that he fell among a hail of food-stuffs—and then found himself tragically holding to the floor the duenna Chitta.

It was a terrible thing, this battle with a frightened woman. Cartaret tried to rise, but she gripped him fast. His amazement first, and next his mortification, would have left him nerveless, but Chitta was fighting like a tigress. His face was scratched and one finger bitten, before he could hold her quiet enough to say, in slow French:

"I did not know that it was you. You are welcome to what you want. I am going to let you go. Don't struggle. I shan't hurt you. Get up."

He thanked Heaven that she understood at least a little of the language. Shaken, he got to his own feet; but Chitta, instead of rising, surprisingly knelt at his.

She spouted a long speech of infinite emotion. She wept. She clasped and unclasped her hands. She pointed to the room of her mistress; then to her mouth, and then rubbed that portion of her figure over the spot where the appetite is appeased.

"Do you mean," gasped Cartaret—"do you mean that you and your mistress"—this was terrible!—"have been poor?"

Chitta had come to the room without her head-dress, and the subsequent battle had sent her hair in dank coils about her shoulders. She nodded; the shaken coils were like so many serpents.

"And that she has been hungry?—Hungry?"

A violent negative. Chitta bobbed toward Cartaret's rifled stores and then toward the street, as if to include other stores in the same circle of depredation. She was also plainly indignant at the idea that she would permit her mistress to be hungry.

"Oh," said Cartaret, "I see! You are a consistent thief."

This time Chitta's nod was a proud one; but she pointed again to the other room and shook her head violently; then to herself and nodded once more. Words could not more plainly have said that, although she had been supplementing her provisions by petty thefts, her employer knew nothing about them.

And she must not be told. Again Chitta began to bob and moan and weep. She pointed across the hallway, put a finger to her lips, shook her old head and finally held out her clasped hands in supplication.

Cartaret emptied his pockets. He wished he had not been so extravagant as to buy that necktie. He handed to Chitta all the money left from the price that Fourget had paid him, to the last five-centime piece.

"Take this," he said, "and be sure you don't ever let your mistress know where it came from. I shan't tell anybody about you. When you want more, come direct to me." He knew that he could paint marketable pot-boilers now.

She wanted to kiss his hand, but he hurried from the woman and left her groveling behind him....

"M. Refrogné," he said to the concierge, "I owe you an apology. I am sorry for the way I spoke to you a while ago. I have found those strawberries."

“Bah!” said Refrogné. He added, when Cartaret had passed: “In his stomach, most likely.”

Slowly the horror of having had to use physical force against a woman left Cartaret. He started for a long walk and thought many things. He thought, as he trudged at last across L’Etoile, how the April starshine was turning the Arc de Triomphe to silver, and how the lovers on the benches at the junction of the rue Lauriston and the avenue Kléber made Napoleon’s arch in praise of war a monument to softer passions. He thought, as he strolled from the avenue d’Eylan and across the Place Victor Hugo, how the heart of that poet, whose statue here represented him as so much the politician, must grow warm when, as now, boys and girls passed arm in arm about the pediment. The night bore jonquils in her hands and wore a spray of wisteria in her hair. Brocaded ghosts of the old régime must be pacing a stately measure at Ranelagh, and all the elves of Spring were dancing in the Bois.

The Princess was poor. That brought her nearer to him: it gave him a chance to help her. Cartaret found it hard to be sorry that she was poor.

CHAPTER IX

BEING THE TRUE REPORT OF A CHAPERONED DÉJEUNER

For she hath breathed celestial air,And heavenly food hath been her fare,And heavenly thought and feelings give her faceThat heavenly grace.—Southey: *The Curse of Kehama*.

Sometimes a mattress is doubtless as efficient a means of pressing one's clothes as any other means, but doubtless always a good deal depends upon the mattress. By way of general rules, it may be laid down, for instance, that the mattress employed must not be too thin, must not be stuffed with a material so gregarious as to gather together in lumpy communities, and must not sag in the middle. Cartaret's mattress failed to meet these fundamental requirements, and when he made his careful toilet on the morning that he was to take *déjeuner* at the Room Across the Landing, he became uneasily aware that his clothes betrayed certain evidences of what had happened to them. He had been up half a dozen times in the night to rearrange the garments, in fear of just such a misfortune; but his activities were badly repaid; the front of the suit bore a series of peculiar wrinkles, rather like the complicated hatchments on an ancient family's escutcheon; he could not see how, when the coat was on him, its back looked, and he was afraid to speculate. With his mirror now hung high and now standing on the floor, he practiced before it until he happily discovered that the wrinkles could be given a more or less reasonable excuse if he could only remember to adopt and assume a mildly Pre-Raphaelite bearing.

Something else that his glass showed him gave him more anxiety and appeared beyond concealment: Chitta's claws had left two long scratches across his right cheek. He had no powder and no money to buy any. He did think of trying a touch of his own paint, but he feared that oils were not suited to the purpose and would only make the wound more noticeable. He would simply have to let it go.

He had wakened with the first ray of sunlight that set the birds to singing in the garden, and, Chitta's fall of the previous evening having spilled his coffee and devastated his supplies, he was forced to go without a *petit déjeuner*. He found a little tobacco in one of his coat-pockets and smoked that until the bells of St. Sulpice, after an unconscionable delay, rang the glad hour for which he waited.

Chitta opened the door to his knock, and he was at once aware of her mistress standing, in white, behind her; but the old duenna was aware of it too and ordered herself accordingly. Chitta bowed low enough to appease the watchful Lady of the Rose, but Chitta's eyes, as she lowered them, glowered at him suspiciously. It was

clear that she by no means joined in the welcome that the Lady immediately accorded him.

The Lady, in clinging muslin and with a black lace scarf of delicate workmanship draped over her black hair, gave him her hand, and this time Cartaret was not slow to kiss it. The action was one to which he was scarcely accustomed, and he hesitated between the fear of being discourteously brief about it and the fear of being discourteously long. He could be certain only of how cool and firm her hand was and, as he looked up from it, how pink and fresh her cheeks.

It was then that the Lady saw the scratches.

"Oh, but you have had an accident!" she cried.

Cartaret's hand went to his face. He looked at Chitta: Chitta's returning glance was something between an appeal and a threat, but a trifle nearer the latter.

"I had a little fall," said Cartaret, "and I was scratched in falling."

The room was bare, but clean and pleasant, fresh from the constant application of Chitta's mop and broom, fresher from the Spring breeze that came in through the front windows, and freshest from the presence of the Lady of the Rose. Two curtained corners seemed to contain beds. At the rear, behind a screen, there must have been a gas-stove where Chitta could soon be heard at work upon the breakfast. What furniture there was bore every evidence of being Parisian, purchased in the Quarter; there was none to indicate the nationality of the tenants; and the bright little table, at which Cartaret was presently seated so comfortably as to forget the necessity of the Pre-Raphaelite pose, was Parisian too.

"You must speak French," smiled the Lady—how very white her teeth were, and how very red her lips!—as she looked at him across the coffee-urn: "that is the sole condition that, sir, I impose upon you."

"Willingly," said Cartaret, in the language thus imposed; "but why, when you speak English so well?"

"Because"—the Lady was half serious about it—"I had to promise Chitta that, under threat of her leaving Paris; and if she left Paris, I should of course have to leave it, too. French she understands a little, as you know, but not English, and"—the Lady's pink deepened—"she says that English is the one language of which she cannot even guess the meaning when she hears it, because English is the one language that can be spoken with the lips only, and spoken as if the speaker's face were a mask."

He said he should have thought that Chitta would pick it up from her. "Why," he said, "it comes so readily to you: you answered in it instinctively that time when I first saw you. Don't you remember?"

"I remember. I was very frightened. Perhaps I used it when you did because we had an English governess at my home and speak it much in the family. We speak it when we do not want the servants to understand, and so we have kept it from Chitta." She was pouring the coffee. "Tell me truly: do I indeed speak it well?"

“Excellently. Of course you are a little precise.”

“How precise?”

“Well, you said, that time, ‘It is I’; we generally say ‘It’s me’—like the French, you understand.”

If Princesses could pout, he would have said that she pouted.

“But I was right.”

“Not entirely. You weren’t colloquial.”

“I was correct,” she insisted. “‘It is I’ is correct. My grammar says that the verb ‘To be’ takes the same case after it as before it. If the Americans say something else, they do not speak good English.”

Cartaret laughed.

“The English say it, too.”

“Then,” said the Lady with an emphatic nod, “the English also.”

It was a simple breakfast, but excellently cooked, and Cartaret had come to it with a healthy hunger. Chitta was present only in the capacity of servant; but managed to be constantly within earshot and generally to have hostess and guest under her supervision. He felt her eyes upon him when she brought in the highly-seasoned omelette, when she replenished the coffee; frequently he even caught her peeping around the screen that hid the stove. It was a marvel that she could cook so well, since she was forever deserting her post. She made Cartaret blush with the memory of his gift to her; she made him feel that his gift had only increased her distrust; when he fell to talking about himself, he made light of his poverty, so that, should Chitta’s evident scruples against him ever lead her to betray what he had done, the Lady might not feel that he had sacrificed too much in giving so little.

Nevertheless, Cartaret was in no mood for complaint: he was sitting opposite his Princess and was happy. He told her of his life in America, of football and of Broadway. It is a rare thing for a lover to speak of his sister, but Cartaret even mentioned Cora.

“Is she afraid of you, monsieur?” asked the Lady.

“I can’t imagine Cora being afraid of any mere man.”

“Ah,” said the Lady; “then the American brothers are different from brothers in my country. I have a brother. I think he is the handsomest and bravest man in the world, and I love him. But I fear him too. I fear him very much.”

“Your own brother?”

The Lady was giving Cartaret some more omelette. Cartaret, holding his ready plate, saw her glance toward the rear of the room and saw her meet the eyes of Chitta, whose face was thrust around the screen.

“Yes,” said the Lady.

It struck Cartaret that she dropped her brother rather quickly. She talked of other things.

“Your name,” she said, “is English: the concierge gave it me. It is English, is it not?”

She had made enquiries about him, then: Cartaret liked that.

“My people were English, long ago,” he answered. He grew bold. He had been a fool not to make enquiries about her, but now he would make them at first hand. “I don’t know your name,” he said.

He saw her glance again toward the rear of the room, but when he looked he saw nobody. The Lady was saying:

“Urola.”

It helped him very little. He said;

“That sounds Spanish.”

Instantly her head went up. There was blue fire in her eyes as she answered:

“I have not one drop of Spanish blood; not one.”

He had meant no offense, yet it was clear that he came dangerously near one. He made haste to apologize.

“You do not understand,” she said, smiling a little. “In my country we hate the Spaniard.”

“What is your country?”

It was the most natural of questions—he had put it once before—yet he had now no sooner uttered it than he felt that he had committed another indiscretion. This time, when she glanced at the rear of the room, he distinctly saw Chitta’s head disappearing behind the screen.

“It is a far country,” said Mlle. Urola. “It is a wild country. We have no opportunities to study art in my country. So I came to Paris.”

After that there was nothing for him to do but to be interested in her studies, and of them she told him willingly enough. She was very ambitious; she worked hard, but she made, she said, little progress.

“The people that have no feeling for any art I pity,” she said; “but, oh, I pity more those who want to be some sort of artist and cannot be! The desire without the talent, that kills.”

Chitta was coming back, bearing aloft a fresh dish. She bore it with an air more haughty than any she had yet assumed. Directing at Cartaret a glance of pride and scorn, she set before her mistress—Cartaret’s strawberries.

The Lady clapped her pretty hands. She laughed with delight.

“This,” she said, “is a surprise! I had not known that we were to have strawberries. It is so like Chitta. She is so kind and thoughtful, monsieur. Always she has for me some surprise like this.”

“It is a surprise,” said Cartaret. “I’m sure I’ll enjoy it.”

She served the berries while Chitta stalked away.

“I find,” confessed the Lady in English, “that they are not so good below as they seemed on the top. You will not object?”

Oh, no: Cartaret wouldn't object.

"I suppose," said Mlle. Urola, "that I should reprimand her, for their quality is"—she frowned at the berries—"inferior; but I have not the heart. Not for the whole world could I hurt her feelings. She is both so kind and so proud, and she is such a marvel of economy. You, sir, would not guess how well she makes me fare upon how small an expense."

After breakfast, she showed him some examples of her work. It had delicacy and feeling. An unprejudiced critic would have said that she had much to learn in the way of technique, but to Cartaret every one of her sketches was a marvel.

"This," she said, again in English, as she produced a drawing from the bottom of her bundle, "does not compare with what you did, sir, but it is not the work of a flatterer, since it is my own work. It is I."

It was a rapid sketch of herself and it was, as she had said, the work of no flatterer.

"I like that least of all," declared Cartaret, in the language to which she had returned; but he wanted her to forget those portraits he had made. He caught, consequently, at trifles. "Why don't you say 'It's me'?" he asked.

She clasped her hands behind her and stood looking up at him with her chin tilted and her unconscious lips close to his.

"I say what is right, sir," she challenged.

He laughed, but shook his head.

"I know better," said he.

"No," she said. She was smiling, but serious. "It is I that am right. And even if I learned that I were wrong, I would now not change. It would be a surrender to you."

Cartaret found his color high. His mind was putting into her words a meaning he was afraid she might see that he put there.

"Not to me," he said.

"Yes, yes, to you!"

Surrender! What a troublesome word she was using!

The chin went higher; the lips came nearer.

"A complete surrender, sir." Quickly she stepped back. If she had read his face rightly, her face gave no hint of it, but she was at once her former self. "And that I will never do," she said, reverting to French.

It was Cartaret's turn to want to change the subject. He did it awkwardly.

"Have you been in the Bois?" he asked.

No, she had not been in the Bois. She loved nature too well to care for artificial scenery.

"But the Bois is the sort of art that improves on nature," he protested; "at least, so the Parisian will tell you; and, really, it is beautiful now. You ought to see it. I was there last night."

"You go alone into the Bois in the night? Is not that dangerous?"

He could not tell whether she was mocking him. He said:
“It isn’t dangerous in the afternoons, at any rate. Let me take you there.”
She hesitated. Chitta was clattering dishes in the improvised kitchen.
“Perhaps,” said the Lady.
Cartaret’s heart bounded.
“Now?” he asked.
The dishes clattered mightily.
“How prompt you are!” she laughed. “No, not now. I have my lessons.”
“To-morrow, then?”
“Perhaps,” said the Lady of the Rose. “Perhaps——”
Cartaret’s face brightened.
“That is,” explained his hostess, “if you will not try to teach me English, sir.”

CHAPTER X

AN ACCOUNT OF AN EMPTY PURSE AND A FULL HEART, IN THE COURSE OF WHICH THE AUTHOR BARELY ESCAPES TELLING A VERY OLD STORY

C'est état bizarre de folie tendre qui fait que nous n'avons plus de pensée que pour des actes d'adoration. On devient véritablement un possédé que hante une femme, et rien n'existe plus pour nous à côté d'elle.—De Maupassant: *Un Soir*.

The Lady's "perhaps" meant "yes," it seemed, for, when Cartaret called for her the next day, he found her ready to go to the Bois, and not the Lady only: hovering severely in the immediate background, like a thunder-cloud over a Spring landscape, was Chitta, wrapped in a shawl of marvelous lace, doubtless from her own country, and crowned with a brilliant bonnet unmistakably procured at some second-hand shop off the rue St. Jacques. The Lady noticed his expression of bewilderment and appeared a little annoyed by it.

"Of course," she said, "Chitta accompanies us."

Cartaret had to submit.

"Certainly," said he.

He proposed a taxi-cab to the Bois—he had visited the Mont de Piété—but the Lady would not hear of it; she was used to walking; she was a good walker; she liked to walk.

"But it's miles," Cartaret protested.

"It is nothing," said she.

Her utmost concession was to go by tram to the *Arc*.

It was a beautiful day in the Bois, with half of Paris there: carriages from the Faubourg St. Germain, motors of the smart set, hired conveyances full of tourists. The trees were a tender green; the footways crowded by the Parisian bourgeois, making a day of it with his family. Slim officers walked, in black jackets and red trousers, the calves of their legs compressed in patent-leather riding-leggings; women of the half-world showed brilliant toilettes that had been copied by ladies of the *haut monde*, who, driven past, wore them not quite so well. Grotesquely clipped French poodles rode in the carriages, and Belgian police-dogs in the automobiles; thin-nosed collies frolicked after their masters; here and there a tailless English sheep-dog waddled by, or a Russian boar-hound paced sedately; children played on the grass and dashed across the paths with a suddenness that threatened the safety of the adult pedestrians.

Cartaret led the way into the less frequented portions of the great park beyond the Lac Inférieur. The Lady was pleasantly beside him, Chitta unpleasantly at his heels.

"Don't you admit it's worth coming to see?" he began in English. "When I was here, under the stars, the other night——"

"You must speak French," the Lady smilingly interrupted. "You must remember my promise to Chitta."

Cartaret ground his teeth. He spoke thereafter in French, but he lowered his voice so as to be sure that Chitta could not understand him.

"I was thinking then that you ought to see it." He took his courage in both hands. "I was wishing very much that you were with me." His brown eyes sought hers steadily. "May I tell you all that I was wishing?"

"Not now," she said.

Her tone was conventional enough, but in her face he read—and he was sure that she had meant him to read—a something deeper.

He put it to her flatly: "When?"

She was looking now at the fresh green leaves above them. When she looked down, she was still smiling, but her smile was wistful.

"When dreams come true, perhaps," she said. "Do dreams ever come true in the American United States, monsieur?"

The spell of the Spring was dangerously upon them both. Cartaret's breath came quickly.

"I wish—I wish that you were franker with me," he said.

"But am I ever anything except frank?"

"You're—I know I haven't any right to expect your confidence: you scarcely know me. But why won't you tell me even where you come from and who you are?"

"You know my name."

"I know a part of it."

"My little name is—it is Vitoria."

"V-i-t-t-o-r-i-a?" he spelled.

"Yes, but with one 't,'" the Lady said.

"Vitoria Urola," he repeated.

She raised her even brows.

"Oh, yes; of course," said she.

Somehow it struck him that its sound was scarcely familiar to her:

"Do I pronounce it badly?"

"No, no: you are quite correct."

"But not quite to be trusted?"

She looked at him doubtfully. She looked at Chitta and gave her a quick order that sent the duenna reluctantly ahead of them. Then the Lady put her gloved hand on Cartaret's arm.

"I want you to be my friend," she said.

"I am your friend," he protested: "that is what I want you to believe. That is why I ask you to be frank with me. I want you to tell me just enough to let me help—to let me protect you. If you are in danger, I want——"

"You might be my danger."

"I?"

She bowed assent.

"No, do not ask me why. I shall not tell you. I shall never tell you—no more," she smiled, "than I shall ever say for you 'it's me.' It is very kind of you to want to be my friend. I am alone here in Paris, except for poor Chitta, and I shall be glad if you will be my friend; but it will not be very easy."

"It would be hard to be anything else."

"Not for you: you are too curious. My friend must let me be just what I am here. All that I was before I came to Paris, all that I may be after I leave it, he must ask nothing about."

Cartaret looked long into her eyes.

"All right," he said at last. "I am glad to have that much. And—thank you."

He stuck to his side of their agreement; not only during that afternoon in the Bois, but during the days that followed. He worked hard. He turned out one really good picture, and he turned out many successful pot-boilers. He would not impose these on Fourget, because old Fourget had already been too kind to him; but Lepoittevin wanted such stuff, and Cartaret let him have it.

Cartaret worked gladly now, because he was, however little she might guess it, working for Vitoria. He had left for himself precisely enough to keep him alive, but every third or fourth day he would have the happiness of slipping a little silver into Chitta's horny palm: Chitta came readily to the habit of waiting for him on the stair. He grew happier day by day, and looked—as who does not?—the better for it. He sought out Seraphin and Varachon; he bought brandy for Houdon; went to hear Devignes sing, and once he had Armand Garnier to luncheon. He rewarded the hurdy-gurdy so splendidly that it was a nightly visitor to the rue du Val de Grâce: the entire street was whistling "Annie Laurie."

Seraphin guessed the truth.

"Ah, my friend," he nodded, "that foolish one, Houdon, says that you have again decided to spend of your income: *I* know that you are somehow making largess with your heart."

Cartaret took frequent walks with Vitoria, Chitta always two feet behind, never closer, but never farther away. Often he saw the Lady to her classes, more frequently they walked to the Ile Saint Louis, or between the old houses of the rue des Francs Bourgeois; to the Jardin des Plantes, or into the Cours de Dragon or St. Germain des Prés: Chitta's unsophisticated mind should have been improved by a thorough knowledge of picturesque Paris.

He was guilty of trying to elude the guardian—guilty of some rather shabby tricks in that direction—and he suffered the more in conscience because they were almost uniformly unsuccessful. More than once, however, he reached a state of exaltation in which he forgot Chitta, cared nothing about Chitta, and then he felt nearer Heaven.

On one such occasion he was actually nearer than the site usually ascribed to the Celestial City. With Vitoria and her guardian he had climbed—it was at his own malign suggestion—to Montmartre and, since Chitta feared the funicular, had toiled up the last steep ascent into Notre Dame de Sacre Coeur. Chitta's piety—or her exhaustion—kept her long upon her knees in that Byzantine nave, and the Lady and Cartaret had a likely flying-start up the stairs to the tower. Cartaret possessed the wit to say nothing, but he noticed that Vitoria's blue eyes shone with a light of adventure, which tacitly approved of the escapade, and that her step was as quick as his own when Chitta's slower step, heavy breathing and muttered imprecations became audible below them.

"I'm sure the old girl will have to rest on the way up, for all her spryness," thought Cartaret. "If we can only hold this pace, we ought to have five minutes alone on the ramparts."

They had quite five minutes and, no other sight-seers being about, they were quite alone. Below them, under a faintly blue haze, Paris lay like an outspread map, with here and there a church steeple rising above the level of the page. The roof of the Opéra, the gilt dome of Napoleon's tomb and the pointing finger of the Tour Eiffel were immediately individualized, but all the rest of the city merged into a common maze about the curving Seine with the red sun setting beyond the Ile de Puteaux.

Vitoria leaned on the rampart. She was panting a little from her climb; her cheeks were flushed, and her whole face glowing.

"It is as if we were gods on some star," she said, "looking down upon a world that is strange to us."

She was speaking in English. Cartaret bent closer. Pledges of mere friendship ceased, for the moment, to appear of primary importance: he wanted, suddenly, to make the most of a little time.

"Am I never to see you alone?" he asked.

She forsook the view of Paris to give him a second's glance. There was something roguish in it.

"Chitta," she said, "has not yet arrived."

He felt himself a poor hand at love-making. Its language was upon his tongue—perhaps the slower now because he so much meant what he wanted to say. His jaw set, the lines at his mouth deepened.

"I've never thought much," he blundered, "about some of the things that most fellows think a lot about. I mean I've never—at least not till lately—thought much about love and—" he choked on the word—"and marriage; but——"

She cut him short. Her speech was slow and deliberate. Her eyes were on his, and in them he saw something at once firm and sad.

"Nor I, my friend," she was saying: "it is a subject that I am forbidden to think about."

If she conveyed a command, he disobeyed it.

"Then," he said, "I wish you'd think about it now."

"I am forbidden to think about it," she continued, "and I do not think about it because I shall not marry any one—at least not any one that—that I——"

Her voice dropped into silence. She turned from him to the sunset over the gray city.

Cartaret's exaltation left him more suddenly than it had come.

"Any one that you care for?" he asked in a lowered tone.

Still facing the city, she bowed assent.

"But, in Heaven's name, whom else should you marry except somebody that you care for?"

She did not answer.

"Look here," urged Cartaret, "you—you're not engaged, are you?"

She faced him then, still with that something at once firm and sad in her fine eyes.

"No," she said; but he must have shown a little of the hope he found in that monosyllable, for she went on: "Yet I shall never marry any one that I care for. That is all that I may tell you—my *friend*."

As a hurrying tug puffs up to the liner that it is to tow safely into port, Chitta puffed up to her mistress. She met a Cartaret, could she have guessed it, as hopeless as she wanted him to be.

He did his best to put from him all desire to unravel the mystery, and for some days he was again content to remain Vitoria's unquestioning friend. She had told him that she could not marry him: nothing could have been plainer. What more could he gain by further enquiry? Did she mean that she loved somebody else whom she could not marry? Or did she mean that she loved, but could not marry—*him*? Cartaret highly resolved to take what good the gods provided: to remain her friend; to work on, in secret, for her comfort, and to be as happy as he could in so much of her companionship as she permitted him. He would never tell her that he loved her.

And then, very early on an evening in May, Destiny, who had been somnolent under the soft influence of Spring, awoke and once more took a hand in Cartaret's affairs and those of the Lady of the Rose.

Cartaret had just returned from a mission to Lepoittevin's shop and, having there disposed of a particularly bad picture, had put money in his purse: Chitta was waiting on the stairs and accepted the bulk of his earnings with her usual bad grace. He went into his studio, leaving the door ajar. The cool breeze of the Spring twilight fluttered the curtains; it bore upward the laughter of the concierge's children, playing

at diavolo in the garden; it brought the fainter notes of the hurdy-gurdy, grinding out its music somewhere farther down the street.

Somebody was tapping at the door.

"Who is it?" he called.

"It's—*I*," came the answer, with the least perceptible pause before the pronoun. "May I come in?"

"Do," he said, and rose.

Before he could reach the door, Vitoria had entered, closing it carefully behind her. He could see that she was in her student's blouse; tendrils of her hair, slightly disarrayed, curled about the nape of her white neck; her delicate nostrils were extended and her manner strangely quiet.

"This is good of you," he gratefully began. "I didn't expect——"

"What is this that you have been doing?"

Her tone, though low, was hasty. Cartaret bewilderedly realized that she was angry. Before he could reply, she had repeated her question:

"Sir, what is this that you have been doing?"

"I don't understand." He had drawn away from her, his face unmistakably expressive of his puzzled pain.

"You have been—— oh, that I should live to say it!—you have been giving money to my maid."

He drew back farther now. He was detected; he was ashamed.

"Yes," he confessed; "I thought—You see, she gave me to understand that you were—were poor."

"None of my family has ever taken charity of any man!"

"Charity?" He did not dare to look at her, but he knew just how high she was holding her head and just how her eyes were flashing. "It wasn't that. Believe me—please believe me when I say it wasn't that. It never struck me in that way." He was on the point of telling her how he had caught Chitta red-handed in a theft, and how this had led to his enlightenment; but he realized in time that such an explanation would only deepen the wound that he had inflicted on the Lady's pride. "I merely thought," he concluded, "that it was one comrade—one neighbor—helping another."

"How much have you given that wretched woman?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"You must know!" She stamped her foot. "Or are you, after all, one of those rich Americans that do not have to count their money, and that are proud of insulting the people of older and poorer countries by flinging it at them?"

It was a bitter thing to say. He received it with head still bent, and his answer was scarcely a whisper:

"I am not quite rich."

"Then count. Recollect yourself, sir, and count. Tell me, and you shall be repaid. Within three days you shall be repaid."

It never occurred to him further to humiliate her by seeking sympathy through a reference to his own poverty. He looked up. In her clenched hands and parted lips, in her hot eyes and face, he saw the tokens of the blow that he had dealt her. He came toward her with outstretched hands, petitioning.

"Can't you guess why I did this?" he asked her. His amazement, even his sorrow, left him. In their place was only the sublimation of a worthy tenderness, the masterfulness of a firm resolve. His face was tense. "Listen," he said: "I don't want you to answer me; I wouldn't say this if I were going to allow you to make any reply. I don't want pity; I don't deserve it. Anything else I wouldn't ask, because I don't deserve anything else, either, and don't hope for it. I just want to make my action clear to you. Perhaps I should have done for any neighbor what I did for—what little I have been doing; I trust so; I don't know. But the reason I did it in this case was a reason that I've never had in all my life before. Remember, I'm hopeless and I shan't let you reply to me: I did this because"—his unswerving glance was on hers now—"because I love you."

But she did reply. At first she seemed unable to credit him, but then her face became scarlet and her eyes blazed.

"Love me! And you do this? Yes, sir, insult me by contributing—and through my servant—to my support! If I had not come back unexpectedly but now and found her counting more silver than I knew she could by right possess—if I had not frightened her into a confession—it might have gone on for months." The Lady stopped abruptly. "How long *has* it been going on?"

"I tell you that I have no idea."

"But once, sir, was enough! You insult me with your money, and when I ask you why you do it, you answer that you love me. Love!"

She uttered the concluding word with an intensity of scorn that lashed him. She turned to go, but, as on the occasion of their first meeting, he stepped forward and barred the way.

"You have no right to put that construction on what I say. Our points of view are different."

"Yes—thank the Holy Saints they *are* different!"

"I shall try to understand yours; I beg you to try to understand mine."

Their eyes met again. In his it was impossible for her not to read the truth. Slowly she lowered hers.

"In my country," she said, more softly now, but still proudly, "love is another sort of thing. In my country I should have said: 'If you respect me, sir, you perhaps love me; if you do not respect me, it is out of the question that you should love me.'"

"Respect you?" This was a challenge to his love that he could not leave unanswered. His voice rose fresh and clear. He was no longer under the necessity of seeking words: they leaped, living, to his lips. "Respect you? Good God, I've been worshiping the very thought of you from the first glimpse of you I ever had. This

miserable room has been a holy place to me because you have twice been in it. It's been a holy place, because, from the moment I first found you here, it has been a place where I dreamed of you. Night and day I've dreamed of you; and yet have I ever once knowingly done you any harm, trespassed or presumed on your kindness? I've seen no pure morning without thinking of you, no beautiful sunset without remembering you; you've been the harmony of every bar of music, of every bird-song, that I've heard. When you were gone, the world was empty for me; when I was with you, all the rest of the world was nothing, and less than nothing. Respect you? Why, I should have cut off my right hand before I let you even guess what you've discovered to-day!"

As he spoke, her whole attitude altered. Her hands were still clenched at her sides, but clenched now in another emotion.

"Is—is this true?" she asked. Her voice was very low.

"It is true," he answered.

"And yet"—she seemed to be not so much addressing him as trying to quiet an accuser in her own heart—"I never spoke one word that could give you any hope."

"Not one," he gravely assented. "I never asked for hope; I don't expect it now."

"And it is—it is really true?" she murmured.

Again he spoke in answer to what she seemed rather to address to her own heart:

"Because you found out what I'd done, I wanted you to know why I'd done it—and no more. If you hadn't found out about Chitta, I would never have told you—this."

She tried to smile, but something caught the smile and broke it. With a sudden movement, she raised her white hands to her burning face.

"Oh," she whispered, "why did you tell me? Why?"

"Because you accused me, because——" He could not stand there and see her suffer. "I've been a brute," he said; "I've been a bungling brute."

"No, no!" She refused to hear him.

He drew her hands from before her face and revealed it, the underlip indrawn, the blue eyes swimming in hushed tears, all humbled in a wistful appeal.

"A brute!" he repeated.

"No, you are not!" Her fingers closed on his. "You are splendid; you are fine; you are all that I—that I ever——"

"Vitoria!"

Out in the rue du Val de Grâce that rattletrap French hurdy-gurdy struck up "Annie Laurie." It played badly; its time was uncertain and its conception of the tune was questionable; yet Cartaret thought that, save for her voice, he had never heard diviner melody. She was looking up at him, her hands clasped in his over his pounding heart, her eyes like altar-fires, her lips sacrosanct, and, wreathing her upturned face, seeming to float upon the twilight, hovered, fresh from sunlit

mountain-crests of virgin snow, the subtle and haunting perfume that was like a poem in a tongue unknown: the perfume of the Azure Rose.

"Vitoria!" he began again. "You don't mean that you—that you——"

She interrupted him with a sharp cry. She freed her hands. She went by him to the door.

Her voice, as she paused there, was broken, but brave:

"You do not understand. How could you? And I cannot tell you. Only—only it must be 'Good-by.' Often I have wondered how Love would come to me, and whether he would come singing, as he comes to most, or with a sword, as he comes to some." She opened the door and stepped across the threshold. She was closing it upon herself when she spoke, but she held it open and kept her eyes on Cartaret until she ended. "I know now, my beloved: he has come with a sword."

CHAPTER XI

TELLS HOW CARTARET'S FORTUNE TURNED TWICE IN A FEW HOURS AND HOW HE FOUND ONE THING AND LOST ANOTHER

A man is rich in proportion to the things he can afford to let alone.—Thoreau: *Walden*.

A great deal has been said, to not much purpose, about the vagaries of the feminine heart; but its masculine counterpart is equally mysterious. The seat of Charlie Cartaret's emotions furnishes a case in point.

Cartaret had resolved never to tell Vitoria that he loved her, and he told her. Similarly, when he told her, he sought to make it clear to her, quite sincerely, that he nursed no hope of winning her for his wife, and, now that she was gone, hope took possession of his breast and brought with it determination. Why not? Had she not amazingly confessed her love for him? That left him, as he saw it, no reason for abnegation; it made sacrifice wrong for them both. The secret difficulty at which she hinted became something that it was now as much his duty, as it was his highest desire, to remove. For the rest, though he could now no more than previously consider offering her a union with a man condemned to a lifelong poverty, there remained for him no task save the simple one of acquiring affluence. What could seem easier—for a young man in love?

The more he thought about it, the more obvious his course became. During all his boyhood, art had been his single passion; during all his residence in Paris he had flung the best that was in him upon the altar of his artistic ambition; but now, without a single pang of regret, he resolved to give up art forever. He would see Vitoria on the morrow and come to a practical understanding with her: was he not always a practical man? Then he would reopen negotiation with his uncle and ask for a place in the elder Cartaret's business. Perhaps it would not even be necessary for him to return to America: he had the brilliant idea that his uncle's business—which was to say, the great monopoly of which his uncle's holdings were a small part—had never been properly "pushed" in France, and that Charles Cartaret was the man of all men to push it. The mystery that dear Vitoria made of some private obstacle? That, of course, was but the exaggeration of a sensitive girl; it was the long effect of some parental command or childish vow. He had only to wrest from her the statement of it in order to prove it so. It was some unpractical fancy wholly beneath the regard of a practical, and now wholly assured, man of affairs.

By way of beginning a conservative business-career, Charlie went to the front window and, as he had done one day not long since, emptied his pockets for the

delight of the hurdy-gurdy grinder. Then, singing under his breath, and inwardly blessing every pair of lovers that he passed, he went out for a long walk in the twilight.

He walked along the Quai D'Orsay, beside which the crowded little passenger-steamers were tearing the silver waters of the Seine; crossed the white Pont de l'Alma; struck through the Trocadero gardens, and so, by the rue de Passy and the shaded Avenue Ingrez, came to the railway bridge, crossed it and strolled along the Allée des Fortifications. He walked until the night overtook him, and only then turned back through Auteuil and over the Pont Grenelle toward home.

Alike in the perfumed shadows beneath the trees and under the yellow lamps of the Boulevard de Mont Parnasse, he walked upon the clouds of resolution. The city that has in her tender keeping the dust of many lovers, cradled him and drew him forward. Her soft breath fanned his cheek, her sweet voice whispered in his ears:

"Trust me and obey me! Did I not know and shelter Gabrielle d'Estrées and her royal suitor? Have I not had a care for De Musset and for Heine? In that walled garden over there, Balzac dreamed of Mme. Hanska. Along this street Chopin wandered with George Sand."

That whisper followed him to his room, still thrilling with Vitoria's visit. It charmed him into a wonderful sense of her nearness, into a belief that he was keeping ward over her as long as he sat by his windows and watched the stars go down and the pink dawn climb the eastern sky. It lulled him at last to sleep with his head upon his arms and his arms upon the mottled table.

He overslept. It must have been nearly noon when he woke, and then he was wakened only by a pounding at the door of his room. Fat Mme. Refrogné had brought him a cable-message. When she had gone, he opened it, surprised at once by its extravagant length. It was from Cora; a modern miracle had happened: there was oil in the black keeping of the plot of ground that only sentiment had so long bade them retain in the little Ohio town. Cartaret was rich....

When the first force of the shock was over, when he could realize, in some small measure, what that message meant to him, Cartaret's earliest thought was of the Lady of the Rose. Holding the bit of paper as tightly as if it were itself his riches and wanted to fly away on the wings that had brought it, he staggered, like a drunken man, to the door of the Room Opposite.

He knocked, but received no answer. A clock struck mid-day. Vitoria had probably gone to her class, and Chitta to her marketing.

A mad impulse to spread the good news possessed him. It was as if telling the news were recording a deed that there was only a brief time to record: he must do it at once in order to secure title. He knew that his friends, if they were in funds, would soon be gathered at the Café Des Deux Colombes.

When he passed the rue St. André Des Arts, he remembered Fourget. Cartaret was ashamed that his memory had been so tardy. Fourget had helped him in his heavy need; Fourget should be the first to know of his affluence....

The old dealer, his bushy brows drawn tight together, his spectacles gleaming, was trying to say "No" to a lad with a picture under his arm—a crestfallen lad that was a stranger to Cartaret.

"Let me see the picture," said Cartaret, without further preface. He put out a ready hand.

The boy blushed. Cartaret had been abrupt and did not present the appearance of a possible purchaser.

"If you please," urged Cartaret. "I may care to buy."

Fourget gaped. The boy turned up his canvas—an execrable daub.

"I'll buy that," said Cartaret.

"Are you mad?" asked Fourget.

"Bring back that picture to M. Fourget in half an hour," pursued the heedless American, "and he will give you for it two hundred francs that he will have lent me and that I shall have left with him."

He pushed the stammering lad out of the shop and turned to Fourget.

"Are you drunk?" asked the dealer, changing the form of his suspicions.

"Fourget," cried Cartaret, clapping his friend on the back, "I shall never be hungry again—never—never—never! Look at that." He produced the precious cable-message. "That piece of paper will feed me all my life long. It will buy me houses, horses, motors, steamship-tickets. It looks like paper, Fourget." He spread it under Fourget's nose. "But it isn't; it's a dozen suits of clothes a year; it's a watch-and-chain, a diamond scarf-pin (if I'd wear one!); it's a yacht. It's an oil-well, Fourget—and a godsend!"

Fourget took it in his blue-veined hands. His hands trembled.

"Oh, I forgot," said Cartaret. "It is in English. Let me translate." He translated.

When Charlie looked up from his reading, he found Fourget busily engaged in polishing his spectacles. Perhaps the old man's eyes were weak and could not bear to be without their glasses: they certainly were moist.

"I do not see so well as I once saw," the dealer was explaining: his voice was very gruff indeed. "You are wholly certain that this is no trick which one plays upon you?"

Cartaret was wholly certain.

Fourget made a valiant attempt at expressing his congratulations in a mere Anglo-Saxon handshake. He found it quite inadequate, and this annoyed him.

"The world," he growled, "loses a possibly fair artist and gets an idle millionaire."

"You get a new shop," vowed Cartaret. "Don't shake your head! I'll make it a business proposition: I've had enough trouble by being suspected of charity. I'm

going to buy an interest, and I shan't want my money sunk in anything dark and unsanitary."

Fourget shook his gray head again.

"Thank you with all my heart, my friend," he said; "but no. This little shop meets my little needs and will last out my little remaining days. I would not leave it for the largest establishment on the boulevards."

They talked until Cartaret again bethought him of the café in the rue Jacob.

"But you will lend me the two hundred francs," he asked, "and give it to that boy for his picture?" How much a boy that boy seemed now: he was just the boy that Cartaret had been in the long ago time that was yesterday!

"Since you insist; but truly, my dear monsieur, myself I was about to weaken and purchase the terrible thing when you interrupted and saved me." ...

The money from Seraphin's latest *magnum opus* not being yet exhausted, Seraphin's friends were lunching at the Café Des Deux Colombes, with little Pasbeaucoup fluttering between them and the kitchen, and Madame, expressionless under her mountain of hair, stuffed into the wire cage and bulging out of it. The company rose when they espied Cartaret, the cadaverous poet Garnier picking up his plate of roast chicken so as not to lose, in his welcoming, time that might be given to eating.

Cartaret felt at first somewhat ashamed before them. He felt the contrast between his changed fortunes and their fortunes unchanged. At last, however, the truth escaped him, and then he felt more ashamed than ever, so unenvious were the congratulations that they poured upon him.

Devignes' round belly shook with delight. Garnier even stopped eating.

"Now you may have the leisure for serious work, which," squeaked Varachon through his broken nose, "your art has so badly needed."

Seraphin said nothing, but put his hand on Cartaret's shoulder and gripped it hard.

Houdon embraced the fortunate one.

"Did I not always tell you?" he demanded of Seraphin. "Did I not say he was a disguised millionaire?"

"But he has but now got his money," Seraphin protested.

"Poof!" said Houdon, dismissing the argument with a trill upon his invisible piano. "La-la-la!"

"Without doubt to mark the event you will give a dinner?" suggested Garnier.

"Without doubt," said Houdon.

Cartaret said that he would give a dinner that very evening if Pasbeaucoup would strain the Median laws of the establishment so far as to trust him for a few days, and Pasbeaucoup, receiving the necessary nod from Madame, said that they would be but too happy to trust M. Cartarette for any sum and for any length of time that he might choose to name.

So Cartaret left them for a few hours and went back to his room at the earliest possible moment for finding Vitoria returned from her class. This time he not only knocked: he tried, in his haste, the knob of the door, and the door, swinging open, revealed an empty room, stripped of even its furniture.

He nearly fell downstairs to the cave of Refrogné.

"Where are they?" he demanded.

Had monsieur again been missing strawberries? Where were what?

"Where is Mlle. Urola—where are the occupants of the room across from mine?" Cartaret's frenzied tones implied that he would hold the concierge personally responsible for whatever might have happened to his neighbors.

"Likely they are occupying some other room by this time," growled Refrogné. "I was unaware that they were such great friends of monsieur."

"They are. Where are they?"

"In that case, they must have told monsieur of their contemplated departure."

"Do you mean they've moved to another room in this house?"

"But no."

"Then where have they gone?"

They had gone away. They had paid their bill honestly, even the rent for the unconsumed portion of the month, and gone away. That was all it was an honest concierge's business to know.

"When did they go?"

"Early this morning."

"Didn't they leave any address?"

"None. Why should they? Mademoiselle never received letters."

Cartaret could bear no more. Even the man that hauled away the furniture had only taken it to the shop from which it had been leased. Refrogné had seen the two women get into a cab with their scanty luggage and had heard them order themselves driven to the Gare d'Orsay. That was the end of the trail....

Cartaret climbed to his own room. Thrust under the door, where he had missed it in the rush of his hopeful exit that morning, was an envelope. It did not hold the expected note of explanation. It held only a pressed rose, yellow now, and dry and odorless.

CHAPTER XII

NARRATING HOW CARTARET BEGAN HIS QUEST OF THE ROSE

The power of herbs can other harms remove,And find a cure for every ill, but love.—Gray: *Elegy I.*

For a great while Cartaret remained as a man stunned. It was only very slowly that there came to him the full realization of his loss, and then it came with all the agony with which a return to life is said to come to one narrowly saved from death by drowning.

Blindly his brain bashed itself against the mysterious wall of Vitoria's flight. Why had she gone? Where had she gone? Why had she left no word? A thousand times that day these unanswerable questions whirled through his dizzy consciousness. Had he offended her? He had explained his one offense, and she had given no sign of having taken any other hurt. Was she indeed a revolutionist from some strange country, summoned away, without a moment's warning, by the inner council of her party? Revolutionist conspirators did not go to art-classes and do not walk only under the chaperonage of an ancient duenna. Was she, then, that claimant to power that he had once imagined her, now gone to seize her rights? Things of that sort did not, Cartaret knew, occur in these prosy days. Then why had she gone, and where, and why had she left no word for him? Again these dreary questions began their circle.

Less than twenty-four hours ago, he had thought that money would resolve all his troubles. Money! Fervently he wished himself poor again—poor again, as yesterday, with Her across the landing in the Room Opposite.

Somehow, he did not forget his friends and the dinner he had promised them. He went to the Deux Colombes and ordered the dinner.

"Say to them, Pasbeaucoup," he gave instructions, "that I am indisposed and shall not be able to dine with them. Say that we shall all dine together some other night—very soon I hope. Say that I am sorry."

He was bitter now against all the world. "What will they care, as long as they have the dinner?" he reflected.

Pasbeaucoup cared. He expressed great concern for monsieur's health.

"That," thought Cartaret, "is because I'm rich. A month or two ago and they wouldn't trust me: they'd have let me starve."

He went back to his desolate room and to his dreary questioning. He was there, with his head in his hands, when Seraphin found him.

Seraphin's suit was still new, and it was evident that he had dressed carefully his twin wisps of whisker in honor of Cartaret's celebration. The Frenchman's face was grave.

"Why aren't you dining?" sneered Cartaret.

Seraphin passed by the sneer.

"They told me that you were ill," he said, simply.

"And you came to see if it was true?"

"I came to see if I could be of any assistance."

("Ah," ran Cartaret's unjust thoughts, "it's very evident you're rich now, Charlie!")

"Nobody else came with you," he said.

Seraphin hesitated. He twirled his soft hat in his hands.

"They thought—all but Houdon, who still persists that you have been rich always—they thought that, now that you were rich, you might prefer other society."

"*You* didn't think it?"

"I did not."

It was said so frankly that even Cartaret's present mood could not resist its sincerity. Charlie frowned and put both his hands on Seraphin's shoulders.

"Dieudonné," he said, "I'm in trouble."

"I feared it."

"Not money-trouble."

"I feared that it was not money-trouble."

"You understood?"

"I guessed. You have been so happy of late, while you were so poor, that to absent yourself from this gayety when you were rich——" An expressive gesture finished the sentence. "Besides," added Seraphin, "one cannot be happy long, and when you told me that you had money, I feared that you would lose something else."

Cartaret wrung the hand of his friend.

"Go back," he said. "Go back and tell them that it's not pride. Tell them it's illness. I *am* ill. It was good of you to come here, but there's nothing you can do just now. To-morrow, or next day, perhaps I can talk to you about it. Perhaps. But not now. I couldn't talk to any one now. Good-night."

He sat down again—sat silent for many hours after he had heard Seraphin's footsteps die away down the stairs. He heard the hurdy-gurdy and thought that he could not bear it. He heard the other lodgers return. He heard the strange sounds—the creaking boards, the complaining stairway, the whispering of curtains—which are the night-sounds of every house. In the ear of his mind, he heard the voices of his distant guests:

"What woman's lips compare to this:This sturdy seidel's frothy kiss?——"

Because he grew afraid of the ghosts of doubt that haunt the darkness, he lighted his lamp; but for a long time the ghosts remained.

This was the very room in which he had told her that he loved her; this desert place was once the garden in which he had said that little of what was so much. She had stood by that table (so shabby now!) and made it a wonderful thing. She had touched that curtain; her fingers, at parting, had held that rattling handle of the shattered door. He half thought that the door might open and reveal her, even now. Memory joined hands with love to make her poignantly present. Her lightest word, her least action: his mind retained them and rehearsed them every one. The music of her laughter, the melody of her grace, wove spells in the lamplit room; but they ceased as she had ceased; they left the song unfinished, they stopped in the middle of a bar.

He wondered whether it must always remain unfinished, this allegro of love in what, without it, would be the dull biographic symphony of his life; whether he would grow to be an old man with no memories but broken memories to warm his heart; and whether even this memory would become as the mere memory of a beautiful portrait seen in youth, a Ghirlandaio's or a Guido Reni's work, some other man's vision, a part of the whole world's rich heritage, a portion of the eternal riddle of existence.

"So short a time ago," crooned the ghosts—"and doubtless she has already forgotten you. You have but touched her hands: how could you hope that you had touched her heart? She will be happy, though she knows that you are unhappy; glad, though you are desolate. You gave her your dreams to keep, your hopes, your faith in love and womankind: and this is what she did with them! They are withered like that rose."

He had put the yellow thing against his heart, where once he had put it when it was fresh and pure. He drew it out now and looked at it. What did it mean—that message of the rose? That, as she had once treasured the flower, so now she would treasure in its place her memory of him?

"It means," chanted the ghosts, "that her friendship is as dead as this dry flower!"

Did it? He would make one trial more.

Vivid as was her face in his mind, he brought to the lamp his pictures of her. She had liked those pictures; in spite of herself, she had shown him that she liked them——

(The ghosts were crooning:

"Though you had the brush of Diego Velasquez, she would not heed you now!")

Had he painted her—he had tried to—as she should have been? Or had he painted her as she really was?

He searched the pictures. Her eyes seemed to look at him with a long farewell in their blue-black depths, the parted lips to tremble on a sob. A light was born in the canvas—the reflected light of his own high faith revived. Whatever separated them, it was by no will of hers. No, there was no ghost in all the fields of night that he would listen to again: in that pictured face there was as much of pride as there was of beauty,

but there was nothing of either cruelty or deceit. Yes, he had only touched her hand, but certainly hand had never yet touched hand as his touched hers. He was sure of it and sure of her. A short acquaintance—it had been long enough to prove her. A few broken words in the twilight—they were volumes. The merest breath of feeling—it would last them to their graves.

He would move earth and Heaven to find Vitoria: the wine of that resolution rang in his ears and fired his heart. The sun, coming up over the Panthéon in a glory of red and gold, sent into Cartaret's room a shining messenger of royal encouragement before whose sword the ghosts forever fled. The lover was almost gay again: here was new service for her; here, for him, was work, the best surcease of sorrow. He felt like an athlete trained to the minute and crouching for the starter's pistol-shot. He believed in Vitoria! He believed in her, and so he could not doubt his own ability to discover her in the face of all hardships and to win her against all odds; he believed in her and in himself, and so he could not doubt God.

He understood something of the difficulties that presented themselves. He knew scarcely anything of the woman whom he sought; his only clews were her name and the name of the rose; he must first find to what country those names belonged, and to find that country he might have to seek through all the world. He could not ask help of the police; he would not summon to his assistance those vile rats who call themselves private-detectives. It was a task for himself alone; it was a task that must occupy his every working-hour; but it was a task that he would accomplish.

A second cable-message interrupted him at his ablutions. It was from his uncle, and it read:

"Cora wires me received no reply from you. Do you accept trust's offer stated in her cable? Advise you say yes. Better come home and attend to business."

This brought Cartaret to the realization that he was in a paradoxical position: he was a penniless millionaire. He went to Fourget's and borrowed some money. Thence he went to the cable-office in the Avenue de l'Opera. There had been, he now recalled, an offer—a really dazzling offer—mentioned in his sister's message; but more practical matters had driven it from his mind. He therefore sent his uncle this:

"I accept trust's offer. Advise Cora to agree. Don't worry: New York's not the only place for business. There's business in Paris—lots of it."

His uncle had been very annoying: Charlie should have been at work at the Bibliothèque Nationale a full half-hour ago. He had resolved to begin with the floral clew.

He went there immediately and asked what books they had about flowers; they told him that they had many thousand. Cartaret narrowed his field; he said what he wanted was a book on roses, and he was told that he might choose any of hundreds that were at hand. In despair, he ordered brought to him any one that began with an "A"; he would work through the alphabet.

By closing-time he had reached “Ac.” He hurried out into the fresh breeze that blew down through the public square and the narrow rue Colbert, and so cut across to the cable-office.

He wanted to send a message mentioning a little matter he had forgotten that morning. As it happened, the operator had just received a message for Charlie. It was again from his uncle, and said that the sale would be consummated early next day. There was about it a brevity more severe than even cables require: the elder Cartaret patently disapproved of the communication that his nephew had sent him. Still, the sale seemed to be assured, and that was the main thing, so Charlie put the word “Five” in place of the word “One” in the message he was drafting, and sent it off:

“Cable me five thousand.”

He interrupted his library-researches the next day to make a sporadic raid upon florist-shops along the boulevards, but found no florist that had ever heard of the Azure Rose.

The answer to his latest cable-message came the next day at noon. He had resumed his search at the Bibliothèque and instructed the cable-clerk to hold all messages until he should call for them. He called for this at lunch-time:

“Sale completed, thanks to power-of-attorney you left me when sailing. Do you mean dollars?”

Cartaret groaned at this procrastination.

“And my uncle brags of his American hustle!” he cried.

He filed his reply:

“Of course I meant dollars. What did you suppose I meant? Francs? Pounds sterling? I mean dollars. Hurry!”

“Be sure to put in the punctuation marks,” he admonished the pretty clerk.

He dashed back to the library. During the next hundred and twenty hours, he divided his time between botanical researches and one side of the following cable-conversation:

“Come home.”

“Can’t.”

“Why?”

“Busy.”

“How?”

“Botanizing. But if you don’t send me immediately that little bit of all that belongs to me, I’ll knock off work to find out the reason why.”

The money arrived just as his credit in short-credit Paris was everywhere close to the breaking-point, and just as he gave up hope of ever finding what he wanted at the great library, where he had driven every sub and deputy librarian to the brink of insanity. Money, however, brings resourcefulness: Cartaret then remembered the Jardin des Plantes, where he had once been with Vitoria.

No official knew anything about the Azure Rose, but an old gardener (Cartaret was trying them all) gave him hope. He was a little Gascon, that gardener, with white hair and blue eyes, and his long labor had bent him forward, as if the earth in which he worked had one day laid hold of his shoulders and never since let go.

"I had a brother once who was a *fainéant* and so a great traveler. He spoke of such a rose," the Gascon nodded; "but I cannot remember what it was that he told me."

"Here are five francs to help you remember," said Cartaret.

The old man took the money and thanked him.

"But I cannot remember what my brother told me," he said, "except that the rose was found nowhere but in the Basque provinces of Spain." ...

A half-hour later Cartaret had bought his traveling-kit, which included a forty-five caliber automatic revolver. Forty minutes later he had paid Refrogné ten months' rent in advance, together with a twenty-five franc tip, and directed that his room be held against his return. An hour later he was sheepishly handing Seraphin a bulky package, evidently containing certain canvases, and saying to him:

"These are something I wouldn't leave about and couldn't bring myself to store, and you're—well, I think you'll understand."

At twelve o'clock that night, from an opened window in his compartment of a sleeping-car on a southward-speeding *train de luxe*, Cartaret was looking up at the yellow stars somewhere about Tours.

"Good-night, Vitoria!" he was whispering. "Good-night, and—God keep you!"

He was a very practical man.

CHAPTER XIII

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF AN AMATEUR BOTANIST

The happiness of the good old times is a mere dream in every age; but to keep on the laws of the old times, in preserving to reform, in reforming to preserve, is the true life of a free people.—Freeman: *The Norman Conquest*.

"Vitoria," explained the guard, whom Cartaret inveigled into conversation next morning, "is the capital of the province of Alava."

"Eh?" said Cartaret. "Then there's more than one Vitoria, my friend. If I'd only studied geography when I was at school, it might have saved me a week now."

He tried to make talk with a hatless Englishman in tweeds, who was smoking a briar-pipe in the corridor.

"Vitoria," said the Englishman, "is one of the places where Wellington beat the French under Joseph Buonaparte and Jourdan, in the Peninsular War."

"Didn't the Spanish help?" asked Cartaret.

“They thought they did,” said the Englishman.

Cartaret had had small time in Paris to learn anything about the strange people and the strange country for which he was bound; but, had he had weeks for study, he would have learned little more. Centuries had availed almost nothing to the scholars that sought to explain them. The origin of their race and language still unknown, the Basques, proud and wild, free and self-sufficient, have held to themselves their sea and mountain-fortresses from the dawn of recorded history. The successive tides of the Suavi, the Franks and the Goths have swept through those rugged valleys, and left the Basque unmixed and untainted. From the days of the Roman legions to those of the Napoleonic armies, he has withstood the onslaughts of every conqueror of Western Europe, unconquered and unchanged. The rivers of his legends draw direct from the source of all legends; the boundary of his customs is as unalterable as the foundation of his Pyrenees. The engines of imperial slaughter, the steady blows of progress, the erosion of time itself, have left him as they found him: the serene despair of the philologist, the Sphynx of ethnology, the riddle of the races of mankind.

Cartaret picked up the scanty threads of the Basques’ known chronicle. He learned that these Celtiberi had preserved an independence which outlasted the Western Empire, gave no more than a nominal allegiance to Leovigild, to Wamba and to Charlemagne, cast their fortunes with the Moors at Roncesvalles and, in the eleventh century, formed a free confederation of three separate republics under a ruler of their own blood and choice, whose tenure was dependent upon constitutional guarantees and whose power was wholly executive. Even the yoke of Spain, hated as it was, had failed materially to affect this form of government and could be justly regarded as little save a name. The three provinces—the Vascongadas as they were called: the sea-coast Viscaza and Guipuzcoa and the inland Alava—retained their ancient identity. Somewhere among their swift rivers and well-nigh inaccessible mountains must be the house of her whom he sought. Because of the name that she had given him, Cartaret headed now for Vitoria.

Twice he had to change his train, each time for a worse. From Bayonne he crossed the Spanish border at Hendaya, whence the railway, after running west along the rocky coast of the Bay of Biscay, turned southward toward the heights about Tolosa. All afternoon the scenery was varied and romantic. The hard-clay soil, cultivated with painful care by young giants and graceful amazons, gave place to pine-forests, to tree-cloaked hills, to mountains dark with mystery.

Twilight fell, then night. Cartaret could now see nothing of the landscape through which he was jolted, but, from the puffing of the engine, the slow advance, the frightful swinging about curves, it was clear to him that he was being hauled, in a series of half-circles, up long and steep ascents.

“What station is this?” he asked a French-speaking guard that passed his window at a stop where the air was cool and sweet with the odor of pine. The lantern showed only a good-natured face in a world of darkness.

“Ormaiztegua, monsieur,” said the guard.

“What?” said Cartaret. “Say it slow, please, and say it plainly: I am a stranger and of tender years.”

The guard repeated that outlandish name.

“And now which way do we go?” Cartaret inquired.

“North again to Zumarraga.”

“North again?” repeated Cartaret. “Look here: I’m in a hurry. Isn’t there any more direct route to Vitoria?”

“Evidently monsieur does not know the Pyrenees.”

From Zumarraga, the train bent yet again southward, out of Guipuzcoa across the Navarra line.

“Aren’t we late?” asked Cartaret.

“But a little,” the guard reassured him: “scarcely two hours.”

At last, when they had climbed that precipitous spur of the Pyrenees which forms the northern wall of Alava; after they had stopped once to harness an extra locomotive, and stopped again to unharness it; after they had descended again, ascended again and once more descended—this last time for what seemed but a little way—the train came to the end of this stage of Cartaret’s journey. He alighted on a smoky platform only partially illuminated by more smoky lamps and had himself driven to the hotel that the first accessible cabby recommended.

Vitoria is a curious city of nearly 150,000 inhabitants, situated on a hill overlooking the Plain of Alava. Cartaret, waking with the sun, could see from his window the Campillo, the oldest portion of the town, crowning the hill-crest, an almost deserted jumble of ruined walls and ancient towers, surrounded by public-gardens and topped by the twelfth-century Cathedral of St. Mary, the effect of its Gothic arches sadly lessened by ugly modern additions to the pile. Below, the Vitoria Antigua clung to the hillside, a maze of narrow, twisting streets; and still lower lay the new town, a place of wide thoroughfares and shady walks, among which was Cartaret’s hotel.

He breakfasted early and, having no leisure for sight-seeing, asked his way to the city’s administrative-offices. He passed rows of hardware-factories, wine and wool warehouses, paper-mills and tanneries, wide yards in which rows of earthenware lay drying, and plazas where the horse and mule trade flourished, and so came at last to the arcaded market-place opposite which was the building that he was in search of; the offices were not yet open for the day.

He sat down to wait at a table under an awning and before a café that faced the market. The market was full of country-folk, men and women, all of great height and splendid physique, and Cartaret saw at once that the latter wore the same sort of peculiar head-dress that, in Paris, had distinguished Chitta.

A loquacious waiter, wholly unintelligible, was accosting him. Cartaret, guessing that he was expected to pay for his chair with an order for drink, made signs

to fit that conjecture, and the waiter brought him a flask of the native *chacoli*. It was a poor wine, and Cartaret did not care for it, but he sat on, pretending to, watching the white municipal building and looking, from time to time, at the farmers from the market who passed into the café and out of it.

He half expected to see Chitta among their womenfolk: Chitta, of whom he would so lately have said that he never wanted to see her again! The farmers all gravely bowed to him, and Cartaret, of course, bowed in return. Finally it occurred to him that he might get news from one of them and so, one by one, he would stop them with an inquiry as to whether they spoke French. A dozen failures were convincing him of his folly, when their result was ruined by the appearance of a rosy-cheeked young man in a wide hat and swathed legs, who appeared to be more prosperous than his neighbors and who replied to Cartaret in a French that the American could understand.

"Then do sit down and have a drink with me," urged Cartaret. "I'm a stranger here and I'd be greatly obliged to you if you would."

The young man agreed. He explained complacently that the folk of Alava, though invariably hospitable, generally distrusted strangers, but that he had had advantages, having been sent to the Jesuit school in St. Jean Pied-de-Port. He was the one chance in a thousand: he knew something of what Cartaret wanted to learn.

Had he ever heard of a rose, a white rose, called the Azure Rose?

Had he not heard! It was one of the foolish superstitions of the folk of Northern Alava, that rose. His own mother, being from the North—God rest her soul—had not been exempt: when he was sent into France to school, she had pinned an Azure Rose against his heart in order to insure his return home.

"Then it grows in the North?"

"For the most part, yes, monsieur, and even there it is something rare: that, without doubt, is why it is esteemed so dearly by the common folk. It grows only near the snows, the high snows. There are but few white peaks there, and on them a few such roses. The country beyond Alegria is the place of all places for them. If monsieur wants to find the Azure Rose, he should go to the wild country beyond Alegria."

"Do you know that country?" asked Cartaret.

The young man shrugged. He ought to know it: he had been brought up there. But it was no place for strangers; it was very wild.

"I wonder," said Cartaret, hope shining in his brown eyes—"I wonder if you ever heard of a family there by the name of Urola?"

The farmer shook his head. Urola? No, he had never heard of Urola. But stay: there was the great family, the Ethenard-Eskurola d'Alegria. Eskurola was somewhat like Urola; indeed, Urola was part of Eskurola. Perhaps, monsieur——

Cartaret was leaning far over the table.

"Is there," he asked, "a young lady in that family named Vitoria?"

The farmer reflected.

“There was one daughter,” he said; “a little girl when I was a lad. She was the Lady Dolorez. She had, however, many names: people of great houses among us have many names, monsieur, and Vitoria is not uncommonly among them. Vitoria? Yes, I think she was also called Vitoria.”

“Did she speak English?”

“It was likely, monsieur.” Nearly all of the Ethenard-Eskurolas spoke English, because one of their so numerous ancestors was the great Don Miguel Ricardo d’Alava, general under the Duke of Wellington, who valued him above all his generals in that Spanish campaign. Since then there had always been English teachers for the children of the house. So much was common knowledge.

It was enough for Cartaret. Within the hour he was summoning the proprietor of his hotel to his assistance in arranging for an expedition to Alegria.

The hotel proprietor stroked a beard so bristling as to threaten his caressing fingers.

“It is a wild country,” he remarked.

“That’s what they all say,” returned Cartaret. “When does the next train leave for it?”

“There is no train. Alegria is a little town in the high Cantabrian Mountains, far from any train.”

“Then come along downtown and help me buy a horse,” said Cartaret. “I saw a lot of likely-looking ones this morning.”

“But, monsieur,” expostulated the hotel proprietor, “nobody between here and Alegria speaks French. Nobody in Alegria speaks French—and you do not speak *Eskura*.”

“What’s that?”

“It is how we Basques name our own tongue.”

“Well, I don’t care. Get me a guide.”

“I fear I cannot, monsieur. The country people do not want Alava to become the prey of tourists, and they will be slow to allow a stranger.”

“Have you got a road-map?”

Yes, the proprietor had a road-map—of sorts. It looked faulty, and Cartaret found later that it was more faulty than it looked; but he resolved to make it do, and that afternoon found him in the saddle of a lean and hardy mare, ten miles on his way. He had brought with him a pair of English riding-breeches and leggings—purchased in Paris for no other reason than that he had the money and used to love to ride—his reduced equipment was in saddle-bags, and the road-map in his handiest pocket.

He put up at a little inn that night and rode hard, east by south, all the next day. He rode through fertile valleys where the fields were already yellow with wheat and barley. He came upon patches of Indian corn that made him think of the country about his own Ohio home, and upon flax-fields and fields of hemp. His way lay steadily upward, and in the hills he met with iron-banks and some lead and copper mines.

Queerly costumed peasants herded sheep and goats along the roadside; but nobody that Cartaret addressed could understand a word of his speech. The road-map was bad, indeed: twice he lost his way by consulting it and once, he thought, by failing to consult it. A road that the map informed him would lead straight to Alegria ended in a marble-quarry.

Cartaret accosted the only workman in sight.

"Alegria?" he asked.

The man pointed back the way that Cartaret had come.

He followed the direction thus indicated and took a turning that he had missed before. He passed through a countryside of small plains. Then he began to climb again and left these for stretches of bare heath and hills covered with furze. From one hilltop he looked ahead to a vast pile of mountains crowned by two white peaks that shone in the sun like the lances of a celestial guard. The farms were less and less in size and farther and farther apart—tiny farms cultivated with antique implements. Apple-orchards appeared and disappeared, and then, quite suddenly, the hills became mountains, their bases covered by great forests of straight chestnut-trees, gigantic oaks and stately bushes whose limbs met in a dark canopy above the rider's head. At his approach, rabbits scurried, white tails erect, across the road; from one rare clearing a flock of partridges whirred skyward, and once, in the distance, he saw a grazing herd of wild deer.

Late in the afternoon, he came to a wide plateau, surrounded on three sides with mountain-peaks. There was a lake in the center, with a few cottages scattered along its shores, and at one end of the lake a high-gabled, wide-eaved inn, in front of which a short man, dark and wiry and unlike the people of that country, lounged in the sun. He proved to be the innkeeper, a native of Navarre, and, to Cartaret's delight, spoke French.

"Yes," he nodded, "I learned it years ago from a French servant that they used to have at the castle in the old lord's time."

"I've come from Vitoria," Cartaret explained. "Can you tell me how far it is to Alegria?"

"If you have come from Vitoria," was the suspicious answer, "you must have taken the wrong road and come around Alegria. Alegria is a score of miles behind you."

Cartaret swore softly at that road-map. He was tired and stiff, however, and so he dismounted and let the landlord attend to his mare and bring him, at the inn-porch, some black bread and cheese and a small pitcher of *zaragua*, the native cider.

"These are a strange people here," he said as the landlord took a chair opposite.

The landlord shook his swarthy head.

"I do not speak ill of them," said he. His tone implied that such a course would be unwise. "They call themselves," he went on after a ruminative pause, "the direct

descendants of those Celtiberi whom the old Romans could never conquer, and I can well believe it of them. However, I know nothing: the lord at the castle knows."

"They don't like the Spaniards?" asked Cartaret.

"They hate us," said the innkeeper.

"Why?"

"I do not know. Perhaps because Spain rules them—so much as any power could. But I know nothing: the lord at the castle knows."

"What's his name?"

The question fell thoughtlessly from the lips of the American, but he had no sooner uttered it than he surmised its answer:

"The Don Ricardo Ethenard-Eskurola d'Alegria."

Cartaret produced a gold-piece and spun it on the rude table before him.

"An important man, isn't he?"

The innkeeper was eyeing the money, but his reply was cautious:

"How—'important'?"

"Rich?"

"The old lord lost much when there was the great rising for Don Carlos. But an Ethenard-Eskurola does not need riches."

"Then he's lucky. How does that happen?"

"Because his family is the most ancient and powerful in all the Vascongadas. There is no family older in Spain, nor any prouder." It was plainly one subject of which this alien was permitted to know something. "They have been lords of this land since before the time that men made chronicles. The papers in the castle go back to the Fifteenth Century—to the time when *Eskura* was first turned into an alphabet. They were at Roncesvalles; they made pilgrimages to Jerusalem and fought in the crusades. One of them was Lord-Lieutenant of Jerusalem when Godfrey de Bouillon was its King. There was an Ethenard-Eskurola at La Isla de los Faisanes when the French Louis XI arranged there with our Henry the marriage of the Duc de Guienne. Always they have been lords and over-lords—always."

"I see," said Cartaret. "And the present lord lives near here at the castle?"

"As all his fathers lived before him. At their place and in their manner. What they did, he does; what they believed, he believes. Monsieur, even the ancient Basque traditions of hospitality are there a law infringeable. Were you his bitterest blood-enemy and knocked at the castle-gate for a night's shelter, he himself, Ricardo d'Alegria, would greet you and wait upon you, and keep you safe until morning."

"And then shoot my head off?" suggested Cartaret.

The innkeeper smiled: "I know nothing; but the lord at the castle knows."

"I suppose he hasn't a drop of any blood but Basque blood in him?"

"Monsieur, there is but one way in which a foreigner may marry even the humblest Basque, and that is by some act that saves the Basque's entire line. Thus

even the humblest. As for the grandee at the castle, if I so much as asked him that question, so proud is he of his nationality and family that likely he would kill me."

"He must be a pleasant neighbor," said the American. "He lives alone?"

"With his servants. He has, of course, many servants."

"He is not married?"

Still eyeing the gold-piece, the landlord answered:

"No. There was something, once, long ago, that men say—but I know nothing. The Don Ricardo is the last of his house. Unless he marries, the Eskurolas will cease. However, he will marry."

"You seem certain of it."

"Naturally, monsieur. He will marry in order that the Eskurolas do not cease."

"Yes-s-s." Cartaret hesitated before his next question. "So he's alone up there? I mean—I mean there's no other member of his family with him now?"

Instantly the innkeeper's face became blank.

"I know nothing——" he began.

"But the lord at the castle knows!" interrupted Cartaret. "I said it first that time. The lord at the castle must know everything."

"He does," said the landlord simply.

Cartaret rose. He pushed the gold-piece across the table.

"That sentiment earns it," said he. "Bring my mare, please. And you might point out the way to this castle. I've a mind to run up there."

The innkeeper looked at him oddly, but, when the mare had been brought around, pointed a lean brown finger across the lake toward the mountains that ended in twin white peaks: the peaks that Cartaret had seen a few hours since and that now seemed to him to be the crests of which he had dreamed when first he saw the Azure Rose.

"The road leads from the head of the lake, monsieur," said the innkeeper: "you cannot lose your way."

Cartaret followed the instructions thus conveyed. After three miles' riding, a curved ascent had shut the lake and the cottages from view, had shut from view every trace of human habitation. He rode among scenery that, save for the grassy bridle-path, was as wild as if it had never before been known of man.

It was a ravishing country, a fairy-country of blue skies and fleecy clouds; of acicular summits and sharp-edged crags; of mist-hung valleys shimmering in the sun; of black chasms dizzily bridged by scarlet-flowered vines. The road ran along the edges of precipices and wreathed the gray outcropping rock; thick ropes of honeysuckle festooned the limbs of ancient trees and perfumed all the air. Here a blue cliff hid its distant face behind a bridal-veil of descending spray, broken by a dozen rainbows; there, down the terrifying depths of a vertical wall, roared a white and mighty cataract. The traveler's ears began to listen for the song of the hamadryad

from the branches of the oak; his eyes to seek the flashing limbs of a frightened nymph; here if anywhere the gods of the elder-revelation still held sway.

Evening, which comes so suddenly in the Cantabrians, was falling before the luxuriant verdure lessened and he came to a break in the forest. Below him, billow upon billow, the foothills fell away in rolling waves of green. Above, the jagged circle of the horizon was a line of salient summits and tapering spires of every tint of blue—turquoise, indigo, mauve—mounting up and up like the seats in a Titanic amphitheater, to the royal purple of the sky.

Cartaret had turned in his saddle to look at the magnificent panorama. Now, turning forward, he saw, rising ahead of him—ten miles or more ahead, but so gigantic as to seem bending directly above him and tottering to crush him and the world at his feet—one of the peaks that the innkeeper had indicated. It was a mountain piled upon the mountains, a sheer mountain of naked chalcedonous rock, rising to a snow-topped pinnacle; and, at its foot, almost at the extreme edge of the timber-line, a broad, muricated natural gallery, stood a vast Gothic pile, a somber, rambling mass of wall and tower: the castle of the Eskurolas.

Almost as Cartaret looked, the sun went down behind that peak and wrapped the way in utter darkness. The traveler regarded with something like dismay the last faint glow that vanished from the west.

"So sorry you had to go," he said, addressing the departed lord of day. He tried to look about him. "A nice fix I'm in," he added.

He attempted to ride on in the dark, but, remembering the precipices, dared not touch rein. He thought of trusting to the instinct of the mare, but that soon failed him: the animal came to a full stop. The stillness grew profound, the night impenetrable.

Then, suddenly, there was a wild cacophony from the forest on his left. It shook the air and set the echoes clanging from cliff to cavern. The mare reared and snorted. Lights danced among the trees; the lights became leaping flames; the noise was identifiable as the clatter of dogs and the shouts of men. Cartaret subdued his mare just as a torch-bearing party of picturesquely-garbed hunters plunged into the road directly in front of him and came, at sight of him, to a stand.

In the flickering light from a trio of burning pine-knots, the sight was enough strange. There were six men in all: three of them, in peasant costume, bearing aloft the torches, and two more, similarly dressed, holding leashes at which huge boar-hounds tugged. A pair of torch-bearers carried a large bough from the shoulder of one to the shoulder of the other, and suspended feet upward from this bough—bending with the weight—was a great, gray-black boar, its woolly hair red with blood, the coarse bristles standing erect like a comb along its spine, its two enormous tusks prism-shaped and shining like prisms in the light from the pine-knots.

A deep bass voice issued a challenge in *Eskura*. It came from the sixth member of the party, unmistakably in command.

He was one of the biggest men Cartaret had ever seen. He must have stood six-feet-six in his boots and was proportionately broad, deep-chested and long-armed. In one hand he held an old-fashioned boar-spear—its blade was red—as a sportsman that scorns the safety of a boar-hunt with a modern rifle.

The torchlight, flickering over his tanned and bearded face, showed features handsome and aquiline, fashioned with a severe nobility. Instead of a hat, a scarf of red silk was wrapped about his black curls and knotted at one side. His eyes, under eagle-brows, were fierce and gray. Cartaret instinctively recalled his early ideas of a dark Wotan in the *Nibelungen-Lied*.

The American dismounted. He said, in English:

"You are the Don Ricardo Ethenard-Eskurola?"

He had guessed rightly: the big man bowed assent.

"I'm an American," explained Cartaret. "The innkeeper down in the valley told me your castle was near here, so I thought that this was you. I'm rather caught here by the darkness. I wonder if——" He noted Eskurola's eye and did not like it. "I wonder if there's another inn—one somewhere near here."

The Basque frowned. For a moment he said nothing. When he did speak it was in the slow, but precise, English that Cartaret had first heard from the lips of the Lady of the Rose.

"You, sir, are upon my land——"

"I'm very sorry," said Cartaret.

"And," continued Don Ricardo, "I could not permit to go to a mere inn any gentleman whom darkness has overtaken upon the land of the Eskurolas. It is true: on my land merely, you are not my guest; according to our customs, I am permitted to fight a duel, if need arises, with a gentleman that is on my land." He smiled: he had, in the torchlight, a fearsome smile. "But on my land, you are in the way of becoming my guest. Will you be so good as to accompany me to my poor house and accept such entertainment as my best can give you?"

Cartaret accepted, and, in the act, thought the acceptance too ready.

"Pray remount," urged Eskurola.

But Cartaret said that he would walk with his host, and so the still trembling mare was given to an unencumbered torch-bearer to lead, and, by the light of the pine-knots, the party began its ten-mile climb.

The night air, at that altitude, was keen even in Summer, and the way was dark. The American had an uneasy sense that he was often toiling along the edges of invisible abysses, and once or twice, from the forest, he heard the scurry of a fox and saw the green eyes of a lynx. He tried to make conversation and, to his surprise, found himself courteously met more than half way.

"I know very little of this part of Spain," he said: "nothing, in fact, except what I've learned in the past few days and what the innkeeper down there told me."

“We Basques do not call this a part of Spain,” Eskurola corrected him in a voice patently striving to be gentle; “and the innkeeper knows little. He is but a poor thing from Navarre.”

“Yes,” Cartaret agreed; “the staple of his talk was the statement that he knew nothing at all.”

Eskurola smiled.

“That is the truth,” said he.

He went on to speak freely enough of his own people. He explained something of their almost Mongolian language: its genderless nouns; its countless diminutives; its endless compounds formed by mere juxtaposition and elision; its staggering array of affixes to supply all ordinary grammatical distinctions, doing away with our need of periphrasis and making the ending of a word determine its number and person and mood, the case and number of the object, and even the rank, sex and number of the persons addressed.

He talked with a modesty so formed as really to show his high pride in everything that was Basque. When Cartaret pressed him, he told, with only a pretense of doubt in his voice, how the Celtiberi considered themselves descendants of the ocean-engulfed Atalantes, and former owners of all the Spanish peninsula. Even now, he insisted, they were the sole power over themselves from the bold coast-line of Vizcaya to the borders of Navarre and had so been long before Sancho the Wise was forced to grant them a *fuero*. They had always named their own governors and fixed their own taxes by republican methods. The sign of the Vascongadas, the three interlaced hands with the motto *Iruracacabat*, signified three-in-one, because delegates from their three parliaments met each year to care for the common interests of all; but there was no written pact between them: the Basques were people of honor.

Spain? Don Ricardo disliked its mention. St. Mary of Salvaterra! The Basque parliaments named a deputation that negotiated with representatives of the Escorial and preserved Basque liberties and law. If Madrid called that sovereignty, it was welcome to the term.

“We remain untouched by Spain,” he said, “and untouched by the world. Our legends are still Grecian, our customs are what the English call ‘iron-clad.’ Basque blood is Basque and so remains. It never mixes. It could mix in only one contingency.”

Cartaret was glad that the darkness hid his flushed cheek as he answered:

“I have recently heard of that contingency.”

“It never occurs,” said Eskurola quickly, “because the Basque always chooses not to permit himself to be saved. It is a traditional law among us as strong as that against the disgrace of suicide.”

Their feet were sounding over a bridge: the bridge, as Cartaret reflected, to the castle’s moat. Through the light of the torches, the great gray walls of the pile climbed above him and disappeared into the night. A studded door, with mighty heaving of

bolts, swung open before them, and they passed through into a vaulted gateway. The pine-knots cast dancing shadows on the stones.

Into what medieval world was he being admitted? Did Vitoria indeed inhabit it? And if she did, what difficulties and dangers must he overcome before ever he could take her thence?

Don Ricardo was speaking.

“I welcome you to my poor home,” he said.

Cartaret’s heart beat high. He was ready for any difficulty, for any danger....

With a solemn boom the great gate swung shut behind him. He felt that it had shut out the Twentieth Century.

CHAPTER XIV

SOMETHING OR OTHER ABOUT TRADITIONS

... Since we must part, down rightWith happy day; burdens well borne are light.—Donne: *Eleg. XIII*.

Cartaret was lighted by his host himself to a bedroom high up in the castle and deep within it—a bedroom big enough and dreary enough to hold all the ghosts of Spain. An old man-servant brought him a supper calculated to stay the hunger of a shipwrecked merchant-crew. He lay down in a great four-poster bed both canopied and curtained, and, in spite of his weariness, he tossed for hours, wondering whether Vitoria was also somewhere within those grim walls and what course he was to pursue in regard to her.

The same uncertainty gripped him when breakfast was brought to his bedside in the early morning. Was this, after all, Vitoria's home; and if it was, had she returned to it? Supposing an affirmative answer to these questions, what was he to say to her brother? So far, thank Heaven, Don Ricardo, though he had once or twice looked queerly at the American, had been too polite to make awkward inquiries, but such inquiries were so natural that they were bound soon to be made; and Cartaret could not remain forever an unexplained and self-invited guest in the castle of his almost involuntary host. The guest recalled all that he had heard of the national and family pride and traditions of the Eskurolas, and only his native hopefulness sustained him.

He found his own way down twisting stairs and into a vast court-yard across which servants were passing. The great gate was open, and he stepped through it toward the battlemented terrace that he saw beyond.

His first shock was there. The bridge that he had crossed the night before was indeed a drawbridge and did indeed span the castle-moat, but the bridge was unrailed and that moat was a terrible thing. It was no pit of twenty or thirty feet dug by the hand of man. The terrace to which the castle clung was separated from that to which climbed the steep approach by a natural chasm of at least twelve yards across, with sheer sides, like those of a glacial crevasse, shooting downwards into black invisibility and echoing upward the thunderous rush of unseen waters.

Leaning on the weather-worn wall that climbed along the edge of this precipice and guarded a broad promenade between it and the castle, Cartaret looked with a new sensation at the marvelous scene about him. Behind rose the frowning castle, a maze of parapets and towers, built against that naked, snow-capped, chalcedonous peak. In front, falling away through a hundred gradations of green, a riot of luxuriant vegetation, lay the now apparently uninhabited country through which he had ridden, and beyond this, circling it like the teeth of the celestial dragon that the Chinese

believe is to swallow the sun, rose row on row of bare mountains, ridges and pinnacles blue and gray.

A hand fell on Cartaret's shoulder. He turned to find Don Ricardo standing beside him. The giant gave every appearance of having been up and about for hours, and, despite his bulk, he had approached his guest unheard.

"I trust that you, sir, have slept well in my poor house."

Cartaret replied that he had slept like a top.

"And that you could eat of the little breakfast which my servants provided?"

"I made a wonderful breakfast," said Cartaret.

"It is good, sir. If you can bear with my house, it is yours for so long as you care to honor it with your presence."

Cartaret knew that this must be only an exaggerated fashion of speech, but he chose to take it literally.

"That's very good of you," he said. "I haven't ridden for years and I'm rather done up. If you really don't mind, I think I will rest here over another night."

Don Ricardo seemed unprepared for this, but he checked a frown and bowed gravely.

"A year would be too short for me," he vowed.

They fell to talking, the host now trying to turn the conversation into the valley, the guest holding it fast to the castle-heights.

"It is a beautiful place," said Cartaret; "I don't know when I've seen anything to compare with it; and yet I should think you'd find it rather lonely."

"Not lonely, sir," said the Basque. "The hunting in the valley is a compensation. For example, where you see those oaks about the curve of that river, I hunted, not ten days ago, a wolf as large as those for which my ancestors paid the wolf-money."

"Still," Cartaret persisted, "you do live here quite alone, don't you?"

He knew that he was impudent, and he felt that only his host's reverence for the laws of hospitality prevented an open resentment. Nevertheless, Cartaret was bound to find out what he could, and this time he was rewarded.

"There is good enough to live with me," said Don Ricardo stiffly, "my lady sister, the Doña Dolorez Eulalia Vitoria." He looked out across the chasm.

Cartaret caught his breath. There was an awkward pause. Then, glancing up, he saw, coming toward them along the terrace, the figure of a woman-servant that seemed startlingly familiar.

It was Chitta. She was bent, no doubt, on some household errand to her master, whose face was luckily turned away—luckily because, when she caught sight of Cartaret, her jaw dropped and her knees gave under her.

Cartaret had just time to knit his brows with the most forbidding scowl he could assume. The old woman clasped her hands in what was plainly a prayer to him to be

silent concerning all knowledge of her and her mistress. A moment more, and Don Ricardo was giving her orders in the Basque tongue.

"Our servants," he said apologetically when she had gone, "are faithful, but stupid." His gray eyes peered at Cartaret searchingly. "Very stupid, sir," he added. "For instance, you, sir, know something of our customs; you know that centuries-old tradition—the best of laws—makes it the worst of social crimes for a Basque to marry any save a Basque——"

He stopped short, holding Cartaret with his eyes. Cartaret nodded.

"Very well, sir," Ricardo continued: "one time a lady of our house—it was years upon years ago, when Wellington and the English were here—fell in love, or thought that she did, with a British officer. For an Englishman, his degree was high, but had he been the English King it would have served him nothing among us. Knowing of course that the head of our house would never consent to such a marriage, this lady commanded her most loyal servant to assist in an elopement. Now, the Basque servant must obey her mistress, but also the Basque servant must protect the honor of the house that she has the privilege to serve. This one sought to do both things. She assisted in the elopement and brought the lady to the English camp. Then, thus having been faithful to one duty, she was faithful to the other: before the wedding, she killed both her mistress and herself." He turned quickly. "Sir, I have pressing duties in the valley, and you are too weary to ride with me: my poor house is at your disposal."

Cartaret leaned against the parapet and, when his host was out of earshot, whistled softly.

"What a delightful *raconteur*," he mused. "I wonder if he meant me to draw any special moral from that bit of family-history."

He waited until, a quarter of an hour later, he saw Don Ricardo and two servants ride across the drawbridge and wind their way toward the valley. He waited until the green forest engulfed them. What he was going to do might be questionable conduct in a guest, but there was no time to waste over nice points of etiquette. He was going to find Vitoria.

He started for the court-yard. His plan was to accost the first servant that he encountered and mention Chitta's name, but this trouble was saved him. In the shadowy gateway, he found Chitta crouching.

She glanced to right and left, saw that they were unobserved, passed beyond a narrow door that opened into the gate, and led Cartaret up a spiral stone staircase to the entrance of a circular room in one of the twin gate-towers. There she turned and left him alone with Vitoria.

In the center of that bare room, standing beside one of the bowmen's windows that commanded the approach to the castle, the Lady of the Rose awaited him. For an instant, he scarcely recognized her. She was gowned in a single-piece Basque dress of embroidered silk, closely fitted about her full lithe figure to below the hips, the skirt

widening and hanging loosely about her slim ankles. A black silk scarf, in sharp contrast to the embroidery, was sewn to the dress and drawn tightly over the right shoulder, across the bust, and then draped beneath the left hip. But the glory of her blue-black hair was as he had first seen it in the twilight of his far-off studio; the creamy whiteness of her cheeks was just touched with pink, and her blue eyes, under curling lashes, seemed at first the frank eyes that he loved.

"Vitoria!" he cried.

She drew back. She raised one hand, its pink palm toward him.

"You should not have done this," she said in a rapid whisper. "How did you find me? How did you come here?" Her voice was kind, but steady.

Cartaret stood still. This he had not looked for. His cheeks were flushed, and the lines about his mouth deepened, as they always did at moments of crisis, and made his face very firm.

"Does it matter how?" he asked. "Not all the width of the world could have kept me away. There's something I've got to know and know instantly."

"But you should not have come, and you must go immediately! Listen—no, listen to me now! I am not Vitoria Urola in these mountains; whether I want it or not, I have to be the Doña Dolorez Ethenard-Eskurola. That would perhaps sound amusing in the rue du Val de Grâce; here it is a serious matter: the most serious matter in this little mountain-world. You will have to listen to me."

Cartaret folded his arms.

"Go on," he said.

"Last Winter," she continued, her face challenging his, "I had a time of rebellion against all these things amongst which I had been brought up. I had never been farther away from this place than Alegria, but I had had French and English governesses, and I read books and dreamed dreams. I loved to paint; I thought that I could learn to be a real artist, but I knew that my brother would think that a shame in an Eskurola and would never permit his unmarried sister to go to a foreign city to study. Nevertheless, I was hungry for the great world outside—for the real world—and so I took poor Chitta, gathered what jewels were my own and not family-jewels, and ran away."

She looked from the window to the road that led into the valley; but the road was still deserted.

"Chitta sold the jewels," she presently went on. "They brought very little; but to me, who had never used money, it seemed much. We went to Paris: I and Chitta, who, because she had often been so far as Vitoria before, became as much my guardian as she was my servant—and I was long afraid to go but a little distance in the streets without her: the streets terrified me, and, after one fright, she made me promise to go nowhere without her. So we took the room that you know of. We were used to regarding my brother as all-powerful; we feared that he would find us. Therefore, we would let no one know who we were or whence we came. Now that is

over." Her voice trembled a little. She made a hopeless gesture. "It is all over, and we have come back to our own people." She raised her head proudly; she had regained her self-control: to Cartaret, she seemed to have regained an ancient pride. "I have learned that I must be what I was born to be."

He squared his jaw.

"A slave to your brother's will," he said.

"A creature," she answered with steady gaze—"a creature of the will of God."

"But this is nonsense!" He came forward. "This sort of thing may have been all very well in the Fourteenth Century; but we're living in the Twentieth, and it doesn't go now. Oh,"—he flung out a hand—"I know all about your old laws and traditions! I dare say they're extremely quaint and all that, and I dare say there was a time when they had some reason in them; but that time isn't this time, and I refuse to hear any more about them. I won't let them interfere with me."

She flashed crimson.

"You speak for yourself, sir: permit me to speak for myself."

His answer was to seize her hands.

"Let me go!" she ordered.

"I'll never let you go," said he.

"Let me go. You are a brave man to restrain a woman! Shall I call a servant?"

She struggled fiercely, panting.

"I've got to make you understand me," he protested, holding fast her hands. "I didn't mean any harm to your traditions or your customs. Whatever you love I'll try to love too—just so long as it doesn't hurt you. But *this* does hurt you. Tell me one thing: Why did you leave Paris? What was it made you change your mind?" He saw in her face the signs of an effort to disregard the demand. "Tell me why you left Paris," he repeated.

Her eyes wavered. The lids fluttered.

"That night," she began in an uneven tone, "I gave you to understand, that night——"

"You gave me to understand that you loved me."

He said it fearlessly, and, on the edge of a sob, she fearlessly answered him. She had ceased to struggle. Her hands lay still and cold in his.

"I told you that love had brought me a sword."

"You've changed. What has changed you?"

"I have not changed. I have only come back to these unchangeable mountains, to this unchanging castle, to the ancient laws and customs of my people—their ancient and unalterable laws. I had to come back to them," she said, "because I realized that it was not in me to be false to all that my fathers have for centuries been true to."

Cartaret leaned forward. He could not believe that this was her only reason; he could not understand that the sway of any custom can be so powerful. He held her hands tighter. His eyes searched her quailing eyes.

“Do you love me? That’s all I want to know, and I’ll attend to everything else. I’ve no time for sparring. I’ve got to know if you love me. I’ve got to know that, right here and now.”

She shook her head.

“Don’t!” she whispered.

“Do you love me?” he relentlessly persisted.

“To love in Paris is one thing: here I may not love.”

“You may not—but *do* you?”

“Don’t. Please don’t. Oh!”—her red lips parted, her breath came fast—“if love were all——”

“It *is* all!” he declared. He slipped both her cold hands into his right hand and put his freed arm about her waist. “Vitoria,” he whispered, drawing her to him, “it *is* all. It’s all that matters, all that counts. It can mock all custom and defy all law. I love you, Vitoria.” Slowly her eyes closed; slowly she sank against his arm; slowly her head drooped backward, and slowly he bent toward its parted, unresisting lips—— “And love’s the one thing in the world worth living and dying for.”

At that word, she came to sudden life. With one wrench, she had darted from his arms. Instantly she had recovered self-control.

“No, no, no!” she cried. “Go away! There is danger here. Oh, go away!”

The suddenness of her action shattered his delirium. He read in her words only her reply to the question that he had put to her.

Impossible as it would have seemed a moment since, that negative meant a catastrophic denial of any love for him. He glanced at the old walls that surrounded them—at all the expressions of a remorseless self in which he could have no part. He felt, with a sudden certainty, that these things were of her, and she of them—that what she meant by her distinction between herself in Paris and this other self here was the vast difference between a Byzantine empress breaking plebeian hearts in the alleys of her capital and that same woman on her throne, passionless and raised above the reach of men’s desires.

The most modest of young fellows is always a little vain, and his vanity is always wounded; it is ever seeking hurts, anxious to suffer: Cartaret was no exception to human rules. He told his heart that Vitoria’s words meant but one thing: She had entertained herself with him during an incognito escapade and, now that the escapade was finished, wanted no reminders. A Byzantine empress? This was worse: the empress gave, if only to take away. What Vitoria must mean was that even her momentary softening toward him on this spot was no more than momentary. She was saying that, having had her amusement by making him love her, she was now returned to her proper station, where to love her was to insult her. He had been her plaything, and now she was tired of it.

“Very well,” he said, “if you think my love is worth so little. If you can’t brave one miserable medieval superstition for it, then I’ve got the answer to what I asked

you, and you're right: I'd better go." He turned to the narrow door at the head of the spiral stairs. "I know," he said, as if to the stone walls about them, "that I'm not worth much sacrifice; but my love has been worth a sacrifice. Some day you'll understand what my love might have meant. Some day, when you're old, you'll look from one of these windows out over these valleys and mountains and think of what could have happened—what there was once, just this one time, one chance for." He half faced her. "Other men will love you, many of them. They'll love your happiness and grace and beauty as well, I dare say, as I do and always will. But you'll remember one man that loved your soul; you'll remember me——"

Vitoria was swaying dizzily. Her recaptured self-command visibly wavered. She leaned against the rough wall. He leaped toward her, but she had the strength left to warn him away.

"No, no, no!" she repeated. "I do not——" She raised her hands to the vaulted roof. By a tremendous effort she became again mistress of herself—and of him. "Why will you not understand? I do not love you. Go!"

At that moment a cry rang out. It was a cry from the gateway. It was the cry of Chitta, who came bounding into the narrow room and hurled herself at her mistress's feet.

Before any one of the trio could speak, there was the clatter of a galloping horse on the road, the thunder of hoofs over the drawbridge above that frightful chasm.

"Go!" shrieked Vitoria. "Will you never go? Do you not understand what this means? Do you not know who is coming here?"

Chitta set up a loud wail.

"I don't care who's coming here," said Cartaret. "If there's any danger——"

Vitoria leaped over the prostrate servant and began pushing Cartaret away.

"I hate you!" she cried. "Do you hear that? *I hate you!* Now will you go?"

He looked at her, and his face hardened.

"I'll go," he said.

He turned away.

"My brother!" gasped Vitoria.

Don Ricardo came in at the door of the tower-room.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH CARTARET TAKES PART IN THE REVIVAL OF AN ANCIENT CUSTOM

La vieille humanité porte encore dans ses entrailles la brutalité primitive; un anthropoïde féroce survit en chacun de nous.—Opinions à Répandre.

For a moment none moved. There was Chitta, groveling on the stone floor of the circular room, her face hidden in her hands; there was Vitoria, her arms outstretched, struck rigid in the act of repulsing Cartaret; and there were the two men—the American white, but determined and unafraid; the Basque with a dull red spreading on his tanned cheeks—facing each other as pugilists, entering the ring, face each other at pause during the fleeting instant before they begin to circle for an opening. Cartaret, with the eye that, in times of high emotion, takes account of even trivial detail, noted how Don Ricardo, who had been forced to stoop in order to pass the doorway, gradually straightened himself with a slow, unconscious expansion of the muscles such as a tiger might employ.

Vitoria was the first to speak: she lowered her arms and turned upon her brother a glance of which the pride proved that her self-possession was regained. She spoke in English, though whether for Cartaret's comprehension, for the servant's mystification, or as an added gibe at Ricardo, the American was unable to determine.

"You came unannounced, brother," she said. "I am not accustomed to such entrances."

The red deepened over Don Ricardo's high cheek-bones, but he bit his lip and seemed to bite down his rage.

"These are not your apartments, Doña Dolorez," he said, adopting, with visible repugnance, the language she employed. "And I am the head of your house." He bent his gray eyes on Cartaret. "Be so good as to come with me, sir," he said. He stood aside from the door. "I follow after my guest."

Cartaret's heart had place only for the last words that Vitoria had said to him. He would not look at her again, and he cared little what might happen to himself, so long as he could draw this irate brother after him and away from the endangered women. Vitoria had said that she hated him: well, he would do what he could to save her, and then leave Alava forever. He passed through the door....

"He is my guest," he heard Don Ricardo saying. "An Eskurola remembers the laws of hospitality."

Cartaret went on to the court-yard. There his host followed him.

"Will you come to my offices?" he asked.

He walked across to the north wing of the castle and into a large room that looked upon the terrace. The ceiling was a mass of blackened rafters; the walls, wainscoted in oak, were hung with ancient arms and armor, with the antlers of deer and the stuffed heads of tusked boar, and with some rags of long-faded tapestry. There was a yawning fire-place at one end, between high bookshelves filled with leather-bound folios, and, near one of the windows, stood an open Seventeenth Century desk massed with dusty papers.

Eskurola waved his guest to a stiff-backed chair. Cartaret, seeing that Don Ricardo intended to remain standing, merely stood beside it.

"Sir," began the Basque, "you have said that you are a stranger to our country and its ways. It is my duty to enlighten you in regard to some details."

He towered nearly half a foot above Cartaret. The nostrils of his beaked nose quivered above his bristling beard, but he kept his voice rigorously to the conversational pitch.

Cartaret, however, was in no mood to hear any more exposition of Vascongada manners and customs. He had had enough of them.

"There's no need of that," he said. "If I've done anything I shouldn't have done, I'm sorry. But I want you to understand that I'm to blame: *I'm* to blame—and nobody else."

Eskurola went on as if Cartaret had not spoken:

"It is not our custom to present to our ladies such casual strangers as happen to ask shelter of us; nor is it the custom of our ladies to permit such presentations, still less to seek them. Of that last fact, I say but one word more: the Doña Dolorez has been lately from home, and I fear that her contact with the outer world has temporarily dulled the edge of her native sensitiveness."

"Look here," said Cartaret, his hands clenched, "if you mean to imply——"

"Sir!" The Basque's eyes snapped. "I speak of my sister."

"All right then. But you'd better be told a few facts, too. Paris isn't Alava. I met the Doña Dolorez in Paris. We were neighbors. What could be more natural, then, than that, when I came here——"

"Ah-h-h!" Eskurola softly interrupted. In the meshes of his beard, his red lips were smiling unpleasantly. "So that was it! How stupid of me not to have guessed before, sir. I was sure that there had been in Paris something beside Art."

Cartaret's impulse was to fly at the man's throat. His reason, determined to protect the woman that cared no more for him, dictated another course.

"I wanted," he said quietly, "to make your sister my wife."

The effect of this statement was twofold. At first a violent anger shook the Basque, and the veins stood out in ridges along his neck and at his temples, below the red cloth bound about his head. Then, as quickly, the anger passed and was succeeded by a look reminiscent, almost tender.

“You know that no alien can marry one of our people,” he said. “You know that now.”

Cartaret thought again of Vitoria’s parting word to him.

“I know it *now*,” he said.

“You are my guest,” Eskurola pursued. “I shall tell you something. You have seen me only as what must seem to you a strange and hard man—perhaps a fierce and cruel man. I am the head of my ancient house; on me there depends not only its honor, but also its continuance. Sir, I exact of my relatives no less than I have already exacted of myself.”

Cartaret looked at him in amazement. Could it be possible that there had ever been in this medieval mind anything but ruthless pride of race?

“Years ago—but not so many years ago as you, sir, might suppose—there came to this house a young lady. She came here as a governess for my sister, but she was a lady, a person of birth. Also, she spoke your language.” He paused, and then went on in a still gentler voice. “Sir, because of her, your language, barbarous as it is, has always been dear to me, and yet, still because of her, I have ever since wanted not to speak it.”

Cartaret looked at the floor. Even though this confession of a past weakness was voluntary, it seemed somehow unfair to watch, during it, the man whose pride was so strong.

“And you sent her away?” he found himself asking.

“She went when her work was finished. She went without knowing.”

Cartaret raised his eyes. There was no false assumption in the man upon whom they rested: it was impossible to believe that, seeing him thus, a woman would not love him.

“I’ll go,” said Cartaret. Eskurola’s words had assured him of Vitoria’s safety. “I’ll go now.”

“I would not drive you away. You have said that you would be my guest for another night; you may remain as long as you care to remain.”

“I’ll go,” Cartaret repeated. “It isn’t you that’s driving me. Will you please send up to my room for my saddle-bags, and have my mare brought around?”

Don Ricardo bowed. He went out.

Cartaret stood for some time on the spot where he had been standing throughout the talk with his host. He was thinking of his ruined hopes and of the woman that had ruined them. Once he asked himself what had so changed her; but, when he could find no answer to that question, he asked what the cause could matter, since the effect was so apparent. He walked to a window. He could see that part of the terrace which lay between the gate and the drawbridge, but he saw no sign of his mare. What could Eskurola be doing? He seemed, whatever it was, to be a long time about it.

The oaken door of the room opened and closed with a bang. Don Ricardo stood before it. The dull red had returned to his cheeks.

"Sir," said he, "I have just been having another word with the Doña Dolorez: she informs me that you have had the impertinence to tell her that you love her."

Cartaret laughed bitterly. "In *my* country," he said, "when a man wants to marry a woman it is customary to say something of that kind."

"You are in Alava, sir, and you speak of a member of my family."

"I was in Paris then."

"But this morning—just now?" Eskurola came a step forward.

"I won't talk any more about it," said Cartaret. "Please have my mare brought around at once."

"No," Eskurola replied: "you shall talk no more about it. Mr. Cartaret, you must fight me."

The American could not believe his ears. He recollected that when the Continental speaks of fighting he does not refer to mere pugilism.

"You're crazy," said Cartaret. "I don't want to fight you."

"So soon as you have passed that gate, you will be my guest no longer. What, sir, you may then want will not matter. You will have to fight me."

Cartaret sat down. He crossed his legs and looked up at his host.

"Is this your little way of persuading me to stay awhile?" he asked.

"You cannot go too soon to please me."

"Then perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me what it's all about."

Eskurola's giant figure bent forward. His eyes blazed down in Cartaret's face.

"You came into this place, the place of my people, under false pretenses. I made you welcome; you were my guest, sir. Yet you used your opportunities to insult my sister."

Cartaret got slowly to his feet. He knew the probable consequences of what he was about to say, but, never shifting his gaze from the Basque's, he said it quietly:

"That's a lie."

Don Ricardo leaped backward. It was doubtless the first time in his life that such a phrase had been addressed to him, and he received it as he might have received a blow. Both in mind and body, he staggered.

"My sister has told me——" he began.

"I don't want to hear any more, señor. I've said all that I have to say." Cartaret thrust his hands into the pockets of his riding-breeches and, turning his back on Eskurola, looked out of the window.

"Now," the Basque was saying, as his mental balance reasserted itself—"now we must indeed fight."

Cartaret himself was thinking rapidly and by no means clearly. To say that dueling was not an American custom would avail him nothing—would be interpreted as cowardice; to fight with a man bred as Don Ricardo was evidently bred would be to

walk out to death. Cartaret looked at the panorama of the mountains. Well, why not death? Less than an hour ago his whole life had been mined, had been sent crashing about his head. The only thing that he cared for in life was taken from him: Vitoria had herself declared that she hated him. Nor that alone—the thought burned in his brain: she had told this wild brother of hers that he, Cartaret, had insulted her; she had incited Eskurola to battle—perhaps to save herself, perhaps to salve some strange Basque conception of honor or pride. So be it; Cartaret could render her one more service—the last: if he allowed himself to be killed by this half-savage who so serenely thought that he was better than all the rest of the world, Don Ricardo's wounded honor would be healed, and Vitoria—now evidently herself in danger or revengeful—would be either safe or pacified. The Twentieth Century had never entered these mountains, and Cartaret, entering them, had left his own modernity behind.

"All right," said he, "since you're so confounded hungry for it, I'll fight you. Anything to oblige."

He looked about to find Eskurola bowing gratefully: the man's eyes seemed to be selecting the spot on their enemy's body at which to inflict the fatal wound.

"I am glad, sir, that you see reason," said Don Ricardo.

"I'm not sure that I see reason," said Cartaret, "but I'm going to fight you."

"I do not suppose that you can use a rapier, Mr. Cartaret?"

It was clear that not to understand the rapier was to be not quite a gentleman; but Cartaret made the confession. "Not that it matters," he reflected.

"But you can shoot?"

Cartaret remembered the boyish days when he had taken prizes for his marksmanship with a revolver. It was the one folly of his youth that he had continued, and he found a certain satisfaction (so much did Eskurola's pride impress him) in admitting this, albeit he did not mean to use the accomplishment now.

"I carry this with me," said he, producing his automatic revolver.

Don Ricardo scarcely glanced at it.

"That is not the weapon for a marksman," he said. "Nevertheless, let me see what you can do. None will be disturbed; these walls are sound-proof." He took a gold coin, an alfonso, from his pocket and flung it into the air. "Shoot!" he commanded.

Cartaret had expected nothing of the sort. He fired and missed. The report roared through the room; the acrid taste of the powder filled the air. Eskurola caught the descending coin in his hand. Cartaret saw that his failure had annoyed Don Ricardo, and this in its turn annoyed the American.

"I didn't know you were going to try me," he said, "and I'm not used to marking up the ceilings of my friends' houses. Try again."

The Basque, without comment, flung up the alfonso a second time, and a second time Cartaret fired. Eskurola reached for the coin as before, but this time it

flew off at an angle and struck the farther wall. When they picked it up, they found that it had been hit close to the edge of the disk.

"Not the center," said Don Ricardo.

"Indeed?" said Cartaret. What sort of shot would please the man? "Suppose you try."

Eskurola explained that he was not accustomed to such a revolver, but he would not shirk the challenge; and there was no need for him to shirk it: when Cartaret recovered the alfonso after Don Ricardo had shot, there was a mark full in its middle.

"So much for His Spanish Majesty," said the Basque, as he glanced at the mark made by his bullet in the face upon the coin. "We shall use dueling-pistols. I have them here." He went to the desk.

Cartaret had no doubt that Eskurola had them there: he probably had a rack and thumbscrews handy below-stairs.

"We shall have to dispense with the formality of a surgeon," Don Ricardo was saying.

"It doesn't look as if one would be needed," Cartaret smiled; "and it doesn't look as if we were to have seconds, either."

The Basque turned sharply. "We are the only gentlemen within miles, and we cannot have servants for witnesses. Moreover, an Eskurola needs no seconds, either of his choosing to watch his safety, or of his enemy's to suspect his honor."

He pressed a spring, released a secret drawer in the desk and found what he was seeking: a box of polished mahogany. Opening the lid, he beckoned to Cartaret. There, on a purple velvet lining, lay a beautifully kept pair of dueling-pistols, muzzle-loaders of the Eighteenth Century pattern and of about .32 caliber, their long octagonal barrels of shining dark blue steel, their curved butts of ivory handsomely inlaid with a Moorish design in gold.

"Listen," said Eskurola, "as we are to have no seconds, I shall write a line to exculpate you in case you survive me. Then"—his gray eyes shone; he seemed to take a satisfaction that was close to delight in arranging these lethal details—"also as we are to have no seconds to give a signal, we shall have but one true shot between us. Certainly. Are we not men, we two? And we have proved ourselves marksmen. You cannot doubt me, but I have a man that speaks French, so that you shall see that I do not trick you, sir."

He went to the door and called into the court-yard. Presently there answered him a man whom Cartaret recognized as one of those who, the night before, held the dogs in leash.

"Murillo Gomez," said Eskurola, in a French more labored than his English, "in five minutes this gentleman and I shall want the terrace to ourselves. You will close the gate when we go out. You will remain on this side of it, and you will permit none to pass. Answer me in French."

The servant's face showed no surprise.

"*Oui, señor*," he said.

"Now you will take these pistols and bring them back without delay. In the armory you will load one with powder and shot, the other with powder only. Neither this gentleman nor I must know which is which. You understand?"

The servant's face was still impassive.

"*Oui, señor.*"

"Go then. Also see that the Doña Dolorez remains in her own apartments. And hurry."

The servant disappeared with the pistols. Eskurola, apologizing gravely, went to the desk and wrote—apparently the lines of which he had spoken. He sanded them, folded the paper, lit a candle and sealed the missive with an engraved jade ring that he wore on the little finger of his left hand.

"This is your first duel, sir?" he said to Cartaret. He said it much as an Englishman at luncheon might ask an American guest whether he had ever eaten turbot.

"Yes," said Cartaret.

"Well, you may have what the gamblers of London call 'beginner's luck.'"

The servant knocked at the door.

"Will you be so good as to take the pistols?" asked Don Ricardo in English of Cartaret. "It appears better if I do not speak with him. Thank you. And please to tell him in French that he may have your mare and saddle-bags ready in the gateway within five minutes, in case you should want them."

Cartaret obeyed.

Eskurola again held the door for his guest to pass.

"After you, sir," he said.

They crossed the court-yard leisurely and shoulder to shoulder, for all the world as if they were two friends going out to enjoy the view. Any one observing them from the windows, had there been any one, would have said that Don Ricardo was pointing out to Cartaret the beauties of the scene. In reality he was saying:

"With your agreement, we shall fix the distance at ten paces, and I shall step it. There is no choice for light, and the wind is at rest. Therefore, there being no person to count for us, I shall ask you to toss a coin again, this time that I may call it: if I fail to do so, you fire first; if I succeed, I fire first. Permit me to advise you, sir, that, if you are unaccustomed to the hair-trigger, it is as well that you be careful lest you lose your shot."

Eskurola's manners were apparently never so polished as when he was about to kill or be killed. He measured off the ground and marked the stand for each, always asking Cartaret's opinion. He stood while Cartaret again tossed a glittering gold-piece in the air.

“Tails!” cried Don Ricardo. “I always prefer,” he explained, “to see this king with his face in the dust. Let us look at him together, so that there will be no mistake.”

The piece lay with its face to the terrace.

“I win,” said Eskurola. “I shoot first. It is bad to begin well.”

Cartaret smiled. With such a marksman as this Basque to shoot at one, the speech became the merest pleasantry. There was only the question of the choice of the pistol, and as to that——

“If you will open the box, I shall choose,” Eskurola was saying. Evidently the choice was also to go to the winner of the toss. Cartaret was certain this would not have been the case if the toss had gone otherwise. “I must touch neither until I have chosen, although the additional powder in the blank pistol tends toward making their weight equal.”

Mechanically Cartaret opened the mahogany box. Don Ricardo scarcely glanced at the pair of beautiful and deadly weapons lying on the purple velvet: he took the one farther from him.

“Pray remember the hair-trigger,” he continued: “you might easily wound yourself. Now, if you please: to our places.”

Each man took off his hat and coat and stood at his post in his white shirt, his feet together, his right side fronting his enemy, his pistol pointing downwards from the hand against his right thigh.

“Are you ready, sir?” asked Eskurola.

For a flashing instant Cartaret wanted to scream with hysterical laughter: the whole proceeding seemed so archaic, so grotesque, so useless. Then he thought of how little he had to lose and of whom he might serve in losing that little....

“Ready, señor,” he said.

If only she could, for only that last moment, love him! That last moment, for he made no doubt of the end of this adventure. The Basque had been too punctilious in all his arrangements: from the first Cartaret had been sure that Don Ricardo and the French-speaking servant had played this tragic farce before, and that the master so arranged matters as easily to choose the one pistol that held death in its mouth. To convict him was impossible, and, were it possible, would be but to strike a fatal blow at the honor of that family which Vitoria held so dear. How false his vanity had played him! What was he that a goddess should not cease to love him when she chose? Enough and more that she had loved him once; an ultimate blessing could she love him a moment more. But once again, then: but that one instant! To see her pitiful eyes upon him, to hear her pure lips whisper the last good-by like music in his dying ears!

He saw the arm of his enemy slowly—slowly—rising, without speed and without hesitation, as the paw of a great cat rises to strike, but with a claw of shining steel.

Cartaret would look his last on the scene that her eyes had known when she was a child, that her eyes would know long after his—so soon now!—were closed forever. It was mid-morning; the golden sun was half-way to the zenith. At Cartaret's left, above the walls, the turrets and towers of the Gothic castle, rose the sheer front of that sheer chalcedonous peak. Its top was crowned with the dazzling and eternal snow; its face was waxen, almost translucent; its outcroppings of crypto-crystalline quartz, multi-toned by the wind and rain of centuries, caught the sunlight and flamed in every gradation of blue and yellow, of onyx, carnelian and sard. To the right lay the wide and peaceful valley, mass after mass of foliage, silver-green and emerald, and, above that, the ridges of the vast, scabrous amphitheater: beetling peaks of gray, dark pectinated cones, fusiform apexes, dancing lancets and swords' points, a hundred beetling crags and darting spires under a turquoise sky.

(Eskurola's arm was rising ... rising....)

Her face came before his eyes; not the face of the woman that sent him from the tower-room, but the face of The Girl that had parted from him in his shabby studio: the frame of blue-black hair, the clear cheek touched with healthy pink, the red lips and white teeth, the level brows, the curling lashes and the frank violet eyes.... Into his own eyes came a mist; it blotted out the landscape.

He dragged his glance back to his executioner. He must meet death face forward. A horrid fear beset him that he had been tardy in this—had seemed ever so little to waver.

But Eskurola had observed no faltering, and had not faltered: his arm still crept upward. It must all have happened in the twinkling of an eye, then: that impulse toward mad laughter, that thought of what he had suffered, that realization of the landscape, even the memory of her face—the Lady of the Rose.

Don Ricardo's arm had just risen a trifle above his shoulder and then come back to its level.... It would come now—the flash, the quick pang that would outstrip and shut out the very sound of the explosion—come now and be over.

The man was taking an aim, careful, deadly....

But if everything else had been quick, this was an eternity. Cartaret could feel the Basque's eye, he could see that the leveled pistol-barrel covered his throat directly below the ear. He wanted to shout out to Eskurola to shoot; to say, "You've got me!" He ground his teeth to enforce his tongue to silence. And still he waited. Good God, would the man never fire?

Don Ricardo was lowering his pistol, and his pistol was smoking. He had fired. Moreover, he had aimed truly. But he had chosen his weapon honorably—it was the one that did not hold a bullet.

Cartaret was dazed, but knew instantly what to do. As if it was the performance of an act long since subconsciously decided upon, he raised his own pistol slowly—the death-laden pistol—and shot straight up into the air....

The smoke was still circling about the American's head when he saw Eskurola striding toward him. The Basque's face was a study of humiliation and dismay.

"What is this?" he demanded. "After I have tried to kill you, you do not kill me? You refuse to kill me? You inflict the greatest insult and the only one that I cannot resent?"

Cartaret threw down his pistol: it frightened him now. "I don't know whether it's an insult to let you live or not," he said, "and I don't care a damn. Where's my mare?"

He went to the gate. It was opened by the French-speaking servant, wide-eyed now, but with his curiosity inarticulate. Cartaret mounted. His hand trembled as he gathered up the reins. He was angry at this and at the comedy that Fate had made of his attempted heroism. Was there ever before, he reflected, a duel the two principals of which were angry because they survived?

Eskurola was standing at the edge of the unrailed drawbridge that crossed the precipitous abyss. It was evident even to Cartaret that the Basque was still too amazed to think, much less speak, coherently; that something beyond his comprehension had occurred; that a phenomenon hitherto unknown had wrecked his cosmos.

"Sir," he began, "will you not return first into the castle and there——"

"If you don't get out of my way," said Cartaret, "I'll ride you into this chasm!"

Don Ricardo drew dumbly aside, and Cartaret rode on. With Vitoria relentless and unattainable, abjured by the woman he had loved, robbed even of the chance to give his life for her, he was riding anywhere to get away from Alava, was fleeing from his sense of loss and failure. He rode as fast as the steep descent permitted, and only once, at a sharp twist of the way, a full mile down the mountain, did he allow himself to turn in his saddle and look back.

There was Eskurola, a silhouette against the gray walls. Behind him rose the castle of his fathers, and back of it the great peak towered, through a hundred flashing colors, to its shining crown of eternal snow.

CHAPTER XVI

AND LAST

It must be a very dear and intimate reality for which people will be content to give up a dream.—Hawthorne: *The Marble Faun*.

Summer held Paris in his arms when Cartaret returned there—held her, wearied from the dance with Spring, in his warm arms, and was rocking her to sleep. Romance had crowded commerce from the boulevards; poets wrote their verses at the marble-topped tables along the awninged pavements; the lesser streets were lovers' lanes.

For Cartaret had not hurried. Once the Pyrenees were behind him, he felt growing upon him a dread of any return to the city in which he had first met and loved the Lady of the Rose; and only the necessity of settling his affairs there—of collecting his few possessions, paying two or three remaining bills and bidding a last good-by to his friends—drew him forward. He lingered at one town after the other, caring nothing for what he saw, but hating the thought of even a week in a Paris without her. Vaguely he had decided to return to America, though what of interest life could hold there, or anywhere, for him he could not imagine: some dull business routine, most likely—for he would never paint again—and the duller the better. Thus he wasted a fortnight along the Loire and among the chateaux of Touraine and found himself at last leaving his train in the Gare D'Orsay at the end of a Summer afternoon.

He made for his own room with the objectless hurry of a native American, his feet keeping time to a remembered stanza of Andrew Lang:

"In dreams she grows not olderThe lands of Dream among,Though all the world wax colder,Though all the songs be sung;In dreams doth he behold herStill fair and kind and young."

Taciturn Refrogné seemed no more surprised to see him than if he had gone out but an hour since: the trade of the Parisian concierge slays surprise early.

"A letter for monsieur," said Refrogné.

Cartaret took it from the grimy paw that was extended out of the concierge's cave. He went on up the stairs.

The door of the magic Room Opposite—in all probability commonplace enough now—stood slightly ajar, and Cartaret felt a new pang as he glanced at it. He passed on to his own room.

His own room! It was precisely as he had seen it last—a little dustier, and far more dreary, but with no other change. The table at which she had leaned, the easel on which he had painted those portraits of her, were just as when he had left them. He went to the window at which he used to store the provisions that Chitta looted, and there he opened the envelope Refrogné had given him. It contained only one piece of

paper: A Spanish draft on the Comptoir Général for a hundred and twenty francs, and on the back, in a labored English script, was written:

"For repayment of the sum advanced to my servant, Chitta Grekekora.

"Ricardo B. F. R. Ethenard-Eskurola (d'Alegria)."

A limb of wisteria had climbed to the window and hung a cluster of its purple flowers on the sill. Below, Refrogné's lilacs were in full bloom, and the laughter of Refrogné's children rose from among them as piercing sweet as the scent of the flowers. Cartaret took a match from his pocket, struck it and set the bit of paper aflame. He held it until the flame burnt his fingers, crushed it in his palm and watched the ashes circle slowly downward toward the lilac-trees.

The sun had set and, as Cartaret walked aimlessly toward the front windows, the long shadows of the twilight were deepening from wall to wall. Summer was in all the air.

So much the same! He leaned forward and looked down into the silent rue du Val-de-Grâce. He was thinking how she had once stood where he was leaning now; thinking how he had leaned there so often, looking for her return up that narrow thoroughfare, waiting for the sound of her light footfall on the stair. So much the same, indeed: the unchanged street outside, the unchanged room within; the room in which he had found her on that February night. Here she had admitted that she loved him, and here she had said the good-by that he would not understand—a few short weeks ago. And now he was back—back after having heard her repudiate him, back after losing her forever.

Fate works everywhere, but her favorite workshop is Paris. Something was moving in the deepest shadow in the room—the shadow about the doorway. Blue-black hair and long-lashed eyes of violet, lips of red and cheeks of white and pink; the incredible was realized, the miracle had happened: Vitoria was here.

He was beside her in a single bound. He thought that he cried her name aloud; in reality, his lips moved without speech.

"Wait," she said. She drew away from him; but the statues of the Greek gods in the Luxembourg gardens must have felt the thrill in the evening air as she faced him. She was looking at him bravely with only the least tremor of her lips. "Do you—do you still love me?" she asked.

Her voice was like a violin; her words dazed him.

"Love you? I—I can't tell you how much—I—haven't the words to say——"

He seized the hand with which she had checked him and kissed its unjeweled fingers.

"What is it?... Why did you say you hated me?... What has brought you back?... Is is true? Is it *true*?"

From Refrogné's garden came the last good-night-song of the birds.

"Love you? Why, from the day I left you—no, from that night I found you here, I've thought nothing but Vitoria, dreamed nothing but Vitoria——"

Now incoherent and afraid, then with hectic eloquence and finally with a complete abandon, he poured out his soul in libation to her. With the first word of it, she saw that she was forgiven.

"I came," she said, "to—to tell you this: You know now that I ran away from Paris because I [306]loved you and knew that I could not marry you; but you do not know why I said that terrible thing which I said in the tower-room. I was afraid of what my brother might do to you. That is why I would not take your kisses. To try to make you leave before he found you, I said what first came to my mind as likely to drive you away. I said it at what fearful cost! I blasphemed against my love for you."

Cartaret was recovering himself. Love gives all, but it demands everything.

"Your brother said that I had offered you some insult. He said you'd told him so. I thought you'd told him that in order to make him all the angrier against me."

"Ever since Chitta and I returned to our home, he had been suspecting," she said. "He would not forgive me for going away. Chitta he tortured, but she told him nothing. Me, he kept almost a prisoner. When you came, I knew that he would soon guess what was true, so I sent for you that morning to send you away, and when that failed and he found us together, I told him that we loved each other, because I hoped that he would spare the man I loved, even though he would never let me—let me marry that man. I should have known him too well to think that, but I was too afraid to reason—too afraid for your sake. He was so proud that he would not repeat it to you as I said it to him: he repeated it in the way least hateful to him—and after you had gone, I found that all I had done served only to make him try to kill you. Of this I knew nothing until hours later. Then—then——"

The birds had ceased their song, but the scent of the lilacs still rose from the garden.

"Don't you understand now?" she asked, her cheeks crimson in the fading light. "I guessed you did not understand then; but don't you understand now?"

He stood bewildered. She had to go through with it.

"My brother had to live—you made him live. To kill himself is the worst disgrace that a Basque can put upon his family. Besides, the thing was done; you had fired into the air; nothing that he might do would undo that. At the bridge he tried to tell you so, but you rode by. You know—my brother told it you—that one reason which allows a foreigner to marry a Basque. We Eskurolas pay our debts; to let you go a creditor for that was to put a stain upon our house indelibly. I would have accepted the disgrace and made my brother continue to accept it, had you not now said that you still loved me; but you have said it. Oh, do—do, please, understand!" She stamped her foot. "My brother is the last man of our name. In saving him, you saved the house of Eskurola."

Cartaret was seized by the same impulse toward hysteria that had seized him when he first faced Don Ricardo's pistol.

"Was *that* what he tried to say at the bridge? What a fool I was not to listen! If I had all the world to give, I'd give it to you!"

He tried to seize her hand again, but she drew it away.

"And so," she said, with a crooked smile and a flaming face, "since you say that you love me, I—I have to pay the just debt of my house and save its honor—I must marry you whether I love you or not."

He looked at her with fear renewed.

"Then you *have* changed?" he asked.

Suddenly she put her own right hand to her lips and kissed the fingers on which his lips had rested.

"You have all the world," she said.... "Give it me."

He found both of her hands this time, but still she kept him from her. The scent of the lilacs mingled with another scent—a scent that made him see again the tall Cantabrians.... Suddenly he realized that she was wearing her student-blouse.

"You've been here—When did you come back to Paris?"

"A week ago."

"To this house?"

"Of *course* I am living in this house as before, and with your friend Chitta. You know that I could not have lived anywhere else in Paris. I *couldn't.* So I took the old room—the dear little old room—again."

"*Before* you knew that I still loved you!" She hung her head. "But I'll surely never let you go this time." He held her hands fast as if fearing that she might escape him. "No custom—no law—no force could take you now. Tell me: would you have wanted to go back?"

She freed herself. That newer perfume filled the purple twilight: the pure perfume of the Azure Rose that the wandering Basque carries with him abroad to bring him safely home. She drew the rose from beneath her blouse and held it out to him. Cartaret kissed it. She took it back, kissed it too, went to the nearest window and, tearing the flower petal from petal, dropped it into the Paris street.

"No," she said softly when she had turned to him again, "do not kiss me yet. I want you first to understand me. I do love my own country, but I cannot stay in it forever. I was being smothered there by all the dust of those dead centuries; I was being slowly crushed by the iron weight of their old customs and their old laws—all horribly alive when they should have been long ago in their graves. There was nothing around me that was not old: old walls and towers, ancient tapestries and arms, musty rooms, yellowed manuscripts. The age of the place, it seemed to become a soul-in-itself. It seemed to get a consciousness and to hate me because I was not as it was. There was nothing that was not old—and I was young." As she remembered it, her face grew almost sulky. "Even if it had not been for you, I believe I should have come away again. I was so angry at it all that I could even have put on a Paquin gown—if I

had had a Paquin gown!—and worn it at dinner in the big dining-hall of my ancestors."

He understood. He realized—none better—the hunger and thirst for Paris: for the lights of the boulevards, the clatter of the dominoes on the café-tables, the procession of carriages and motors along the Champs Élysées, the very cries and hurry of the rue St. Honoré by day or the Boul' Miche' by night. Nevertheless, he had lately been an American headed for America, and so he said:

"Just wait till you see Broadway!"

Vitoria smiled, but she remained serious.

"I wanted you to know that—first," she said: "to know that I came away this second time in large part because of you, but not wholly."

"I think," said Cartaret, "that I can manage to forgive that."

"And then—there is something else. You saw my brother in a great castle and on a great estate, but he is not rich, and I am very poor."

Cartaret laughed.

"Was that what was on your mind? My dear, *I'm* rich—I'm frightfully rich!"

"Rich?" Her tone was all incredulity.

"It happened the day you left Paris. Oh, I know I ought to have told you at the castle, but I forgot it. You see, there was so little time to talk to you and so many more important things to say."

He told her all about it while the dusk slowly deepened. Chitta should have a salary for remaining in a cottage that he would give her in Alava and never leaving it. He would give his friends that dinner now—Houdon and Devignes, Varachon and Garnier—a dinner of celebration at which the host would be present and to which even Gaston François Louis Pasbeaucoup and the elephantine Madame would sit down. There would be bushels of strawberries. Seraphin would be pensioned for life, so that he might paint only the pictures that his heart demanded, and Fourget—yes, Cartaret would embrace dear old Fourget like a true Gaul. In the Luxembourg Gardens the statues of the old gods smiled and held their peace.

"You—you can study too," said Cartaret. "You can have the best art-masters in the world, and you shall have them."

But Vitoria shook her head.

"There," she said, "is another confession and the last. I was the more ready to leave Paris when I ran away from you, because I was disheartened: the master had told me that I could never learn, and so I was afraid to face you."

"Then *I'll* never paint again," vowed Cartaret. "Pictures? I was successful only when I painted pictures of you, and why should I paint them when I have you?"

She looked at him gravely.

"I am glad," she said, "that you are rich, but I am also glad that we have both been poor—together. Oh,"—she looked about the familiar room,—"it needs but one

thing more: if only the street-organ were playing that Scotch song that it used to play!"

"If it only were!" he agreed. "However, we can't have everything, can we?"

But lovers, if they only want it enough, can have everything, and, somehow, the hurdy-gurdy did, just at that moment, begin to play "Annie Laurie" as it used to do, out in the rue du Val-de-Grâce.

Cartaret led her toward the darkened window, but stopped half-way across the room.

"I will try to deserve you," he said. "I *will* make myself what you want me to be."

"You *are* that," she answered, her face raised toward his. "All that I ask is to have you with me always as you are now." The clear contralto of her voice ran like a refrain to the simple air of the ballad. "I want you with me when you are unhappy, so that I may comfort you; when you are ill, so that I may nurse you; when you are glad, so that I may be glad because you are. I want to know you in every mood: I want to belong to you."

High over the gleaming roofs, the moon, a disk of yellow glass, swung out upon the indigo sky and peeped in at that window. One silver beam enveloped her. It bathed her lithe, firm figure; it touched her pure face, her scarlet lips; it made a refulgent glory of her hair, and, out of it, the splendor of her wonderful eyes was for him.

"Soon," he whispered, "in the chapel of Ste. Jeanne D'Arc at the church of St. Germain des Prés."

"Good-night," she said.... "Good-night, my love."

She raised her white hands to him and drew one step nearer. Then she yielded herself to his arms and, as they closed, strong and tight, about her, her own arms circled his neck.

The scent of the Azure Rose returned with her lips: a vision of mountain-peaks and sunlight upon crests of snow, a perfume sweeter than the scent of any rose in any garden, a poem in a language that Cartaret at last could understand.

Her lips met his....

"Oh," he whispered, "sweetheart, is it really, really you?"

"Yes," said the lady of the Rose, "it—is *me*!"