

aunt, too, wishes to leave Pont-Avize, and so they wish—they would like," says the girl, suddenly embarrassed, "to see me provided for."

"You must not go back to the convent, whatever you do," cries Horace, throwing away his cigar. "What should I do if I returned to find you shut up behind high walls?"

"You need not fear, I have no vocation," she answers, smiling.

"What will you do, then?"

"Indeed I do not know."

"But I know," says the young man quickly. "You will be married."

"I think not. I do not think any one will marry me."

"And why not? if I may ask the question." He feels unreasonably offended, as if some one else had made the remark.

"I have so little fortune," she says, rather shamefaced. "Papa is not a rich man, and though I am an only child——"

"What do little wild roses want with fortunes? Tell me—you need not be afraid to tell me—would you like to be married?"

"Yes," hesitating; "but it is not likely. My aunt had a better *dot* than I shall ever have, and no one wished to marry her."

Horace, thinking of Mademoiselle Stéphanie's thin lips and sharp features, could laugh outright but that he is piqued by the girl's frankness. She was shy enough of him a while ago; has her delicate instinct told her that if he can speak lightly on such a subject she need be shy of him no longer?

"In England we do not think so much of money," he says coldly; and then a disagreeable recollection comes across him of his father's feelings on the subject, and of the fortune of the old family, which he, the eldest son, is one day to retrieve by an alliance with a newer name but better filled coffers. "To-morrow is Sunday, is it not?" he says, abruptly changing the subject. "What do you do on Sundays? Oh, I remember; you walk with your friends, Madame Langré and her daughters, after vespers. I shall walk with you also."

"Indeed that is not permitted," cries Aimée, eagerly. "You could not come with us, but papa will no doubt take you for a walk," she adds, seeing he looks discomfited.

"Not if my company is so little desired," he says, rather crossly.

## III.

"Aimée make haste; take off your hat," says Mademoiselle Stéphanie, as they stop at their own door on their return from the church the next afternoon. "Your papa wishes to see you in the study."

M. Laval is seated at his writing-table when Aimée comes to him in obedience to this command.

"That is right, come in, my daughter," he says in a tone which is meant to be encouraging. "You wonder

why I desired to see you. It is nothing disagreeable, I assure you. Come, I give you leave to guess what it is that I mean."

"I—I do not understand you, papa," says Aimée, falteringly.

"Aimée, a piece of singular good fortune has befallen you. Should all go on as prosperously as it has begun, an unexpected, indeed I may say, an undeserved and happy lot awaits you. M. Blanchard, good, excellent M. Blanchard, whose business becomes more prosperous every day, is content to sue for the hand of my young daughter—of you, yourself, Aimée."

He pauses and strikes his hand on the table to emphasize his words.

As for Aimée, she is struck dumb. All the color fades from her cheeks, which were so sweetly flushed but now.

"Of me?" she murmurs. "It is impossible."

"It is indeed an honor, my child;" but M. Laval is not so unmindful as he appears to be of those paling cheeks. "I do not wonder that you are overcome with astonishment that you, my simple little girl, should have attracted so sensible and honorable a man."

"M. Blanchard is very good," says the girl in a low voice, "but—but—I have no thought of marrying."

"Of what, then, do you think?" cries M. Laval, exasperated. "Of the convent and your aunt Nathalie, perhaps! No, no, my daughter," he adds in a milder tone, "you need not be alarmed. M. Blanchard will give you time to transfer to him the affections which have been centered, as is proper, upon your aunt, your piano, your young companions; and I shall wait patiently for the happy day when I shall see my only daughter the wife of that estimable man. Go now; put on your prettiest dress; M. Blanchard may come in this evening."

M. Blanchard comes after dinner when they are once more seated in the stiff little drawing-room. He bows to the company generally, and then with an air of perfect assurance he seats himself by Aimée's side.

He hopes that she is not fatigued by her walk. She replies in the negative, and then he makes another effort. He would be much honored if she will sometimes walk with her aunt in his grounds.

"You are very obliging, monsieur," she says shyly.

"Not at all. It is a solitary garden; a lonely house," says M. Blanchard, who would be sentimental if he might.

So they carry on the conversation after the same fashion a little longer, and then M. Laval, seeing how matters stand, wisely interrupts the *loto-a-loto*.

Horace has, however, only the opportunity to say a few words to her apart this evening.

"Not one kind word or look, all day, Mademoiselle Aimée; what have I done?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" cries the poor child. She can hardly keep back her tears. The day she thought would be so bright has ended so miserably.

"Never mind," cries Horace gaily; her manifest discomposure has restored his good humor."