

Dallas in that moment of indecision, but that look has turned the scale and he accepts M. Laval's hospitality.

"But I will not agree to talk English with you," says M. Laval, laughing. "If you can not talk French to me you must ask my daughter to converse with you. She has studied English at school and it is for her an agreeable exercise; is it not, Aimée?"

"Yes, papa," she answers, blushing.

But he has no opportunity to talk English with Aimée that evening. Mademoiselle Stéphanie is not to be won over easily, and she receives the young man's advances coldly. When she leaves her room the next morning she sees with satisfaction that his boots are still outside his door, and before she goes to attend to her household affairs she orders Aimée into the garden.

But circumstances are too strong for Mademoiselle Stéphanie. When Horace comes down half an hour later, he sees the house empty, and he sees Aimée sitting on the steps which lead from a glass door into the garden. Another minute and he is standing by her side.

"You are to talk my own language to me, you know," he says smiling, and as she answers his greeting in French. "You had an English great-grand-mother, and you ought not to forget it."

"I make so many mistakes," she says, in her pretty, hesitating way. "But it will be an advantage to me if you will pardon my mistakes."

"Have you no English friends?"

"I have only two young friends, and they have never learned English. No strangers come to Pont-Avize, and my aunt does not care for society."

"And you never go away?" says the young man with a sort of horrified astonishment.

"I have been twice to Rouen," cries Aimée, brightening. "What gay streets and beautiful shop windows! I have also been once to the theatre. And every year I shall return for a week or two to the convent, where I was at school. My aunt is one of the nuns. It is very peaceful and happy there."

"But you must not go there too often," replies Horace, quickly. "You must not be shut up between high walls forever. What would your father say if you were never to come back again?"

"Ah, papa!" she says innocently; "I am a great charge to poor papa."

"Not a very heavy one, I think," says Horace, laughing, and looking at the little figure in the close-fitting dress of dark linen which economy and propriety alike suggest to Mademoiselle Stéphanie as most suitable to Aimée's years.

"But I am often in his way, you know. He often says if I had been a son it would have been so much better. I should have understood his affairs. No doubt it would have been better if I had been a son."

"It would not have been at all better," cries Horace decidedly. "On the contrary, it would have been an infinite pity."

His blue eyes were looking straight at hers; she does not understand what he means, yet she is startled. A

door has slammed in the distance; what if Mademoiselle Stéphanie should find her here!

"I must go," she says quickly. "Breakfast will be ready and papa will be waiting."

"Nonsense," cries Horace, gently constraining her to sit down again. "They will come and tell us when breakfast is ready. Why should you not stay here with me a little longer?"

Aimée is in an agony, for she hears her aunt's voice coming nearer. "Aimée, Aimée," she cries, calling to her from the back passages, and in another moment she may be upon them.

But it is not Mademoiselle Stéphanie who interrupts them, after all. It is M. Laval himself. He looks neat and alert, as is his custom when things are going well. He glances at Aimée's flushed, averted face without displeasure; he shakes hands in a friendly manner with his guest.

Then they go together into the bare, shady dining-room, where old Marie is waiting to hand round the beef-steak and fried potatoes, and Mademoiselle Stéphanie is too much occupied in seeing that all is as it should be, to give much heed to her niece.

II.

Dinner at M. Laval's is apt to be a somewhat dull affair, but this evening the master of the house is unusually agreeable. He even tries to draw Aimée into the talk, and to her unfeigned astonishment it is her father himself who proposes that they should adjourn to the garden, though he knows his sister is afraid of the night air, and after awhile he says something of the imperative demands of business, and he too withdraws into his study.

Horace has lighted a cigar; his fair head is uncovered, his eyes are fixed a little absently on Aimée's, as she sits near him on a garden chair; he looks round at the neglected walks and weedy borders, and says presently:

"It is really a shame that you should know so little about flowers. There is a language of flowers which I thought all young ladies studied. You can fancy what flower your friends most resemble. Let me see, to what shall we liken you? But I can not tell unless you let me see your face."

Slowly, shyly, she turns towards him. The warm glow from the sunset rests on the childish rounded cheeks and dark head, and softly touches the outline of the white figure in the big wicker chair.

"You are not like a garden flower at all," he says with a half laugh. "Is it only the sunset which crimsoned his sunburnt face? You are like the wild rose."

Aimée droops her head. It seems to her that he has spoken disparagingly, and yet his eyes contradict his words.

"And I rather think you are only a rosebud, Mademoiselle Aimée."

"I am older than you imagine," she says quickly. "That is why papa is vexed. I can not go back to school, and it would not suit him to have me always here. My