

MAYBE LAND.

Beyond where the marshes are dank and wide  
Is a ladder of red and gold.  
Where the sun has sunk in the shifting tide  
Of the clouds that the night elves mold.

LOVE AND RAPIERS.

The village of Bay St. Louis was a favorite dueling ground in the days when an appeal to swords or to pistols was thought by southern gentlemen to be the only honorable way of settling personal grievances.

If ever you shall be going to New Orleans by way of the railroad from Mobile you will find it well worth while to stop and spend a few days at this lovely summer resort.

If you will take a carriage and a driver who knows the place you may spend a day or two delightfully in exploring the ins and outs, by highway and byway, of a settlement that dates back to the time when the Spaniards and the French were playing batleadores and shuttlecock with all our rich and salubrious gulf-coast country.

The people have soft voices and gentle manners, and it is hard to imagine, much harder to believe, that it was ever true of them that they stood ready, on the strength of the slightest insult, to fight to the death as a matter of honor; but so it was.

Before the days of the railroad which now makes Bay St. Louis but one hour and thirty minutes from New Orleans, the only approach was by water, save from the interior of Mississippi.

Nearly all the duels ever fought at Bay St. Louis took place in one or another secluded spot in the lonely woods behind the town. These woods are now dotted with creole and negro cottages, the homes of poor people, who find an easy if not luxurious life where the fish in the bayons and the fruits on the trees are to be had with but the smallest outlay of labor.

About the year 1824 two young men of New Orleans were lovers of a beautiful girl by the name of Marie de Noyant, whose father had a summer place at Bay St. Louis.

The three families—Noyants, Chauvins and Matons—were of the best in New Orleans, and had always been on the most intimate terms socially. Honore and Pierre had known Marie from her childhood up; they had been her playmates, her friends, and now they were her lovers.

Still it was very hard for her, when Pierre came to her home on the bay and asked her to be his wife—it was hard to break in on his passionate appeal with the truth that must crush him.

Gently, kindly, sweetly as she could, Marie put an end to Pierre's hopes; but it was not in her power to blunt in the least the terrible point of her refusal.

"Then it is Honore Chauvin that you care for, Marie?" said Pierre, rising to go.

"Yes, Pierre," she said presently, "I will not deceive you or evade your question. I do love Honore, and I promised him today that I would be his wife."

"Pierre stood dumb for a while. There was nothing for him to say; words were not made that could in any way serve his turn in this moment of utter defeat.

"Oh, I am so sorry, so grieved, Pierre, to see you feel like this!" cried Marie. "You know I love you as a brother is loved, very, very much, and—"

"As a brother!" muttered Pierre, with bitter, desperate emphasis—"as a brother!" And he turned and left the girl's presence without another word.

She made a movement as if to follow him, but he had passed down the steps and out of the gate with long strides, like some actor in a melodrama.

Her first thought was of danger to Honore Chauvin; for in those days the hot French blood rarely cooled without first having boiled over in deadly fight.

What Pierre Maton did was to go straight to his friend Honore Chauvin and slap him in the face.

"That for Marie de Noyant!" he exclaimed, still choking with the desperate cholera excited by his sense of defeat.

"That for you!" he went on, repeating the insulting blow. Then he turned and left Honore, well knowing what would follow.

The challenge was promptly sent and as promptly accepted.

The following morning at a little past sunrise the combatants, with their seconds and surgeons, met in a small open space where two or three little wildwood roads, dim and straggling, crossed each other in the forest part of what was then known as the Tonline plantation.

The weapons were measured, positions chosen, the word given, and the fight to the death was begun by a thin, keen, far reaching clink of steel crossing steel.

Many a time had these young men, now eager for each other's blood, fenced in manly play, and well did both know how equally were they matched, and how doubtful was the outcome of the struggle they were beginning.

Honore Chauvin, to do him justice, did not wish to kill Pierre Maton, but meant, if he could, to disable him. This, however, was not so easy, for Pierre, eager to slay, and burning with rage of disappointed passion, was fighting like a mad tiger, and yet with supreme vigilance and art.

Their swords cut the air with hissing swiftness and filled the space with a clangor and shower of spiteful sparks that might well have stifled all the wild songs of the birds in the woods round about.

Again and again each of the combatants received slight wounds, mere scratches; but neither appeared able to break the other's guard or to find an undefended point, such touches as they had given and received being more the result of close fighting than of advantage either way.

They were panting now, and the white foam was gathering on their purple lips. Their eyes, starting and glaring with concentrated fury, were fixed and terrible in their animal expression.

Happily the time when such things could be has gone by, but it is by keeping record of those strange acts that we are able to understand the growth of our present civilization.

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ing strength; but Honore was failing. Pierre saw this and rushed upon him with feeble but furious energy, striving to beat down his guard. He had succeeded, and Honore was at his mercy. The next breath there was a sharp cry of terror, the voice of a woman in utter distress, and a strange, dull rushing sound followed by a crash.

The duelists were swept from their feet and dashed headlong, a horse tumbled over them and the fragments of a small vehicle were scattered around. In the midst of this wreck thus hurled upon the contestants a young woman rose to her feet and stood, beautiful, disheveled, frightened almost to madness, but unhurt.

The horse, after falling and rolling over, struggled to its feet, and, with parts of its harness still clinging to it and trailing and whirling about, ran frantically away through the woods in the direction of the town.

Overcome for a moment, the seconds and surgeons stood staring and motionless, but they were men of nerve, and needed but time to take a breath and pull themselves together before springing forward to the assistance of Honore and Pierre, who lay as if dead on the ground where the shock of the collision had flung them.

Marie de Noyant had arisen early that morning to keep a promise she had made to visit a sick and extremely aged creole woman who lived in a small house back in the woods on the road to Jorlon river. Feeling oppressed with what had occurred between her and Pierre, she ordered her servant to fetch her pony and and cart and drove away alone before the rest of the household were up.

She left the servant behind, wishing to be entirely free to commune with her heart and to devise if possible some means of softening Pierre's disappointment. While she feared that something dreadful might come of the terrible passion of the young man, she did not dream that, even while she drove slowly along the dim road under the trees, a duel was in progress between him and Honore Chauvin.

Her pony, a stout, gentle animal, jogged quietly forward in the sand between the tufts of Spanish bayonet and thickets of bay bushes; overhead the pine trees moaned and the grand magnolias nestled their stiff, glossy foliage.

Suddenly three or four goats, part of a herd that had been turned out to graze and browse in the woods, leaped out of a little tangle of tall wild grass hard by and dashed across the road close in front of the pony.

The reader will understand at once how the catastrophe came about at the dueling ground, for the pony, accidentally heading itself that way, ran madly and blindly upon the combatants. It was found dead a half mile from the spot, with Pierre's rapier sheathed to the hilt in its breast.

The strangest part of the whole adventure was that Marie escaped without even the slightest hurt.

The young men were borne to the nearest house, where for many hours they lay side by side insensible. Honore's hurts were nearly fatal, and Pierre was crippled for life.

Marie de Noyant's father at the time of the duel. You may, if you will visit her in her little house on Hospital street in New Orleans, have the story, that I have here sketched, told to you in the most picturesque way, and it always ends with a minute description of how beautiful Marie looked in her white wedding gown when she and Honore Chauvin were married.

In the course of frequent and long sojourns in the old French region of the south I have made note of many romantic, odd or otherwise interesting stories of dueling, but none of them seems to me more strange than this told me by Aunt Clothilde.

Last winter I visited the spot where the duel was fought, and while I tried to imagine the scene as it was sixty-six years ago a mocking bird quavered its incomparable flute score from a wax myrtle bush on the edge of a flowery thicket hard by.

An ancient and distinguished individual writes: "I owe my wealth and elevation to the neglect with which I used to be treated by the proud. It was a real benefit, though not so intended. It awakened a zeal which did its duty, and was crowned with success. I determined, if this neglect was owing to my want of learning, I would be studious and acquire it. I determined, if it was owing to my poverty, I would accumulate property; if extreme vigilance, industry, prudence and self denial would do it (which will not always). I determined, if it was owing to my manners, I would be more circumspect. I was anxious, also, to show those who had so treated me that I was undeserving such coldness. I was also warmed by a desire that the proud should see me on a level with, or elevated above, themselves. And I was resolved, above all things, never to lose the consolation of being conscious of not deserving the haunter which they displayed to me."

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