

"To-morrow morning let us meet in the garden. Is it not a promise?"

She dares not say yes, she can not say no, and that night it is little use to try to sleep. When sleep at length comes it is so profound that she awakes with a start to find the sun shining with such power as to make her fear that some of the precious hours before breakfast are already past; and yet though the thought gives her a pang she is in no haste to leave her room. She fears she knows not what. If she again finds herself alone with Horace, can she any longer be happy and unconstrained, when every day she is drawing nearer the time when she will be M. Blanchard's affianced wife?

"Aimée," says her aunt, meeting her at the door, "you are late. Never mind, you were fatigued last night. But see, this linen requires putting in order; apply yourself to the task till breakfast. I am required elsewhere."

Mademoiselle Stéphanie has opened the door of the room where the linen-closet stands. The shelves are empty, the linen lies in piles upon the floor.

Aimée makes no objection; she sets herself somewhat wearily to her task.

IV.

Mr. Horace Dallas is somewhat displeased, when, having taken the trouble to be out of his room at an unwonted early hour, he can see no signs of Aimée.

"Little deceiver," he says to himself, feeling very much annoyed with her for having induced him to disturb himself so early. "Of course, I might have known these French girls are as changeable as the wind." And then for a moment he thinks of another girl, a fair-haired girl in England, to whom he need give no secret appointments, by whose side he is welcome to sit with the full approval of all her friends—a girl, too, who is pretty and good-tempered and placidly fond of him, whose recognized lover he may become at any moment, no man forbidding him.

"Marie," he calls, leaning his elbows on the sill of the dining-room window, and addressing the old servant, who is engaged within the room, rubbing the furniture, "Marie, tell me, has Mademoiselle Aimée gone out for a walk this fine morning?"

"Mademoiselle Aimée is occupied, monsieur; she will not descend until the breakfast is served."

"But she has left her room," cries Horace, brightening. "If she is so busy, do not you think, Marie, that I might be able to help her?"

"Bah! in arranging the linen in the storeroom! That is very likely, monsieur," cries old Marie, taken off her guard.

Horace is not a young man of very rigid principles, and he has not a great opinion of other people's, moreover, he is bent upon having his own way.

He takes a five-franc piece from his pocket and rolls it gently along the polished floor till it rests just underneath the hem of Marie's petticoat.

"You should not have such big holes in your pockets, Marie," he says, "look, you will lose all your money.

And now," he adds, making one long stride which brings him over the sill of the window into the room—"now show me where is this storeroom."

Marie reflects for a minute whilst she pockets the money and wipes her hands on her apron. Mademoiselle Stéphanie deserves to be annoyed. It is not her fault if the young gentleman will persist. Finally, no one else is likely to give her a five-franc piece. So she takes him into the hall, and pointing up the stairs, leaves him in no doubt as to which is the storeroom.

Aimée is seated on the floor, some linen in her lap, and her head leaning back against a great pile of sheets. She is already tired, but she starts into a less listless attitude as the door opens and Horace enters. When she sees him a sudden sweet rosy color flushes her face like a dawn in a summer sky.

"Why have you hidden yourself from me so persistently—why?" he asks, and though his words are reproachful, he can not keep the gladness out of his voice. It is but a paltry triumph he has gained, but Aimée's troubled and yet brightening face all unconsciously gives him his reward.

"I did not hide myself," she says simply; "on the contrary, monsieur, I am very glad to see you, for there is something I wish to say."

"I am quite ready to listen," replies Horace, seating himself on the high stool.

But the permission to speak seems to have deprived her of the power. For a moment she remains quite silent, and then without raising her eyes, she speaks with quiet resolution.

"I have been wishing to tell you that you must not seek me in this way when I am by myself. My aunt has reproved me. You make it hard for me to please her. I would do all I can to make your visit agreeable to you, but you would not have me to do wrong?"

"Does your aunt give you permission to walk with M. Blanchard, to sit the whole evening without speaking to any one but him? What does it mean?"

"You have no right to ask all these questions," she answers, "no right whatever; and yet if you wish to know, it means that M. Blanchard desires to marry me."

"But it does not mean that you wish to marry him," cries Horace; "it can not mean that. It is a sacrilege even to think of it. How has he ever dared—how can even your father or your aunt have allowed him for one single moment—"

He stops suddenly and fixes his eyes upon her. How gentle and sweet and pretty she is, with her pale cheeks and her dark tender eyes which are still bright with the determined effort she is making to keep back the signs of her weakness!

"You should not speak in that manner of those whom I am bound to obey. Are you, whom I have known three days, to be the judge of what is right for me? M. Blanchard has been my father's good friend for this long time. It is true I was too young to know his disposition, to appreciate his good qualities. But is he not giving a proof of his goodness in wishing to marry me?"