

**A FRENCHMAN'S STORY**

By NORMAN GRANGER

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I have been often in Paris, and the last time I was there I went to a restaurant for my meals in a house that had recently been the dwelling of a wealthy man. The landlord spoke English, and when I asked him some questions about how he came to secure so fine a house for such a purpose into his reply he wove a story. There was nothing very novel in the substance. The interest lay rather in the telling by a man who spoke English indifferently.

"This house was occupied by M. Chateau, a rich gentleman, who had a fine daughter, Mlle. Elise. Chateau she was fond of herself when she wanted to marry Gaston Lefevre, a young man very poor church mouse. Mademoiselle told Gaston she married him in spite of her father, in spite of everybody. But M. Chateau he found out he had daughter of poor young man, and he made arrangements for her to marry a rich man right off, very quick. He told M. Bourdon he had been for son-in-law. M. Bourdon rich man, and he had to marry rich woman. Marriage in France not like marriage in America. French girl get husband through her father.

"M. Chateau told M. Bourdon, 'I give my daughter 100,000 francs. How much you give?'

"I give 100,000 francs too. That makes 200,000 francs. Your daughter had that to spend on fine clothes. That makes her very happy.'

"All right. You go ask mademoiselle to be your wife.'

"M. Bourdon he go ask mademoiselle if she be his wife for 100,000 francs.

"Mlle. Chateau she say: 'Yes, I like to be your wife very much. I had a glass of wine?' M. Bourdon drink glass wine with mademoiselle. Then he go away. The next morn he go to M. Chateau, very pale, and he say:

"M. Chateau, you had done me great honor to let me marry your daughter. Mademoiselle do me great honor to consent to marry me.'

"And you do me great honor, too, monsieur."

"Yes, we all do each other great honor, but I think I no lak get married just now. I not good enough for your daughter."

"What you mean, monsieur? Didn't you ask me for my daughter?'

"Yes, monsieur."

"And didn't you ask my daughter to be your wife?'

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then you mean to insult me, to insult my daughter? By gar, I break every bone in your body!"

"I not insult you; I not insult your daughter. I not lak to die just yet. I lak to live a little longer."

"What you mean?'

"I go ask mademoiselle if she be my wife. Mademoiselle she kind enough to say, 'You do me great honor, Mr. Bourdon.' And she make me happy to say she be my wife. But she make me unhappy another way. Mademoiselle ask me to have glass of wine. I ver' happy, ver' much honor, to drink the health of my fiancée. I take all in de glass down at one gulp. Then I go home.

"What's that in my stomach? Eat must be I drink in that glass of wine hot coals. I roll on de floor; I cry; I tell Gasconne go quick for the doctor. The doctor come, and he put pump down my throat and pump out de wine your honored daughter kind enough to give me. Very fine girl Mlle. Chateau. I ver' much honored to be her man, but I think I remain bachelor little while longer."

"M. Chateau ver' glad to hush up this matter that his daughter give a sister something hot in de wine. Maybe that be poison; maybe it be she put tabasco in de bottle. Anyway, M. Bourdon had enough of her. He tell her father to make his excuses to his daughter and say he remain bachelor little while longer.

"Then M. Chateau he shut his daughter up in this house and lock all the doors and close the windows so that Gaston Lefevre not get in or Mlle. Elise get out. But when two lofers make up their minds to love they ver' hurt to shut up so they didn't get out. One night robbers broke into the house, but they didn't steal anything except Mlle. Elise. One of those robbers was Gaston Lefevre.

"When M. Chateau knew that his daughter had gone off to marry that poor man he raved lak madman. Then he go away by himself somewhere and put up paper on this house for rent. One day I come along and see the bill, and I go to the agent, and I rent the house for a year.

"What wine did monsieur drink?'

"I certainly don't want the kind Mlle. Chateau gave her fiancée. You didn't take any of it off her father's hands with the house, did you?'

"No, monsieur, no! I assure monsieur that mademoiselle put pepper or something lak that in de wine. I bring all my wine here."

I ordered what I fancied, and he went away, saying: 'I must go now. As you Americans say, 'I had some fish to fry.'"

"Well," I said, "when you have fried your fish come back and tell me another love story. You needn't trouble yourself about the substance. All love stories are alike. You have a quaint way of telling yours. Then the politeness of you French people is delicious. We American men are deferential to women, but we don't carry our deference so far as to take off our hats to them when they pour hot stuff into us."

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