

THE FLOWER OF THE CHAPDELAINES

BY

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PART 1

The Flower of the Chapdelaines

I

Next morning he saw her again.

He had left his very new law office, just around in Bienville Street, and had come but a few steps down Royal, when, at the next corner below, she turned into Royal, toward him, out of Conti, coming from Bourbon.

The same nine-year-old negro boy was at her side, as spotless in broad white collar and blue jacket as on the morning before, and carrying the same droll air of consecration, awe, and responsibility. The young man envied him.

Yesterday, for the first time, at that same corner, he had encountered this fair stranger and her urchin escort, abruptly, as they were making the same turn they now repeated, and all in a flash had wondered who might be this lovely apparition. Of such patrician beauty, such elegance of form and bearing, such witchery of simple attire, and such un-Italian yet Latin type, in this antique Creole, modernly Italianized quarter--who and what, so early in the day, down here among the shops, where so meagre a remnant of the old high life clung on in these balconied upper stories--who, what, whence, whither, and wherefore?

In that flash of time she had passed, and the very liveliness of his interest, combined with the urchin's consecrated awe--not to mention his own mortifying remembrance of one or two other-day lapses from the austerities of the old street--restrained him from a backward glance until he could cross the way as if to enter the great, white, lately completed court-house. Then both she and her satellite had vanished.

He turned again, but not to enter the building. His watch read but half past eight, and his first errand of the day, unless seeing her had been his first, was to

go one square farther on, for a look at the wreckers tearing down the old Hotel St. Louis. As he turned, a man neat of dress and well beyond middle age made him a suave gesture.

"Sir, if you please. You are, I think, Mr. Chester, notary public and attorney at law?"

"That is my name and trade, sir." Evidently Mr. Geoffry Chester was also an American, a Southerner.

"Pardon," said his detainer, "I have only my business card." He tendered it: "Marcel Castanado, Masques et Costumes, No. 312, rue Royale, entre Bienville et Conti."

"I diz-ire your advice," he continued, "on a very small matter neither notarial, neither of the law. Yet I must pay you for that, if you can make your charge as--as small as the matter."

The young lawyer's own matters were at a juncture where a fee was a godsend, yet he replied:

"If your matter is not of the law I can make you no charge."

The costumer shrugged: "Pardon, in that case I must seek elsewhere." He would have moved on, but Chester asked:

"What kind of advice do you want if not legal?"

"Literary."

The young man smiled: "Why, I'm not literary."

"I think yes. You know Ovide Landry? Black man? Secon'-han' books, Chartres Street, just yonder?"

"Yes, very pleasantly, for I love old books."

"Yes, and old buildings, and their histories. I know. You are now going down, as I have just been, to see again the construction of that old dome they are dim-olishing yonder, of the once state-house, previously Hotel St. Louis. I know. Twice a day you pass my shop. I am compelled to see, what Ovide also has told me, that, like me and my wife, you have a passion for the *poétique* and the *pittoresque*!"

"Yes," Chester laughed, "but that's my limit. I've never written a line for print----"

"This writing is done, since fifty years."

"I've never passed literary judgment on a written page and don't suppose I ever shall."

"The judgment is passed. The value of the article is pronounced great--by an expert amateur."

"SHE?" the youth silently asked himself. He spoke: "Why, then what advice do you still want--how to find a publisher?"

"No, any publisher will jump at that. But how to so nig-otiate that he shall not be the lion and we the lamb!"

Chester smiled again: "Why, if that's the point--" he mused. The hope came again that this unusual shopman and his wish had something to do with *her*.

"If that's the advice you want," he resumed, "I think we might construe it as legal, though worth at the most a mere notarial fee."

"And contingent on--?" the costumer prompted.

"Contingent, yes, on the author's success."

"Sir! I am not the author of a manuscript fifty years old!"

"Well, then, on the holder's success. You can agree to that, can't you?"

"'Tis agreed. You are my counsel. When will you see the manuscript?"

"Whenever you choose to leave it with me."

The costumer's smile was firm: "Sir, I cannot permit that to pass from my hand."

"Oh! then have a copy typed for me."

The Creole soliloquized: "That would be expensive." Then to Chester: "Sir, I will tell you; to-night come at our parlor, over the shop. I will read you that!" "Shall we be alone?" asked Chester, hoping his client would say no.

"Only excepting my"--a tender brightness--"my wife!" Then a shade of regret: "We are without children, me and my wife."

His wife. H'mm! *She?* That amazing one who had vanished within a few yards of his bazaar of "masques et costumes"? Though to Chester New Orleans was still new, and though fat law-books and a slim purse kept him much to himself, he was aware that, while some Creoles grew rich, many of them, women, once rich, were being driven even to stand behind counters. Yet no such plight could he imagine of that bewildering young--young luminary who, this second time, so out of time, had gleamed on him from mystery's cloud. His earlier hope came a third time: "Excepting only your wife, you say? Why not also your amateur expert?"

"I am sorry, but"--the Latin shrug--"that is--that is not possible."

"Have I ever seen your wife? She's not a tallish, slender young-----?"

"No, my wife is neither. She's never in the street or shop. She has no longer the cap-acity. She's become so extraordinarily *un*-slender that the only way she can come down-stair' is backward. You'll see. Well,"--he waved--"till then--ah, a word: my close bargaining--I must explain you that--in confidence. 'Tis because my wife and me we are anxious to get every picayune we can get for the owners--of that manuscript."

Chester thought to be shrewd: "Oh! is *she* hard up? the owner?"

"The owners are three," Castanado calmly said, "and two dip-end on the earnings of a third." He bowed himself away.

A few hours later Chester received from him a note begging indefinite postponement of the evening appointment. Mme. Castanado had fever and probably *la grippe*.

II

Early one day some two weeks after the foregoing incident the young lawyer came out of his *pension française*, opposite his office, and stood a moment in thought. In those two weeks he had not again seen Mr. Castanado.

Once more it was scant half past eight. He looked across to the windows of his office and of one bare third-story sleeping-room over it. Eloquent windows! Their meanness reminded him anew how definitely he had chosen not merely the simple but the solitary life. Yet now he turned toward Royal Street. But at the third or fourth step he faced about toward Chartres. The distance to the courthouse was the same either way, and its entrances were alike on both streets.

Thought he as he went the Chartres Street way: "If I go *one more time* by way of Royal I shall owe an abject apology, and yet to try to offer it would only make the matter worse."

He went grimly, glad to pay this homage of avoidance which would have been more to his credit paid a week or so earlier. His frequent failure to pay it had won him, each time, a glimpse of *her* and an itching fear that prying eyes were on him inside other balconied windows besides those of the unslender Mme. Castanado.

Temptation is a sly witch. Down at Conti Street, on the court-house's upper riverside corner, he paused to take in the charm of one of the most picturesque groups of old buildings in the *vieux carré*. But there, to gather in all the effect, one must turn, sooner or later, and include the upper side of Conti Street from Chartres to Royal; and as Chester did so, yonder, once more, coming from Bourbon and turning from Conti into Royal, there she was again, the avoided one!

Her black cupid was at her side, tiny even for nine years. They disappeared conversing together. With his heart in his throat Chester turned away, resumed his walk, and passed into the marble halls where justice dreamt she dwelt. Up and down one of these, little traversed so early, he paced, with a question burning in his breast, which every new sigh of mortification fanned hotter: *Had she seen him?*--this time? those other times? And did those Castanados suspect? Was that why Mme. Castanado had the grippe, and the manuscript was yet unread?

A voice spoke his name and he found himself facing the very black dealer in second-hand books.

"I was yonder at Toulouse Street," said Ovide Landry, "coming up-town, when I saw you at Conti coming down. I have another map of the old city for you. At that rate, Mr. Chester, you'll soon have as good a collection as the best."

The young man was pleased: "Does it show exactly where Maspero's Exchange stood?" he asked.

Ovide said come to the shop and see.

"I will, to-day; at six." Another man came up, "Ah, Mr. Castanado! How--how is your patient?"

"Madame"--the costumer smiled happily--"is once more well. I was looking for you. You didn't pass in Royal Street this morning."

[Ah, those eyes behind those windows behind those balconies!]

"No, I--oh! going, Landry? Good day. No, Mr. Castanado, I----"

"Madame hopes Mr. Chezter can at last, this evening, come at home for that reading."

"Mr. Castanado, I can't! I'm mighty sorry! My whole evening's engaged. So is to-morrow's. May I come the next evening after? . . . Thank you. . . . Yes, at seven. Just the three of us, of course? Yes."

III

Six o'clock found Chester in Ovide's bookshop.

Had its shelves borne law-books, or had he not needed for law-books all he dared spend, he might have known the surprisingly informed and refined shopman better. Ovide had long been a celebrity. Lately a brief summary of his career had appeared incidentally in a book, a book chiefly about others, white people. "You can't write a Southern book and keep us out," Ovide himself explained.

Even as it was, Chester had allowed himself that odd freedom with Landry which Southerners feel safe in under the plate armor of their race distinctions. Receiving his map he asked, as he looked along a shelf or two: "Have you that book that tells of you--as a slave? your master letting you educate yourself; your once refusing your freedom, and your being private secretary to two or three black lieutenant-governors?"

"I had a copy," Landry said, "but I've sold it. Where did you hear of it? From René Ducatel, in his antique-shop, whose folks 'tis mostly about?"

"Yes. An antique himself, in spirit, eh? Yet modern enough to praise you highly."

"H'mm! but only for the virtues of a slave."

Chester smiled round from the shelves: "I noticed that! I'm afraid we white folks, the world over, are prone to do that--with you-all."

"Yes, when you speak of us at all."

"Ducatel's opposite neighbor," Chester remarked, "is an antique even more interesting."

"Ah, yes! Castanado is antique only in that art spirit which the tourist trade is every day killing even in Royal Street."

"That's the worst decay in this whole decaying quarter," the young man said.

"And in all this deluge of trade spirit," Ovide continued, "the best dry land left of it--of that spirit of art--is----"

"Castanado's shop, I dare say."

"Castanado's and three others in that one square you pass every day without discovering the fact. But that's natural; you are a busy lawyer."

"Not so very. What are the other three?"

"First, the shop of Seraphine Alexandre, embroideries; then of Scipion Beloiseau, ornamental ironwork, opposite Mme. Seraphine and next below Ducatel--Ducatel, alas, he don't count; and third, of Placide La Porte, perfumeries, next to Beloiseau. That's all."

"Not the watchmaker on the square above?"

"Ah! distantly he's of them: and there *was* old Manouvrier, taxidermist; but he's gone--where the spirits of art and of worship are twin." Chester turned sharply again to the shelves and stood rigid. From an inner room, its glass door opened by Ovide's silver-spectacled wife, came the little black cupid and his charge. Ah, once more what perfection in how many points! As she returned to

Ovide an old magazine, at last he heard her voice--singularly deep and serene. She thanked the bookman for his loan and, with the child, went out.

It disturbed the Southern youth to unbosom himself to a black man, but he saw no decent alternative: "Landry, I had not the faintest idea that that young lady was nearer than Castanado's shop!"

Ovide shook his head: "You seem yourself to forget that you are here by business appointment. And what of it if you have seen her, or she seen you, here--or anywhere?"

"Only this: that I've met her so often by pure--by chance, on that square you speak of, I bound for the court-house, she for I can't divine where--for I've never looked behind me!--that I've had to take another street to show I'm a gentleman. This very morn'--oh!--and now! here! How can I explain--or go unexplained?"

Ovide lifted a hand: "Will you leave that to my wife, so unlearned yet so wise and good? For the young lady's own sake my wife, *without* explaining, will see that you are not misjudged."

"Good! Right! Any explanation would simply belie itself. Yes, let her do it! But, Landry----"

"Yes?"

"For heaven's sake don't let her make me out a goody-goody. I haven't got this far into life without making moral mistakes, some of them huge. But in this thing--I say it only to you--I'm making none. I'm neither a marrying man, a villain, nor an ass."

Ovide smiled: "My wife can manage that. Maybe it's good you came here. It may well be that the young lady herself would be glad if some one explained her to you."

"Hoh! does an angel need an explanation?"

"I should say, in Royal Street, yes."

"Then for mercy's sake give it! right here! you! come!" The youth laughed. "Mercy to me, I mean. But--wait! Tell me; couldn't Castanado have given it, as easily as you?"

"You never gave Castanado this chance."

"How do you know that? Oh, never mind, go ahead--full speed."

"Well, she's an orphan, of a fine old family----"

"Obviously! Creole, of course, the family?"

"Yes, though always small in Louisiana. Creole except one New England grandmother. But for that one she would not have been here just now."

"Humph! that's rather obscure but--go on."

"Her parents left her without a sou or a relation except two maiden aunts as poor as she."

"Antiques?"

"Yes. She earns their living and her own."

"You don't care to say how?"

"She wouldn't like it. 'Twould be to say where."

"She seems able to dress exquisitely."

"Mr. Chester, a woman would see with what a small outlay that is done. She has that gift for the needle which a poet has for the pen."

"Ho! that's *charmingly* antique. But now tell me how having a Yankee grandmother caused her to drop in here just now. Your logic's dim."

"You are soon to go to Castanado's to see that manuscript story, are you not?"

"Oh, is it a story? Have you read it?"

"Yes, I've read it, 'tis short. They wanted my opinion. And 'tis a story, though true."

"A story! Love story? very absorbing?"

"No, it is not of love--except love of liberty. Whether 'twill absorb you or no I cannot say. Me it absorbed because it is the story of some of my race, far from here and in the old days, trying, in the old vain way, to gain their freedom."

"Has--has mademoiselle read it?"

"Certainly. It is her property; hers and her two aunts'. Those two, they bought it lately, of a poor devil--drinking man--for a dollar. They had once known his mother, from the West Indies."

"He wrote it, or his mother?"

"The mother, long ago. 'Tis not too well done. It absorbs mademoiselle also, but that is because 'tis true. When I saw that effect I told her of a story like it, yet different, and also seeming true, in this old magazine. And when I began to tell it she said, 'It *is* true! My Vermont *grand'mère* wrote that! It happened to her!'"

"How queer! And, Landry, I see the connection. Your magazine being one of a set, you couldn't let her read it anywhere but here."

"I have to keep my own rules."

"Let me see it. . . . Oh, now, why not? What was the use of either of us explaining if--if----?"

But Ovide smilingly restored the thing to its stack. "Now," he said, "'tis Mr. Chester's logic that fails." Yet as he turned to a customer he let Chester take it down.

"My job requires me," the youth said, "to study character. Let's see what a *grand'mère* of a *tite-fille*, situated so and so, will do."

Ovide escorted his momentary customer to the sidewalk door. As he returned, Chester, rolling map and magazine together, said:

"It's getting dark. No, don't make a light, it's your closing time and I've a strict engagement. Here's a deposit for this magazine; a fifty. It's all I have--oh, yes, take it, we'll trade back to-morrow. You must keep your own rules and I must read this thing before I touch my bed."

"Even the first few lines absorb you?"

"No, far from it. Look here." Chester read out: "'*Now, Maud,' said my uncle--Oh, me! Landry, if the tale's true why that old story-book pose?"*

"It may be that the writer preferred to tell it as fiction, and that only something in me told me 'tis true. Something still tells me so."

"*Now, Maud,*" Chester smilingly thought to himself when, the evening's later engagement being gratifyingly fulfilled, he sat down with the story. "And so you were grand'mère to our Royal Street miracle. And you had a Southern uncle! So had I! though yours was a planter, mine a lawyer, and yours must have been fifty years the older. Well, '*Now, Maud,*' for my absorption!"

It came. Though the tale was unamazing amazement came. The four chief characters were no sooner set in motion than Chester dropped the pamphlet to his knee, agape in recollection of a most droll fact a year or two old, which now all at once and for the first time arrested his attention. He also had a manuscript! That lawyer uncle of his, saying as he spared him a few duplicate volumes from his law library, "Burn that if you don't want it," had tossed him a fat document indorsed: "*Memorandum of an Early Experience.*" Later the nephew had glanced it over, but, like "Maud's" story, its first few lines had annoyed his critical sense and he had never read it carefully. The amazing point was that "*Now, Maud*" and this "*Memorandum*" most incredibly--with a ridiculous nicety--fitted each other.

He lifted the magazine again and, beginning at the beginning a third time, read with a scrutiny of every line as though he studied a witness's deposition. And this was what he read:

IV

THE CLOCK IN THE SKY

"Now, Maud," said uncle jovially as he, aunt, and I drove into the confines of their beautiful place one spring afternoon of 1860, "don't forget that to be too near a thing is as bad for a good view of it as to be too far away."

I was a slim, tallish girl of scant sixteen, who had never seen a slaveholder on his plantation, though I had known these two for years, and loved them dearly, as guests in our Northern home before it was broken up by the death of my mother. Father was an abolitionist, and yet he and they had never had a harsh word between them. If the general goodness of those who do some particular thing were any proof that that particular thing is good to do, they would have convinced me, without a word, that slaveholding was entirely right. But they were not trying to do any such thing. "Remember," continued my uncle, smiling

round at me, "your dad's trusting you not to bring back our honest opinion--of anything--in place of your own."

"Maud," my aunt hurried to put in, for she knew the advice I had just heard was not the kind I most needed, "you're going to have for your own maid the blackest girl you ever saw."

"And the best," added my uncle; "she's as good as she is black."

"She's no common darky, that Sidney," said aunt. "She'll keep you busy answering questions, my dear, and I say now, you may tell her anything she wants to know; we give you perfect liberty; and you may be just as free with Hester; that's her mother; or with her father, Silas."

"We draw the line at Mingo," said uncle.

"And who is Mingo?" I inquired.

"Mingo? he's her brother; a very low and trailing branch of the family tree."

As we neared the house I was told more of the father and mother; their sweet content, their piety, their diligence. "If we lived in town, where there's better chance to pick up small earnings," remarked uncle, "those two and Sidney would have bought their freedom by now, and Mingo's too. Silas has got nearly enough to buy his own, as it is."

Silas, my aunt explained, was a carpenter. "He hands your uncle so much a week; all he can make beyond that he's allowed to keep." The carriage stopped at the door; half a dozen servants came, smiling, and I knew Sidney and Hester at a glance, they were so finely different from their fellows.

That night the daughter and I made acquaintance. She was eighteen, tall, lithe and as straight as an arrow. She had not one of the physical traits that so often make her race uncomely to our eyes; even her nose was good; her very feet were well made, her hands were slim and shapely, the fingers long and neatly jointed, and there was nothing inky in her amazing blackness, her red blood so enriched it. Yet she was as really African in her strong, eager mind as in her color, and the English language, on her tongue, was like a painter's palette and brushes in the hands of a monkey. Her first question to me after my last want was supplied came cautiously, after a long gaze at my lighted lamp, from a seat on the floor. "Miss Maud, when was de convention o' coal-oil 'scuvvud?" And to her

good night she added, in allusion to my eventual return to the North, "I hope it be a long time afo' you make dat repass!"

At the next bedtime she began on me with the innocent question of my favorite flower, but I had not answered three other questions before she had placed me where I must either say I did not believe in the right to hold slaves, or must keep silence; and when I kept silence of course she knew. For a long moment she dropped her eyes, and then, with a soft smile, asked if I would tell her some Bible stories, preferably that of "Moses in de boundaries o' Egyp'."

She listened in gloating silence, rarely interrupting; but at the words, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, 'Let my people go,'" the response, "Pra-aise Gawd!" rose from her lips in such volume that she threw her hands to her mouth. After that she spoke only soft queries, but they grew more and more significant, and I soon saw that her supposed content was purely a pious endurance, and that her soul felt bondage as her body would have felt a harrow. So I left the fugitives of Egyptian slavery under the frown of the Almighty in the wilderness of Sin; Sidney was trusting me; uncle and aunt were trusting me; and between them I was getting into a narrow corner. After a meditative silence my questioner asked:

"Miss Maud, do de Bible anywhuz capitulate dat Moses aw Aaron aw Joshaway aw Cable *buy* his freedom--wid money?"

Her manner was childlike, yet she always seemed to come up out of deep thought when she asked a question; she smiled diffidently until the reply began to come, then took on a reverential gravity, and as soon as it was fully given sank back into thought. "Miss Maud, don't you reckon dat ef Moses had a-save' up money enough to a-boughtened his freedom, dat'd a-been de very sign mos' pleasin' to Gawd dat he 'uz highly fitten to be sot free widout paying?" To that puzzle she waited for no answer beyond the distress I betrayed, but turned to matters less speculative, and soon said good night.

On the third evening--my! If I could have given all the topography of the entire country between uncle's plantation and my native city on the margin of the Great Lakes, with full account of its every natural and social condition, her questions would have wholly gathered them in. She asked if our climate was very hard on negroes; what clothing we wore in summer, and how we kept from freezing in midwinter; about wages, the price of food, what crops were raised, and what the "patarolers" did with a negro when they caught one at night without a pass.

She made me desperate, and when the fourth night saw her crouched on my floor it found me prepared; I plied her with questions from start to finish. She yielded with a perfect courtesy; told of the poor lot of the few free negroes of whom she knew, and of the time-serving and shifty indolence, the thievishness, faithlessness, and unaspiring torpidity of "some niggehs"; and when I opened the way for her to speak of uncle and aunt she poured forth their praises with an ardor that brought her own tears. I asked her if she believed she could ever be happy away from them.

She smiled with brimming eyes: "Why, I dunno, Miss Maud; whosomeveh come, and whensomeveh, and howsomeveh de Lawd sen' it, ef us feels his ahm und' us, us ought to be 'shame' not to be happy, oughtn't us?" All at once she sprang half up: "I tell you de Lawd neveh gi'n no niggeh de rights to snuggle down anywhuz an' fo'git de auction-block!"

As suddenly the outbreak passed, yet as she settled down again her exaltation still showed through her fond smile. "You know what dat inquit'ance o' yone bring to my 'memb'ance? Dass ow ole Canaan hymn----

"O I mus' climb de stony hill
Pas' many a sweet desiah,
De flow'ry road is not fo' me,
I follows cloud an' fiah."

After she was gone I lay trying so to contrive our next conversation that it should not flow, as all before it had so irresistibly done, into that one deep channel of her thoughts which took in everything that fell upon her mind, as a great river drinks the rains of all its valleys. Presently the open window gave me my cue: the stars! the unvexed and unvexing stars, that shone before human wrongs ever began, and that will be shining after all human wrongs are ended--our talk should be of them.

V

At the supper-table on the following evening I became convinced of something which I had felt coming for two or three days, wondering the while whether Sidney did not feel the same thing. When we rose aunt drew me aside and with caressing touches on my brow and temples said she was sorry to be so

slow in bringing me into social contact with the young people of the neighboring plantations, but that uncle, on his arrival at home, had found a letter whose information had kept him, and her as well, busy every waking hour since. "And this evening," she continued, "we can't even sit down with you around the parlor lamp. Can you amuse yourself alone, dear, or with Sidney, while your uncle and I go over some pressing matters together?"

Surely I could. "Auntie, was the information--bad news?"

"It wasn't good, my dear; I may tell you about it to-morrow."

"Hadn't I better go back to father at once?"

"Oh, my child, not for our sake; if you're not too lonesome we'd rather keep you. Let me see; has Mingo ever danced for you? Why, tell Sidney to make Mingo come dance for you."

Mingo came; his leaps, turns, postures, steps, and outcries were a most laughable wonder, and I should have begged for more than I did, but I saw that it was a part of Sidney's religion to disapprove the dance.

"Sidney," I said, "did you ever hear of the great clock in the sky? Yes, there's one there; it's made all of stars." We were at the foot of some veranda steps that faced the north, and as she and Mingo were about to settle down at my feet I said if they would follow me to the top of the flight I would tell this marvel: what the learned believed those eternal lamps to be; why some were out of view three-fourths of the night, others only half, others not a quarter; how a very few never sank out of sight at all except for daylight or clouds, and yet went round and round with all the others; and why I called those the clock of heaven; which gained, each night, four minutes, and only four, on the time we kept by the sun.

"Pra-aise Gawd!" murmured Sidney. "Miss Maud, please hol' on tell Mingo run' fetch daddy an' mammy; dey don't want dat sto'y f'om me secon' haynded!" Mingo darted off and we waited. "Miss Maud, what de white folks mean by de nawth stah? Is dey sich a stah as de nawth stah?"

I tried to explain that since all this seeming movement of the stars around us was but our own daily and yearly turning, there would necessarily be two opposite points on our earth which would never move at all, and that any star directly in line with those two points would seem as still as they.

"Like de p'int o' de spin'le on de spinnin'-wheel, Miss Maud? Oh, yass, I b'lieve I un'stand dat; I un'stan' it some."

I showed her the north star, and told her how to find it; and then I took from my watch-guard a tiny compass and let her see how it forever picked out from among all the stars of heaven that one small light, and held quiveringly to it. She hung over it with ecstatic sighs. "Do it *see* de stah, Miss Maud, like de wise men o' de Eas' see de stah o' Jesus?"

I tried to make plain the law it was obeying.

"And do it p'int dah dess de same in de broad day, an' all day long?--Pra-aise Gawd! And do it p'int dah in de rain, an' in de stawmy win' a-fulfillin' of his word, when de ain't a single stah admissible in de ske-eye?--De Lawd's na-ame be pra-aise!" Her father, mother, and brother were all looking at it with her, now, and she glanced from one to another with long heavings of rapture.

"Miss Maud," said Silas, in a subdued voice, "dat little trick mus' 'a' cos' you a mint o' money."

"Silas," put in Hester, "you know dass not a pullite question!" But she was ravening for its answer, and I said I had bought it for twenty-five cents. They laughed with delight. Yet, when I told Sidney she might have it, her thanks were but two words, which her lips seemed to drop unconsciously while she gazed on the trinket.

They all sat down on the steps nearest below me, and presently, beginning where I had begun with Sidney, I went on to point out the polar constellations and to relate the age-worn story of Cepheus and Cassiopeia, Andromeda and the divine Perseus.

"Lawd, my Lawd !" whispered the mother, "was dey--was dey colo'd?"

I said two of them were king and queen of Ethiopia, and a third was their daughter.

"Chain' to de rock, an' yit sa-ave at las'!" exclaimed Sidney.

While her husband and children still gazed at the royal stars, Hester spoke softly to me again. "Miss Maud, dass a tryin' sawt o' sto'y to tell to a bunch o' po' niggehs; did you dess make dat up--fo' us?"

"Why, Hester," I said, "that was an old, old story before this country was ever known to white folks, or black," and the eyes of all four were on me as the daughter asked: "Ain't it in de Bi-ible?"

As all but Sidney bade me good night, I heard her say; "I don' care, I b'lieb dat be'n in de Bible an' git drap out by mista-ake!"

In my room she grew queerly playful, and continued so until she had drawn off my shoes and stockings. But then abruptly, she took my feet in her slim black hands, and with eyes lifted tenderly to mine, said: "How bu'ful 'pon de mountain is dem wha' funnish good tidin's!" She leaned her forehead on my insteps: "Us bleegeed to paht some day, Miss Maud."

I made a poor effort to lift her, but she would not be displaced. "Cayn't no two people count fo' sho' on stayin' togetheh al'ays in dis va-ain worl'," and all at once I found my face in my hands and the salt drops searching through my fingers; Sidney was kissing my feet and wetting them with her tears.

At close of the next day, a Sabbath, my uncle and aunt called all their servants around the front steps of the house and with tears more bitter than any of Sidney's or mine, told them that by the folly of others, far away, they had lost their whole fortune at one stroke and must part with everything, and with them, by sale. Their dark hearers wept with them, and Silas, Hester, and Sidney, after the rest had gone back to the quarters, offered the master and mistress, through many a quaintly misquoted scripture, the consolations of faith.

"I wish we had set you free, Silas," said uncle, "you and yours, when we could have done it. Your mistress and I are going to town to-morrow solely to get somebody to buy you, all four, together."

"Mawse Ben," cried the slave, with strange earnestness, "don't you do dat! Don't you was'e no time dat a-way! You go see what you can sa-ave fo' you-all an' yone!"

"For the creditors, you mean, Silas," said my aunt; "that's done."

Hester had a question. "Do it all go to de credito's anyhow, Miss 'Liza, no matteh how much us bring?" and when aunt said yes, Sidney murmured to her mother, "I tol' you dat." I wondered when she had told her.

Uncle and aunt tried hard to find one buyer for the four, but failed; nobody who wanted the other three had any use for Mingo. It was after nightfall when

they came dragging home. "Now don't you fret one bit 'bout dat, Mawse Ben," exclaimed Sidney, with a happy heroism in her eyes that I remembered afterward. "De Lawd is perwide!"

"Strange," said my aunt to uncle and me aside, smiling in pity, "how slight an impression disaster makes on their minds!" and that too I remembered afterward.

As soon as we were alone in my chamber, Sidney and I, she asked me to tell her again of the clock in the sky, and at the end of her service and of my recital she drew me to my window and showed me how promptly she could point out the pole-star at the centre of the clock's vast dial, although at our right a big moon was leaving the tree tops and flooding the sky with its light. Toward this she turned, and lifting an arm with the reverence of a priestess said, in impassioned monotone:

"De moon shine full at His comman'
An' all de stahs obey."

She kissed my hand as she added good-by. "Why, Sidney!" I laughed, "you mean good night, don't you?"

She bent low, tittered softly, and then, with a swift return to her beautiful straightness, said: "But still, Miss Maud, who eveh know when dey say good night dat it ain't good-by?" She fondled my hand between her two as she backed away, kissed it fervently again, and was gone.

When I awoke my aunt stood in broad though sunless daylight at the bedside, with the waking cup of coffee which it was Sidney's wont to bring. I started from the pillow. "Oh! what--who--wh'--where's Sidney? Why--how long has it been raining?"

"It began at break of day," she replied, adding pensively, "thank God."

"Oh! were we in such bad need of rain?"

"*They* were--precisely when it came. Rain never came straighter from heaven."

"They?"--I stared.

"Yes; Silas and Hester--and Sidney--and Mingo. They must have started soon after moonrise, and had the whole bright night, with its black shadows, for going."

"For going where, auntie; going where?"

"Then the rain came in God's own hour," she continued, as if wholly to herself, "and washed out their trail."

I sprang from the bed. "Aunt 'Liza!"

"Yes, Maud, they've run away, and if only they may *get* away. God be praised!"

Of course, I cried like an infant. I threw myself upon her bosom. "Oh, auntie, auntie, I'm afraid it's my fault! But when I tell you how far I was from meaning it----"

"Don't tell me a word, my child; I wish it were my fault; I'd like to be in your shoes. And, I don't care how right slavery is, I'll never own a darky again!"

One day some two months after, at home again with father. Just as I was leaving the house on some errand, Sidney--ragged, wet, and bedraggled as a lost dog--sprang into my arms. When I had got her reclothed and fed I eagerly heard her story. Three of the four had come safely through; poor Mingo had failed; if I ever tell of him it must be at some other time. In the course of her tale I asked about the compass.

"Dat little trick?" she said fondly. "Oh, yass'm, it wah de salvation o' de Lawd 'pon cloudy nights; but time an' ag'in us had to sepa'ate, 'llowin' fo' to rejine togeteh on de bank o' de nex' creek, an' which, de Lawd a-he'pin' of us, h-it al'ays come to pass; an' so, afteh all, Miss Maud, de one thing what stan' us de bes' frien' night 'pon night, next to Gawd hisse'f, dat wah his clock in de ske-eye."

VI

"Landry," Chester said next day, bringing back the magazine barely half an hour after the book-shop had reopened, "that's a true story!"

"Ah, something inside tells you?"

"No need! You remember this, near the end? '*Poor Mingo had failed [to escape]; if I ever tell of him it must be at another time.*' Landry, it's so absurd that I hardly have the face to say it; I've got--ha-ha-ha!--I've got a manuscript! and it fills that gap!" The speaker whipped out the "Memorandum"; "Here's the story, by my own uncle, of how the three got over the border and how Mingo failed. I'd totally forgotten I had it. I disliked its beginning far more than I did 'Maud's' yesterday. For I hate masks and costumes as much as Mr. Castanado loves them; and a practical joke--which is what the story begins with, in costume, though it soon leaves it behind--nauseates me. Comical situation it makes for me, this 'Memorandum,' doesn't it--turning up this way?"

Ovide replied meditatively: "To lend it, even to me, would seem as though you sought----"

"It would put me in a false light! I don't like false lights."

"It would mask and costume you."

"Why, not so badly as if I were really in society; as, you know, I'm not! The only place where any man, but especially a society man, can properly seek a girl's society is in society. The more he's worthy to meet her, the more hopelessly--I needn't say hopelessly, but completely--he's cut off from meeting her any other way. Isn't that a gay situation? Ha-ha-ha!"

"You would probably move much in society, even Creole society, without meeting mademoiselle; she has less time for it than you."

"Is that so?"

Cupid, the evening before, had carried a flat, square parcel like a shop's account-books to be written up under the home lamp. Staring at Landry, Chester rather dropped the words than spoke them: "Think of it! The awful pity! For the like of her! Of her! Why, how on earth--? No, don't tell! I know what I'd think of any other man following in her wake and asking questions while hard fortune writes her history. A girl like her, Landry, has no business with a history!"

"Mr. Chester."

"Yes?"

"Has that 'Memorandum' never been printed? I can find out for you, in *Poole's Index*."

"Do it! It's good enough, and it's named as if to be printed. See? 'The Angel of----'"

"Then why not have Mr. Castanado, while selecting a publisher for mademoiselle's manuscript, select for both?"

Chester shone: "Why--why, happy thought! I'll consider that, indeed I will! Well, good mor'----"

"Mr. Chester."

"Well?"

"Why did you want that new book yesterday?"

"I've met that nice old man the book calls 'the judge,' and he's coaxed me to break my rules and dine with him, at his home uptown, to-night."

"I'm glad. Madame, his wife, was my young mistress when I was a slave. I wish her granddaughter and his grandson--they also are married--were not over in the war--Red Cross. You'd like them--and they would like you."

"Do they know mademoiselle?"

"Indeed, yes! They are the best of her very few friends. But--the Atlantic rolls between."

Chester went out. In the rear door Ovide's wife appeared, knitting. "Any close-ter?" she asked over her silver-bowed spectacles.

"Some," he said, taking down *Poole's Index*.

She came to his side and they placidly conversed. As she began to leave him, "No," she said, "we kin wish, but we mustn' meddle. All any of us want' or got any rights to want is to see 'em on speakin' terms. F'om dat on, hands off. Leave de rest to de fitness o' things, de everlast'n' fitness o' things!"

VII

At the Castanados', the second evening after, Chester was welcomed into a specially pretty living-room. But he found three other visitors. Madame, seated on a sort of sofa for one, made no effort to rise. Her face, for all its breadth, was sweet in repose and sweeter when she spoke or smiled. Her hands were comparatively small and the play of her vast arms was graceful as she said to a slim, tallish, comely woman with an abundance of soft, well-arranged hair:

"Seraphine, allow me to pres-ent Mr. Chezter."

She explained that this Mme. Alexandre was her "neighbor of the next door," and Chester remembered her sign: "Laces and Embroideries."

"Scipion," said Castanado to a short, swarthy, broad-bearded man, "I have the honor to make you acquaint' with my friend Mr. Chezter."

Chester pressed the enveloping hand of "S. Beloiseau, Artisan in Ornamental Iron-work."

"Also, Mr. Chezter, Mr. Rene Ducatel; but with him you are already acquaint', I think, eh?"

Chester shook hands with a small, dapper, early-gray, superdignified man, recalling his sign: "Antiques in Furniture, Glass, Bronze, Plate, China, and Jewelry." M. Ducatel seemed to be already taking leave. His "anceztral 'ome," he said, was far up-town; he had dropped in solely to borrow--showing it--the *Courrier des Etats-Unis*.

That journal, Castanado remarked to Chester as at a corner table he poured him a glass of cordial, brought the war, the trenches, the poilu and the boche closer than any other they knew. Beloiseau and Mme. Alexandre, he softly explained, had come in quite unlooked-for to discuss the great strife and might depart at any moment. Then the reading!

But Chester himself interested those two and they stayed. When he said that Beloiseau's sidewalk samples had often made him covet some excuse for going in and seeing both the stock and the craftsman, "That was excuse ab-undant!" was the prompt response, and Castanado put in:

"Scipion he'd rather, always, a non-buying connoisseur than a buying Philistine."

"Come any day! any hour!" said Beloiseau.

Presently all five were talking of the surviving poetry of both artistic and historic Royal Street. "Twenty year' ag-o," said the ironworker, "looking down-street from my shop, there was not a building in sight without a romantic story. My God! for example, that Hotel St. Louis!"

Chester--"had heard one or two of its episodes only the evening before, at that up-town dinner, from a fine old down-town Creole, a fellow guest, with whom he was to dine the next week."

"Aha-a-a! precizely ac-rozz the street from Mme. Alexandre!" said the hostess. "M'sieu' et Madame De l'Isle! Now I detec' that!"

"Have they no son?--or--or daughter?" he asked.

"Not any," Mme. Alexandre broke in with a significant sparkle; "juz' the two al-lone."

"They live over my shop," Beloiseau said. "You muz' know that double gate nex' adjoining me."

"Oh, that lovely piece of ironwork? I took that for a part of your establishment."

"I have only the uze of it with them. My *grandpère* he made those gate', for the father of Mme. De l'Isle, same year he made those great openwork gate' of Hotel St. Louis. You speak of episode! One summer, renovating that hotel, they paint' those gate'--of iron openwork--in imitation--*mon Dieu!*--of marbl'! *Ciel!* the tragedy of *that!* Yes, they live over me; in the whole square, both side' the street, last remaining of the 'igh society."

When Mme. Alexandre finally rose to go, and had kissed the upturned brow of her hostess, she went by an inner door and rear balcony. And when Chester and Beloiseau began to take leave their host said to Chester:

"You dine with M. De l'Isle Tuesday. Well, if you'll come again here the next evening we'll attend to--that business."

"Wouldn't that be losing time? I can just as well come sooner."

"No," said madame, "better that Wednesday."

Chester was nettled, but he recovered when the ironworker walked with him around into Bienville Street and at his *pension* door lamented the pathetic decay of the useful arts and of artistic taste, since the advent of castings and machinery. The pair took such liking for each other's tenets of beauty, morals, art, and life that Chester walked back to the De l'Isle gates, and their parting at last was at the corner half-way between their two domiciles.

Meanwhile madame was saying to her spouse, "Aha! you see? The power of prayer! Ab-ove all, for the he'pless! By day the fo' corner' of my room, by night the fo' post' of my bed, are----"

"Yes, *chérie*, I know."

"Yes, they're to me for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John! Since three days every time I heard the cathedral clock I've prayed to them; and now----!"

"Well, my angel? Now?"

"Well, now! He's dining there next Tuesday!"

"Truly. Yet even now we can only hope----"

"Ah, no! Me, I can also continue to supplicate! From now till Wednesday, every time that clock, I'll pray those four *évangélistes*! and Thursday you'll see--the power of prayer! Oh, 'tis like *magique*, that power of prayer!"

VIII

On Tuesday evening Chester, a country boy yet now and then, was first at the De l'Isles'.

Madame lauded him. "Punctualitie! tha'z the soul of pleasure!" She had begun to explain why her other guests included but one young lady, when here they came. First, the Prieurs, a still handsome Creole couple whom he never met again. Then that youthful-aged up-town pair, the Thorndyke-Smiths. And last--while Smith held Chester captive to tell him he knew his part of Dixie, having soldiered there in the Civil War--the one young lady, Mlle. Chapdelaine. As

Chester turned toward her she turned away, but her back view was enough to startle him.

"Aline," the hostess began as she brought them face to face, but whatever she said more might as well have been a thunderbolt through the roof. For Aline Chapdelaine was SHE.

They went out together. What a stately dining-room! What carvings! What old china and lace on the board, under what soft, rich illumination! The Prieurs held the seats of honor. Chester was on the hostess's left. Mademoiselle sat between him and Mr. Smith. It would be pleasant to tell with what poise the youth and she dropped into conversation, each intensely mindful--intensely aware that the other was mindful--of that Conti Street corner, of Ovide's shop, and of "The Clock in the Sky," and both alike hungry to know how much each had been told about the other. Calmly they ignored all earlier encounter and entered into acquaintance on the common ground of the poetry of the narrow region of decay in which this lovely home lay hid "like a lost jewel."

"Ah, not quite lost yet," the girl protested.

"No," he conceded, "not while the poetry remains," and Smith, on her other hand, said:

"Not while this cluster of shops beneath us is kept by those who now keep them."

"My faith!" the hostess broke in, "to real souls 'tis they are the wonder--and the *poésie*--and the jewels! Ask Aline!"

"Ask me," Chester said, as if for mademoiselle's rescue; "I discovered them only last week."

"And then also," quietly said Aline, "ask me, for I did not discover them only last week."

M. Prieur joining in enabled Chester to murmur: "May I ask you something?"

"You need not. You would ask if I knew you had discovered them--M. Castanado and the rest."

"And you would answer?"

"That I knew they had discovered you."

"Discovered, you mean, my spiritual substance?"

"Yes, your spiritual substance. That's a capital expression, Mr. Chester, your 'spiritual substance.' I must add that to my English."

"Your English is wonderfully correct. May I ask something else?"

"I can answer without. Yes, I know where you're going to-morrow and for what; to read that old manuscript. Mr. Chester, that other story--of my *grand'mère*, 'Maud'; how did you like that?"

"It left me in love with your *grand'mère*."

"Notwithstanding she became what they used to call--you know the word."

"Yes, 'nigger-stealer.' How did you ever add that to your English?"

"My father *was* one. Right here in Royal Street. Hotel St. Louis. Else he might never have married my--that's too long to tell here."

"May I not hear it soon, at your home?"

"Assuredly. Sooner or later. My aunts they are born raconteurs."

"Oh! your aunts. Hem! Do you know? I had an uncle who once was your grandfather's sort of robber, though a Southerner born and bred."

"Yes, Ovide's wife told me. Will you permit me a question?"

"No," laughed Chester, "but I can answer it. Yes. Those four poor runaways to whom your sweet Maud showed the clock in the sky were the same four my uncle helped on--oh, you've not heard it, and it also is too long. I can lend you his 'Memorandum' if you'll have it."

She hesitated. "N-no," she said. "Ah, no! I couldn't bear that responsibility! Listen; Mr. Smith is going to tell a war story of the city."

But no, that gentleman's story was yet another too long for the moment even when the men were left to their cigars. Instead he and Chester made further acquaintance. When they returned to the ladies, "I want you to talk with my

wife," said Mr. Smith, and Chester obeyed. Yet soon he was at mademoiselle's side again and she was saying in a dropped voice:

"To-morrow when you're at the Castanados' to read, so privately, would you be willing for Mme. De l'Isle to be there--just madame alone?"

Oh, but men are dull! "I'd be honored!" he said. "They can modify the privacy as they please." Oh, but men are dull! There he had to give place to M. Prieur and presently accepted some kind of social invitation, seeing no way out of it, from the Smiths. So ended the evening. Mlle. Chapdelaine was taken to her home, "close by," as she said, in the Prieurs' carriage.

"They are juz' arround in Bourbon Street, those Chapdelaines," said the De l'Isles to Chester, last to go. "Y'ought to see their li'l' flower-garden. Like those two aunt' that maintain it, 'tis unique. Y'ought to see that--and them."

"I have mademoiselle's permission," he replied.

"Ah, well, then!--ha, ha!" The pair exchanged a smile which seemed to the parting guest to say: "After all he's not so utterly deficient!"

IX

Again the Castanados' dainty parlor, more dainty than ever. No one there was in evening dress, though with its privacy "modified as the Castanados pleased," it had gathered a company of seven.

Chester, not yet come, would make an eighth. Madame was in her special chair. And here, besides her husband, were both M. and Mme. De l'Isle, Mme. Alexandre and Scipion Beloiseau. The seventh was M. Placide Dubroca, perfumer; a man of fifty or so, his black hair and mustache inclined to curl and his eyes spirited yet sympathetic. Just entered, he was telling how consumed with regret his wife was, to be kept away--by an old promise to an old friend to go with her to that wonderful movie, "Les Trois Mousquetaires," when Chester came in and almost at once a general debate on Mlle. Chapdelaine's manuscript was in full coruscation.

"In the firs' place," one said--though the best place he could seize was the seventeenth--"firs' place of all--competition! My frien's, we cannot hope to nig-otiate with that North in the old manner which we are proud, a few of us yet, to *con*-tinue in the rue Royale. Every publisher----" Mme. Castanado had a quotation that could not wait: "We got to be 'wise like snake' an' innocent like pigeon!'"

"Precizely! Every publisher approach' mus' know he's bidding agains' every other! Maybe they are honess men, and *if* so they'll be rij-oice'!"

A non-listener was trying to squeeze in: "And sec'--and sec'--and secon' thing--if not firs'--is guarantee! They mus' pay so much profit in advance. Else it be better to publish without a publisher, and with advertisement' front and back! Tiffany, Royal Baking-Powder, Ivory Soap it Float'! Ten thousand dolla' the page that *Ladies' 'Ome Journal* get', and if we get even ten dolla' the page--I know a man what make that way three hundred dolla'!"

"He make that net or gross?" some one asked.

"Ah! I think, not counting his time *sol*-iciting those advertisement', he make it *nearly* net."

Chester made show of breaking in and three speakers at once begged him to proceed: "How much of a book," he asked Mme. Castanado, "will the manuscript make? How long is it?"

She looked falteringly to her husband: "'Tis about a foot long, nine inch' wide. Marcel, pazz that to monsieur."

The husband complied. Chester counted the lines of one of the pages. Madame watched him anxiously.

"Tha'z too wide?" she inquired.

"It isn't long enough to make a book. To do that would take--oh--seven times as much."

"Ah!" Madame's voice grew in sweetness as it rose: "So much the better! So much the more room for those advertisement'!--and picture'!"

"And portrait of mademoiselle!" said Mme. Alexandre, and Mme. De l'Isle smiled assent.

Yet a disappointed silence followed, presently broken by the perfumer: "All the same, what is the matter to make it a pamphlet?"

Beloiseau objected: "No, then you compete aggain' those magazine'. But if you permit one of those magazine' to buy it you get the advantage of all the picture' in the whole magazine."

"Ah!" several demurred, "and let that magazine swallow whole all those profit' of all those advertisement'!"

Chester spoke: "I have an idea--" But others had ideas and the floor besides.

Castanado lifted a hand: "Frien'--our counsel."

Counsel tried again: "I have a conviction that we should first offer this to a magazine--through--yes, of course, through some influential friend. If one doesn't want it another may----"

Chorus: "Ho! they will all want it! That was not written laz' night! 'Tis fifty year' old; they cannot rif-use that!"

"However," Chester persisted, "if they should--if all should--I'd advise----"

"Frien's," Castanado pleaded, "let us hear."

"I should advise that we gather together as many such old narratives as we can find, especially such as can be related to one another----"

"They need not be ril-ated!" cried Dubroca. "*We* are not ril-ated, and yet see! Ril-ated? where you are goin' to find them, ril-ated?"

"Royal Street!" Scipion retorted. "Royal Street is pave' with old narration!"

"Already," said Castanado, "we chanze to have three or four. Mademoiselle has that story of her *grand'mère*, and Mr. Chezter he has--sir, you'll not care if I tell that?--Mr. Chezter has *the sequel to that*, and written by his uncle!"

"Yes," Chester put in, "but Ovide Landry finds it was printed years ago."

"Proof!" proclaimed Mme. Alexandre, "proof that 'tis good to print ag-ain! The people that read that before, they are mozely dead."

"At the same time," Chester responded, rising and addressing the chair, his hostess, "because that is a sequel to the *grand'-mère's* story, and because *this--* this West Indian episode--is not a sequel and has no sequel, and particularly because we ought to let mademoiselle be first to judge whether my uncle's *memorandum* is fit company for her two stories, I propose, I say, that before we read this West Indian thing we read my uncle's *memorandum*, and that we send and beg her to come and hear it with us. It's in my pocket."

Patter, patter, patter, went a dozen hands.

"Marcel," the hostess cried in French, "go!"

"I will go with you," Mme. Alexandra proposed, "she will never come without me."

"Tis but a step," said Mme. De l'Isle, "the three of us will go together." They went.

Those who waited talked on of their city's true stories. The vastest and most monstrous war in human history was smoking and roaring just across the Atlantic, and in it they had racial, national, personal interests; but for the moment they left all that aside. "One troub'," Dubroca said, "'tis that all those three stone'-and all I can rim-ember--even that story of M'sieu' Smith about the fall of the city--1862--they all got in them *somewhere*, alas! the nigger. The *publique* they are not any longer pretty easy to fascinate on that subjec'."

"Ho!" Beloiseau rejoined, "*au contraire*, he's an advantage! If only you keep him for the back-ground; biccuse in the mind of every-body tha'z where he is, and that way he has the advantage to ril-ate those storie' together and----"

Mademoiselle came. Her arrival, reception, installation near the hostess and opposite Chester are good enough untold. If elsewhere in that wide city a like number ever settled down to listen to an untamed writer's manuscript in as sweet content with one another *their* story ought to be printed. "Well," Mme. Castanado chanted, "commence." And Chester read:

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

When I was twenty-four I lived at the small capital of my native Southern State.

My parental home was three counties distant. My father, a slaveholding planter, was a noble gentleman, whom I loved as he loved me. But we could not endure each other's politics and I was trying to exist on my professional fees, in the law office of one of our ex-governors. I was kindly tolerated by everybody about me but had neglected social relations, being a black sheep on every hot question of the time--1860.

In the world's largest matters my Southern mother had the sanest judgment I ever knew, and it was from her I had absorbed my notions on slavery. It was at least as much in sympathy for the white man as for the black that she deprecated it, yet she pointed out to me how idle it was to fancy that any mere manumission of our slaves would cure us of a whole philosophy of wealth, society, and government as inbred as it was antiquated.

One evening my two fellow boarders--state-house clerks, good boys--so glaringly left me out of their plan for a whole day's fishing on the morrow, that I smarted. I was so short of money that I could not have supplied my own tackle, but no one knew that, and it stung me to be slighted by two chaps I liked so well. I determined to be revenged in some playful way that would make us better friends, and as I walked down-street next morning I hit out a scheme. They had been gone since daybreak and I was on my way to see a client who kept a livery-stable.

Now, in college, where I had intended to leave all silly tricks behind me, my most taking pranks had been played in female disguise; for at twenty-four I was as beardless as a child.

My errand to the stableman was to collect some part of my fee in a suit I had won for him. But I got not a cent, for as to cash his victory had been a barren one. However, a part of his booty was an old coach built when carriage people made long journeys in their own equipages. This he would "keep on sale for me free of charge," etc.

"Which means you'll never sell it," I said.

Oh, he could sell it if any man could!

I smiled. Could he lend me, I asked, for half a day or so, a good span of horses? He could.

"Then hitch up the coach and let me try it."

He bristled: "What are you going to find out by 'trying' it? What d'you 'llow it'll do? Blow up? Who'll drive it? *I can't spare any one.*"

I was glad. Any man of his would know me, and my scheme called for a stranger to both me and the coach. I must find such a person.

"If I send a driver," I said, "you'll lend me the span, won't you?"

"Oh, yes."

But all at once I decided to do without the whole rig. I went back to my room and had an hour's enjoyment making myself up as a lady dressed for travel. For a woman I was of just a fine stature. In years I looked a refined forty. My hands were not too big for black lace mitts, my bosom was a success, and my feet, in thin morocco, were out of sight and nobody's business. A little oil and a burnt match darkened my eyebrows, my wig sat straight, under the weest of bonnets I wore a chignon, behind one ear a bunch of curls, and, unseen at one side of a modest bustle, my revolver. Though I say it myself, I managed my crinoline with grace.

["That was pritty co'rect," the costumer remarked. "Humph!" said Chester. The three mesdames exchanged glances, and the reading went on.]

XI

Leaving a note on her door to tell our landlady that business would keep me away an indefinite time, I got out at the front gate unobserved, and with a sweet dignity that charmed me with myself walked away under a bewitching parasol, well veiled.

I knew where to find my two sportsmen. A few hundred paces put the town and an open field at my back; a few more down a bushy lane brought me where a dense wood overhung both sides of the narrow way, and the damp air was full of

the smell of penny-royal and of creek sands. From here I proposed to saunter down through the woods to the creek, locate my fishermen, and draw them my way by cries of distress.

On their reaching my side my story, told through my veil and between meanings and clingings, was to be that while on a journey in my own coach, a part of its running-gear having broken, I had sent it on to be mended; that through love of trees and wild flowers I had ventured to stay alone meantime among them, and that a snake had bitten me on the ankle. I should describe a harmless one but insist I was poisoned, and yet refuse to show the wound or be borne back to the road, or to let either man stay with me alone while the other went for a doctor, or to drink their whiskey for a cure. On getting back to the road--with the two fellows for crutches--I should send both to town for my coach, keeping with me their tackle and fish. Then I should get myself and my spoils back to our dwelling as best I could and--await the issue. If this poor performance had so come off--but see what occurred instead!

I had shut my parasol and moved into hiding behind some wild vines to mop my face, when near by on the farther side of the way came slyly into view a negro and negress. They were in haste to cross the road yet quite as wishful to cross unseen. One, in home-spun gown and sunbonnet, was ungainly, shoeless, bird-heeled, fan-toed, ragged, and would have been painfully ugly but for a grotesqueness almost winsome.

"She's a field-hand," was my thought.

The other, in very clean shirt, trousers, and shoes, looking ten years younger and hardly full-grown, was shapely and handsome. "That boy," thought I, "is a house-servant. The two don't belong in the same harness. And yet I'd bet a new hat they're runaways."

Now they gathered courage to come over. With a childish parade of unconcern and with all their glances up and down the road, they came, and were within seven steps of me before they knew I was near. I shall never forget the ludicrous horror that flashed white and black from the eyes in that sun-bonnet, nor the snort with which its owner, like a frightened heifer, crashed off a dozen yards into the brush and as suddenly stopped.

"Good morning, boy," I said to the other, who had gulped with consternation, yet stood still.

"Good mawnin', mist'ess."

The feminine title came luckily. I had forgotten my disguise, so disarmed was I by the refined dignity of the dark speaker's mellow voice and graceful modesty. After all, my prejudices were Southern. I had rarely seen negroes, at worship, work, or play, without an inward groan for some way--righteous way--by which our land might be clean rid of them. But here, in my silly disguise, confronting this unmixed young African so manifestly superior to millions of our human swarm white or black, my unsympathetic generalizations were clear put to shame. The customary challenge, "Who' d'you belong to?" failed on my lips, and while those soft eyes passed over me from bonnet to mitts I gave my head as winsome a tilt as I could and inquired: "What is your name?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you; what is it?"

"I'm name', eh, Euonymus; yass'm."

"Oh, boy, where'd your mother get that name?"

"Why, mist'ess, ain't dat a Bible name?"

"Oh, yes," I said, remembering Onesimus. With my parasol I indicated the other figure, sunbonneted, motionless, gazing on us through the brush.

"Has she a Bible name too?"

"Yass'm; Robelia."

Robelia brought chin and shoulder together and sniggered. "Euonymus," I asked, "have you seen two young gentlemen, fishing, anywhere near here?"

"Yass'm, dey out 'pon a san'bar 'bout two hund'ed yards up de creek." The black finger that pointed was as clean as mine.

"You and this woman," thought I again, "are dodging those men." With a smile as of curiosity I looked my slim informant over once more. I had never seen slavery so flattered yet so condemned.

All at once I said in my heart: "You, my lad, I'll help to escape!" But when I looked again at the absurd Robelia I saw I must help both alike.

"Euonymus, did you ever drive a lady's coach?"

"Me? No'm, I never drove no lady's coach."

"Well, boy, I'm travelling--in my own outfit."

"Yass'm."

"But I hire a new driver and span at each town and send the others back."

"Yass'm," said Euonymus. Robelia came nearer.

"My coach is now at a livery-stable in town, and I want a driver and a lady's maid."

"Yass'm."

"I'd prefer free colored people. They could come with me as far as they pleased, and I shouldn't be responsible for their return."

"Yass'm," said Euonymus, edging away from Robelia's nudge.

"Now, Euonymus, I judge by your being out here in the woods this time of day, idle, that you're both free, you and your sister, h'm?"

"Ro'--Robelia an' me? Eh, ye'--yass'm, as you may say, in a manneh, yass'm."

"She is your sister, is she not?"

"Yass'm," clapped in Robelia, with a happy grin, and Euonymus quietly added:

"Us full sisteh an' brotheh--in a manneh."

"Umh'm. Could you drive my coach, Euonymus?"

"What, me, mist'ess? Why, eh, o' co'se I kin drive *some*, but--" The soft, honest eyes, seeking Robelia's, betrayed a mental conflict. I guessed there were more than two runaways, and that Euonymus was debating whether for Robelia's sake to go with me and leave the others behind, or not.

"You kin drive de coach," blurted the one-ideaed Robelia. "You knows you kin."

"No, mi'ss, takin' all roads as dey come I ain't no ways fitt'n'; no'm."

"Well, daddy's fitt'n'!" said the sun-bonnet.

Euonymus flinched, yet smilingly said:

"Yass, da's so, but I ain't daddy, no mo'n you is."

"Well, us kin go fetch him--in th'ee shakes."

Euonymus flinched again, yet showed generalship. "Yass'm, us kin go ax daddy."

I smiled. "Let Robelia go and you stay here."

Robelia waited on tiptoe. "Go fetch him," murmured Euonymus, "an' make has'e."

"Wait! You're a good boy, Euonymus, ain't you?"

"I cayn't say dat, mi'ss; but I'm glad ef you thinks so."

"Y' is good!" said Robelia. "You knows you is!"

"Never mind," I said; "do you belong to--Zion?"

The dark face grew radiant. "Yass'm, I does!"

"Euonymus, how many more of you-all are there besides *daddy and mammy*?"

The surprise was cruel. The runaway's eyes let out a gleam of alarm and then, as I lighted with kindness, filled with rapt wonder at my miraculous knowledge: "Be'--be'--beside'--beside' d-daddy an' m-mammy? D'ain't no mo', m-mist'ess; no'm!"

"Yass'm," put in Robelia, "da's all; us fo'."

"Just you four. Euonymus, a bit ago I noticed on your sister's ankles some white mud."

"Yass'm." Another gleam of alarm and then a fine, awesome courage. Robelia stared in panic.

"The nearest white mud--marl--in the State, Robelia, is forty miles south of here."

"Is d'--dat so, mist'ess?"

"Yes, and so you also are travellers, Euonymus."

"Trav'--y'--yass'm, I--I reckon you mought call us trav'luz, in a manneh, yass'm."

"Well, my next town is thirty miles north of----"

"Nawth!" Euonymus broke in, thinking furiously.

"Now, if instead of hiring just your sister and her daddy I should----"

"Yass'm!"

"Suppose I should take all four of you along, as though you were my slaves--
--"

"De time bein'," Euonymus alertly slipped in.

"Certainly, that's all. How would that do?"

"Oh, mist'ess! kin you work dat miracle?"

"I can do it if it suits you."

"Lawd, it suit' *us*! Dey couldn't be noth'n' mo' rep'ehensible!"

Robelia vanished. Euonymus gazed into my eyes.

[Had my disguise failed?] "What is it, boy?"

"May I ax you a question, mi'ss?"

"You may ask if you won't tell."

"Oh, I won't tell! Is you a sho' enough 'oman?--Lawd, I knowd you wa'n't! No mo'n you is a man! I seen it f'om de beginnin'!"

"Why, boy, what do you imagine I am?"

"Oh, I don't 'magine, I knows! 'T'uz me prayed Gawd to sen' you. Y' ain't man, y' ain't 'oman! an' yit yo' bofe! Yo' de same what visit Ab'am, an' Lot, an' Dan'l, and de motheh de Lawd!"

"Stop! Stop! Never mind who I am; I've got to put you fifty miles from here before bedtime."

"Yes, my Lawd. Oh, yes, my Lawd!"

"Euonymus! you mustn't call me that!"

"Ain't dat what Ab'am called you?"

"I forget! but--call me mistress!--only!"

"Yass, suh--yass, mi'ss!"

"Good. Now, lad, I can take you alone, horseback, which'll be far swifter, safer, surer----"

A new alarm, a new exaltation--"Oh, no, my--mist'ess; no, no! you knows you on'y a-temptin' o' dy servant!"

"You wouldn't leave daddy and mammy?"

"Oh, daddy kin stick to mammy, an' her to he! but Robelia got neither faith nor gumption, an' let me never see de salvation o' de Lawd ef I cayn't stick by dat--by--by my po' Robelia!"

"But suppose, my boy, we should be mistaken for runaways and tracked and run down."

"Yass'm, o' co'se. Yass'm."

"Can you fight--for your sister?"

"Yass, my La'--yass'm, I kin an' I will. I's qualified my soul to' dat, suh; yass'm."

"Dogs?"

"Yass'm, dawgs. Notinstandin' de dawgs come pass me roun' about, in de name o' de Lawd will I lif up my han' an' will perwail."

"Have you only your hands?"

"Da's all David had, ag'in lion an' bah."

"True. Euonymus, I need a man's clothes."

"Yass'm, on a pinch dey mowt come handy."

XII

Here Robelia came again, conducting "Luke" and "Rebecca." Luke's garments were amusingly, heroically patched, yet both seniors were thoroughly attractive; not handsome, but reflecting the highest, gentlest rectitude. One of their children had inherited all that was best from both parents, beautifully exalting it; the other all that was poorest in earlier ancestors. They were evolution and reversion personified.

The father was frank yet deferential. Our parley was brief. His only pomp lay in his manner of calling me madam. I felt myself a queen. Handing him a note to the stable-keeper, "You can read," I said, "can't you? Or your son can?"

"No, madam, I regrets to say we's minus dat."

I hid my pleasure. "Well, at the stable, if they seem to think this note is from a man, or that the coach is owned by a man----"

"Keep silent," put in Euonymus, "an' see de counsel o' de Lawd ovehcome."

Luke went. I pencilled another note. It requested my landlady to give Euonymus a hat, boots, and suit from my armoire and speed him back all she could. (To avoid her queries.)

Rebecca gazed anxiously after this second messenger. Robelia, near by, munched blackberries.

"Rebecca, did you ever think what you'd do if both your children were in equal danger?"

"Why, yass'm, I is studie' dat, dis ve'y day, ef de trufe got to be tol'."

Thought I: "If anything else has to be told, Robelia'll be my only helper." I asked Rebecca which one she would try to save first.

"Why, mist'ess, I could tell dat a heap sight betteh when de time come. De Lawd mowt move me to do most fo' de one what least fitt'n' to"--she choked--"to die. An' yit ag'in dat mowt depen' on de circumstances o' de time bein'."

"Well, it mustn't, Rebecca, it mustn't!"

"Y'--yass'm--no'm'm! Mustn' it?"

"No, in any case you must do as I tell you."

"Oh, o' co'se! yass'm!"

"So promise, now, that in any pinch you'll try first to save your son."

"Yass'm." A pang of duplicity showed in her uplifted glance, yet she murmured again: "Yass'm, I promise you dat." Nevertheless, I had my doubts.

A hum of voices told us my two anglers were approaching, and with Rebecca's quieting hand on the pusillanimous Robelia we drew into hiding and saw them cross the corner of a clearing and vanish again downstream. Then, hearing the coach, we went to meet it.

Both messengers were on the box. Euonymus passed me my bundle of stuff. The coach turned round. Bidding Euonymus stay on the box I had Rebecca and Robelia take the front seat inside. Following in I remarked: "Good boy, that of yours, Luke."

Luke bowed so reverently that I saw Euonymus's belief in me was not his alone. "We thaynk de Lawd," Luke replied, "fo' boy an' gal alike; de good Lawd sawnt 'em bofe."

"Yet extra thanks for the son wouldn't hurt."

Robelia buried a sob of laughter in the nearest cushion, and as we rolled away gaped at me with a face on which a dozen flies danced and played tag. And so we went----.

Chester ceased reading and stood up. For Mlle. Chapdelaine was rising. All the men rose.

"And so, also," she said, "I too must go."

"Oh, but the story is juz' big-inning," Mme. Alexandra protested, and Mme. De l'Isle said:

"I'm sure 'twill turn out magnificent, yes!"

Mademoiselle declared the tale fascinating. She "would be enchanted to stay," but her aunts *must* be considered, etc.; and when Chester confessed the reading would require another session anyhow Mmes. De l'Isle and Alexandre arose, and M. Castanado asked aloud if there was any of the company who could not return a week from that evening.

No one was so unlucky. "But!" cried Mme. Alexandre, "why not to my parlor?" "Because!" said Mme. Castanado, to Chester's vivid enlightenment, "every week-day, all day, you have mademoiselle with you."

"With me, ah, no! me forever down in my shop, and mademoiselle incessantly upstairs!"

Mme. Castanado prevailed. That same room, one week later.

Scipion and Dubroca escorted Mme. De l'Isle across to her beautiful gates, and Chester, not in dream but in fact, with M. De l'Isle and Mme. Alexandre following well in the rear, walked with mademoiselle to the high fence and green batten wicket of her olive-scented garden in the rue Bourbon. So walking, and urged by him, she began to tell of matters in her father's life, the old Hotel St. Louis life before hers began--matters that gave to "The Clock in the Sky" and "The Angel of the Lord" a personal interest beyond all academic values.

"We'll finish about that another time," she said, and with "another time" singing in his heart like a taut wire he verily enjoyed the rasping of the wicket's big lock as he turned away.

The week wore round. Except M. De l'Isle, kept away by a meeting of the Athénée Louisianais, all were regathered; one thing alone delayed the reading. Each of the three women had separately asked her father confessor how far one might justly--well--lie--to those seeking the truth only for cruel and wicked ends. But as no two had received the same answer, and as Chester's uncle was gone to

his reward--or penalty--the question was early tabled. "Well," Mme. Castanado said: "'And so we went--' in the coach. Go on, read."

XIII

And so we went, not through the town but around it.

My attendants were heavy with sleep. Seating Rebecca next me I called Euonymus into the coach and let mother, son, and daughter slumber at ease.

To the few persons we met I paraded my bonnet and curls. Some, in Southern fashion, I questioned. I was a widow who had sold her plantation in order to go and live with a widowed brother. Euonymus too I showed off, who, waking at every halt, presented a face that seemed any boy's rather than a runaway's. So natural to these Africans was the supernatural that I could be one of the men who plucked Lot from Sodom and yet a becurled widow.

When at noon, at a farmhouse, we had fed horses and dined, I at the planter's board, my "slaves" under the house-grove trees, Euonymus took the lines, and for five hours Luke slept inside. Then they changed places again, and Euonymus and I, face to face, watched the long hot day wane, and pass through gorgeous changes into twilight. Often I saw questions in the young eyes that watched me so reverently, but I dared not encourage them; dared not be a talkative angel. Also my brain had its questions. How was I to get out of the most perilous trap into which a sane man--if sane I was--ever thrust himself? There was no sign that we were being pursued, but it was a harrowing puzzle how, without drawing suspicion upon the runaways, to get them once more separated from me and the coach while I should vanish as a lady and reappear as a gentleman.

"Euonymus, boy, if I should by and by dress as a man could you put these woman things on, over what you're wearing, and be a lady in my place?"

"Why, eh, y'--yass'm. Oh, yass'm, ef you say so, my--mistress; howsomever, you know what de good book say 'bout de Ethiopian."

"Can't change--yes, I know; but this would be only for an hour or two and in the dark."

"It'd have to be pow'ful dahk," sighed Euonymus, and from Robelia's sunbonnet came--"Unh!"

Rebecca interposed: "An' still, o' co'se, we all gwine do ezac'ly what you say."

"Well," I responded, "maybe we won't do that." And we never did. I was still "Mrs. Southmayd," as we came into a small railway station. At the ticket-window I asked if any one had come up in the train of half an hour before, inquiring for a lady in a coach.

"No, ma'am, nobody got off that train. But there's another train at half past eight."

"Oh," I whined, "he won't come on that; he's overrated my speed and gone on to the next station, making five miles more going for me!"

"Why, no, you can give three of your servants a pass to go on with the carriage, keep your maid and wait for the train."

"Ah, no! No lady can choose to travel by rail where she can go in her own coach!"

They said no more except to warn Luke of a bad piece of road about two miles on. Sure enough, in its very middle--crack!--we broke down. "De kingbolt done gone clean in two!" said Luke, and Robelia repeated the news explosively.

"We'll leave the coach," I announced. "Fold the lap-ropes on the backs of the two horses, for Rebecca and me. You-all can walk beside us."

After a while, so going, we passed a large plantation house, its windows ruddy with home cheer. A second quarter-mile brought dimly to view a railroad water-tank and an empty flag-station house, and in the next bit of woods I spoke to Euonymus: "Have you that bundle? Ah, yes. Luke, this boy and I are going off here a step for me to change my dress. If any passer questions you, say I'll be right back."

"Yass, madam, but, er, eh--wouldn' you sooner take yo' maid, Robelia, instid?"

"No, for as to dress I'll be as much of a man, when I get back, as Euonymus."

"Is Euonymus gwine change dress too?"

"No, these things that I take off, your wife and Robelia may divide between them."

I started away but Luke lifted a hand. I thought he was going to claim every dud for Robelia. Not so.

"We all thanks you mighty much, madam, but in fac', ef de trufe got to be tol'----"

"It hasn't got to be told *me*, Luke, if I----"

"Oh, no, madam, o' co'se. I 'uz on'y gwine say--a-concernin' Euonymus----"

I hurried off while the wife chided her good man: "Why don't you dess hide all dem thing' in yo' heart like *dey* used to do when d' angel 'pear' unto *dem*?"

Alone with Euonymus, as I whipped off my feminine garb and whirled into the other, I began to say that however suddenly I might leave the fugitives they must rest assured that I was not deserting them. To which----

"Oh, my Lawd," Euonymus replied, "us know dat!"

We reached the pike again. "Rebecca, dismount. Hand me your bridle. Luke, for you-all's better safety I'm going back and return these horses. We may not see one another again----"

"Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy!" moaned Rebecca.

"In dis vain worl' you mean," Luke said.

"That's all. Come, don't waste time. You'd better walk on for a short way in the pike before taking to the woods. Now go all night for all you're worth. Good-by." I turned abruptly. But my led horse was averse to abruptness, and all the family except the torpid Robelia poured up their blessings and rained kisses on my very feet.

In my half-intelligent plan I intended first to stop at the house we had gone by, and had reached the gate of its front lane when I met one of its household, a lad of sixteen, on the pike.

"Yes, he had just seen the disabled coach."

I said that by business appointment with the lady who had just left the coach I had gone to the next railway station northward in order to meet her. That I had come down the turnpike on a hired horse and met her and her servants pushing forward to our appointment as best they could. Now, I said, our business, a law matter, was accomplished and she was gone on on my hired horse. This span I was taking back to the stable whence I had hired them for her in the morning.

The boy's graciousness shamed me through and through. "Why, certainly! He would have the coach drawn up to the house before sunrise and would keep it as long as I liked." He asked me in, but I went on to the little railway town, repeated my tarradiddle at its "hotel," and soon was asleep.

["Tarradi'l," said Mme. Castanado, "tha'z may be a species of paternoster, I suppose, eh?"

"No," said Scipion, "I think tha'z juz' a fashion of speech that he took a drink. I do that myself, going to bed."

Chester explained, but said that to admit one's untruthfulness by even a nickname implied *some* compunction. Whereat two or three put in:

"Ah! if he acknowledge' his compunction he's all right! But we are stopping the story."

It went on.]

XIV

I was awakened, after the breakfast hour, by a tap on my door. Why it gave me consternation I could not have told; I dare say my inveracities of the day before had failed to digest. "Come in," I called, and in stepped my two fishermen.

Their good mornings were pleasant, but, "Fact is," said one, "we're bothered about your client."

"The lady who passed through here last evening?"

"Yes, it looks as though----"

"Go on while I dress. Looks as though--what?"

"As though she wa'n't what you thought, or else----"

I smiled aggressively: "Pardon, I *know* that lady. 'Or else,' you say? What else? Go on."

"Oh, you go on dressing. Do you know them darkies are hers?"

"Hoh! Are your teeth yours? Why do you ask?"

He handed me a newspaper clipping:

Two Hundred Dollars Reward. Ran away from my plantation in ---- county of this State, on the ----- day of ----- the following named and described slaves; father, mother, daughter, and son: . . . A reward of fifty dollars will be paid to any person for the capture and imprisonment in any jail, of each or either of the above named. Etc.

With a laugh I returned the thing and went on dressing. "It doesn't," I said aloud to my busy image in the mirror, "describe my client's darkies at all." I faced round: "Why, gentlemen, if this isn't the most astonishing----"

"Ho-old on. Ho-old on! Finish your dressing. We're told it does describe two of them and we thought we'd just come and see for ourselves."

"And you followed the unprotected lady?"

"We followed four runaway niggers, sir! Else why did they take to the woods inside of a mile from that house where you left the coach? Oh, you're dressed; come along; time's flying!"

Determined to waste all the time I could, "Wait," I said, strapping on my pistol. "Now, gentlemen, we'll follow this matter to the end, beginning now, instantly. But it must be done as----"

"Oh, as privately as possible! Certainly!"

"Certainly. You want the reward and you want it all. But understand, I know you're in error, and I go with you solely to prove you are. Now, by your theory---
_"

"Oh, come along!" We went. I killed time over my coffee, and in getting a saddle for one of my hired span. "You must excuse us if we're not polite," my friends apologized after another flash of impatience. "Of course those niggers are not on the run in broad day, but their trail's getting cold!"

"You're not as bad-mannered as I am," I laughed as we mounted, but their allusion to hounds made me enjoy the burden of my six-shooter.

As we ambled off, "What were you going to say," one asked me, "about our 'theory,' or something?"

"Oh! I see you think Mrs. Southmayd must have met up with company and left her servants to follow on to the next station alone."

"Exactly. We tracked the darkies along the edge of the road; but her horse tracks--we could only see that no horse tracks left the road where any of their man tracks left it."

When we had gone a mile or so one of the boys turned to leave us by a neighborhood road, saying: "I'll rejoin you, 'cross fields, where you turned back last night. I'm going for the dogs."

"Stop! Gentlemen, this is too high-handed. Do you reckon I'll let you run down those four innocent creatures with hounds? I *swear* you shan't do it, sirs."

"See here," said the one still with me, "come on. We'll show you the very spots where those innocents left the road one by one, and if you don't say they've used every trick known to a nigger to kill their trail, we'll just quit and go home. Does that suit you?"

"Not by a long chalk!" I retorted as I moved with him up the pike. "Those poor simpletons--alone in a strange land, maybe without a pass, at any moment liable to meet a patrol--how easy for them to make the fatal mistake of leaving the road and hiding their tracks!"

"All right, come ahead, you'll see fair play."

We passed the scene of the breakdown and then the house to which the coach had been drawn. I saw the coach in a stable door. By and by a turn in the pike revealed the other clerk and a tall, slim horseman just dismounting among four lop-eared, black-and-brown dogs coupled two and two by light steel breast-yokes. With a heavy whip and without a frown this man gave one of them a quick cut over the face as the brute ventured to lift a voice as hollow and melodious as a bell.

"He's a puppy I'm breaking in," said the man. "Now here, you see"--he pointed to the middle of the road--"is where you, sir, met up with the madam and her niggers, and given her yo' hoss and taken her span. Here's the tracks o' the span, you takin' 'em back; you can see they're the same as these comin' this way. T'other critter's tracks I don't make out, but no matter, here's the niggers' along here--and here, see? and here--here--there." We rode for ten minutes or so. Then halting again:

"Look yonder in that lock o' fence. There's where one went over into the brush."

Beyond the high worm fence grew a stubborn tangle of briars, vines, and cane. "Mind you," I began to call after the nigger-chaser, but one of my companions spoke for me:

"Mr. Hardy, we got to be dead sure they're runaways before we put the dogs on."

"No, we ain't," Hardy called through the back of his head. "Dandy and Charmer'll tell us if they're not, before we've gone three hundred yards, and I can call 'em off so quick it'll turn 'em a somerset." He dismounted, and, while unyoking the two older hounds, spoke softly a few words of gusto that put them into a dumb ecstasy. One of the boys pressed his horse up to mine.

"There's the place," he said. "Now watch the dogs find it."

As the pair sprang from Hardy's hands one began to nose the air, the other the earth, to left, to right, and to cross each other's short, swift circuits. With stony face while assuming a voice of wildest eagerness he cried in searching whispers: "Niggeh thah, Dandy! Niggeh thah, Charmer! Take him, my lady!"

Skimming the ground with hungry noses, the dogs answered each cry with a single keen yap of preoccupied affirmation. Almost at once Charmer came to the spot pointed out to me, reared her full length upon the rails and let out a new

note; long, musical, fretful, overjoyed. Hardy mounted breast-high to the fence's top, wreathed two fingers in the willing brute's collar, lifted her, and dropped her on the other side. There she instantly resumed her search.

At the same time her yoke-mate's deep bay pealed like a trumpet, from a few yards up the roadway. He had struck the broad, frank trail of the other three negroes. The "puppy," still in leash, replied in a note hardly less deep and mellow, but the whip of cool discipline cut him off. From an ox-horn the master blew a short, sharp recall and at once Dandy returned and began his work over, knowing now which runaway to single out. Hardy remained on the fence, watching his favorite, over in the brush. By a stir of the bushes, now here, now there, we could see how busy she was, and every now and then she sent us, as if begging our patience, her eager promissory yelp.

Suddenly her master had a new thought. He stepped onward to the next lock of the fence, scrutinized its top rail, moved to, the next lock, examining the top rail there, then to the next, the next, the next, and at the seventh or eighth beckoned us.

"See, here?" he asked. "Think that ain't a runaway nigger? Look." A splinter had been newly rubbed off the rail. "What you reckon done that, sir; a bird or a fish? That's where he jumped. Look yonder, where he landed and lit out."

The merest fraction of a note from the horn brought the two free dogs to their master, and before he could lift Dandy over the fence Charmer was on the trail. She threw her head high and for the first time filled the resounding timber with the music of her bay.

["Mr. Chester," murmured Mlle. Chapdelaine, and once more he ceased to read. Mme. Castanado had laid her hands tightly to her face. Yet now she smilingly dropped them, saying: "Seraphine--Marcel--please to pazz around that cake an' wine. Well, I su'pose there are yet in the worl'--in Afrique--Asia--even Europe--several kin' of cuztom mo' wicked than that. And still I'm sorry that ever tranzpire. But, Mr. Chezter, if you'll resume?"

Chester once more resumed.]

XV

Hardy's incitements were no longer whispers.

"Dandy! Dandy!" he cried, with wild elation of voice and still no emotion in his face. "Niggeh-fellah thah. Dandy! Ah, Dandy! look him out!"

The music swelled from Dandy's throat. Away went the pair. The younger couple, in yoke, trembled and moaned to be after them. The two clerks had swung down three or four rails from the fence, and with Hardy were hurrying their horses through, when the youngest dog, nose to the ground and tugging his yokemate along, let go a cry of discovery and began to dig furiously under a bottom rail. His master threw him off and drew from under it "Mrs. Southmayd's" tiny beflowered bonnet.

"Good God!" exclaimed one of the boys as he held it up, "they've made way with her!"

"Now, none of *that* nonsense!" I cried; "she's given it to one of them and they've feared 'twould get them into trouble!" But the three had spurred off and I could only toss it away and follow.

The baying had ceased and an occasional half-smothered yap told that the scent was broken. A huge grape-vine end, hanging from a lofty bough, had enabled the run-away to take a long sidewise swing clear of the ground; but as I came up the brutes had recovered the trail and sped on, once more breaking the still air, far and wide, into deep waves of splendid sound. Close after them, as best they might in yoke, scuttled the younger pair, dragging each other this way and that, their broad ears trailing to their feet, and Hardy riding close behind them, reciting their pedigrees and their distinguishing whims.

Presently we issued from the woods, at the edge of wide fields surrounding a plantation-house and slave-quarters, and I hoped to find the trail broken again; but without a pause the chase turned along a line of fence as if to half encircle the plantation. The master of the hounds, in nervy yet placid words, explained that a runaway knew better than to cross open ground by night and set the house-dogs a-barking. It was only on seeing no workers in the fields that I remembered it was Sunday, and feared intensely that the pious fugitives might have shortened their flight.

From the plantation's farther bound we ran down a long, gentle slope of beautiful open woods. At the bottom of it a clear stream rippled between steep

banks shrouded with strong vines. Here the scent had failed and it was wonderful to see the docile faith and intelligence with which the dogs resigned the whole work to their master, and followed beside him while he sought a crossing-place for his horse. This took many minutes, but by and by they scrambled over, he bidding us wait where we were until the dogs should open again; and as he started down-stream along the farther bank the older hounds, at a single word, ran circling out before him in the tangle, electrified by the steel-cold eagerness of his implorings.

But now, to my joy, he found their hungry snufflings as futile as his own scrutinizings and divinations, and after following the stream until my companions fretted openly at the delay, he dropped a note from his horn, rode back with the four dogs, recrossed, and passed down on our side with them at his heels, frowning at last and scanning the tangled growth of the opposite bank.

And now again he came back: "You see, this stream runs so nigh the way they wanted to go that there's no tellin' how fur they waded down it or whether they was two, three, or four of 'em rej'ined together. They're shore to 'a' been all together when they left it, but where that was hell only knows. Come on."

We plunged across after him and followed down the farther bank, and at the point where he had turned back he put the hounds on again. "How do you know there were more than one here?" I asked.

"Because, if noth'n' else, this trail at first was a fool's trail and now it's as smart as cats a-fight'n'--*look 'em out, Dandy!* Every time the rascals struck a swimmin'-hole they swum it, the men sort o' tote'n' the women, I reckon--*ah, my Charmer! Yes, my sweet lady! take 'em! take 'em!*"

As the stream emerged into an old field--"Sun's pow'ful hot for you-all!" Hardy added. "Ain't see' such a day this time o' year fo' a coon's age. Hosses feel'n' it. Hard to say which is hottest, sun or brush."

We had skirted the branch a full mile, beating its margin thoroughly, and were in deep woods again, when all at once Charmer let out a glad peal. Her mate echoed it and with the stream at their back they were off and away in full cry. The trail was broad and strong and with rare breaks continued so for an hour. Often the dogs made us trot; in open grounds we galloped. Once, in a thickety wet tract where the still air was suffocating and a sluggish runlet meandered widely, Hardy was forced, after long hinderance, to drop the trail and recover it on a rising ground beyond.

There once more we were making good speed when we burst into an open grove where about a small, unpainted frame church a saddle-horse was tied under every swinging limb. Before the church a gang of boys had sprung up from their whittling to be our gleeful spectators. Hardy waved them off with the assurance that we wanted neither their help nor company, and though the trail took us at slackened speed around two sides of the building we passed and were gone while the worshippers were in the first stanza of a hymn started to keep them on their benches.

Noon, afternoon; we made no pause. "It's ketch 'em before night," said Hardy as we bent low under beech boughs, "or not till noon to-morrow."

About mid-afternoon one of the court-house boys, who had been talking softly with the other, turned back with a bare good-by. His friend explained:

"Got to be at his desk early in the morning. But I'm with you till you run 'em down."

Happy for me that he was mistaken. Two hours more were hardly gone when, "My Prince is sick!" he cried, drew in, and under a smoke of his own curses began wildly to unsaddle. Hardy rode on.

"You'll have to get another mount," I said.

"Another hell! I wouldn't leave this horse sick in strange hands for a thousand dollars!" Suddenly he struck an imploring key: "Look here! I'll give you fifty dollars cash to stay with me till I get him out o' this!"

"Five hundred," I called, trotting after Hardy, "wouldn't hire me."

Till I was out of earshot I could hear him damning and cursing me in snorts and shouts as a sneak who would wear my coat of tar and feathers yet, and I was still wondering whether I ought to or not, when I overhauled the nigger-chaser cheering on his dogs. Their prey had again tricked them, and again the cry was, "Take him, Dandy!" and "Hi, Charmer, hi!"

Between shouts: "Is yo' nag gwine to hold out?"

"He's got to or perish," I laughed.

In time we found ourselves under a vast roof of towering pines. The high green grass beneath them had been burned over within a year. The declining sun

gilded both the grass and the lower sides of the soaring boughs. Even Hardy glanced back exaltedly to bid me mark the beauty of the scene. But I dared not. The dogs were going more swiftly than ever, and there was a ticklish chance of one's horse breaking a leg in one of the many holes left by burnt-out pine roots. The main risk, moreover, was not to Hardy's trained hunter but to my worn-out livery "nag."

"We've started 'em, all four, on the run," he called, "but if we don't tree 'em befo' they make the river we'll lose 'em after all."

The land began a steady descent. Soon once more we were in underbrush and presently came square against a staked-and-ridered worm fence around a "deadening" dense with tall corn. Charmer and Dandy had climbed directly over it, scampered through the corn, and were waking every echo in a swamp beyond. The younger pair, still yoked, stood under the fence, yelping for Hardy's aid. He sprang down and unyoked them and over they scrambled and were gone, ringing like fire-bells. Outside the fence, both right and left, the ground was miry, yet for us it was best to struggle round through the bushy slough; which we had barely done when with sudden curses Hardy spurred forward. The younger dogs were off on a separate chase of their own. For at the river-bank the four negroes had divided by couples and gone opposite ways.

"Call them back!" I urged. "Blow your horn!" But I was ignored.

XVI

[Chester sat looking at a newly turned page as though it were illegible.

"I'm wondering," he lightly said, "what public enormity of to-day the next generation will be as amazed at as we are at this."

"Ah," Mme. Castanado responded, "never mine! Tha'z but the moral! Aline and me we are insane for the story to finizh!" And the story was resumed, to suffer no further interruption.]

At the river we burst out upon a broad, gentle bend up and down which we could see both heavily wooded banks for a good furlong either way.

The sun's last beams shone straight up the lower arm of the bend. On the upper bayed Charmer and Dandy, unseen. On the lower we heard the younger pair. On the upper we saw only the clear waters crinkling in a wide shallow over a gravel-bar, but down-stream we instantly discovered Luke and his wife. Silhouetted against the level sunlight, heaving forward with arms upthrown, waist deep in the main current, they were more than half-way across. At that moment two small dark objects, the two dogs, moved out from the shore, after them, each with its wake of two long silvery ripples. The "puppy" was leading.

With a curse their master threw the horn to his lips and blew an imperious note. The rear dog turned his head and would have reversed his course, but seeing his leader keep on he kept on with him. Again the angry horn re-echoed, and the rear dog promptly turned back though the other swam on.

Rebecca threw a look behind and it was pitiful to hear her outcry of despair and terror. But Luke faced about and, backing after her through the flood, prepared to meet the hound naked-handed. Hardy sprang to his tiptoes in the stirrups, his curses pealing across the water. "If you hurt that dog," he yelled, "I'll shoot you dead!"

Up-stream the other two runaways were out on the gravel-bar, Euonymus behind Robelia and Robelia splashing ludicrously across the shoal, tearing off and kicking off--in preparation for deep water--sunbonnet, skirt, waist, petticoat, and howling in the self-concern of abject cowardice.

"Thank heaven, she's a swimmer," thought I, "and won't drown her brother!" For only a swimmer ever cast off garments that way.

The flight of Euonymus, too, was bare-headed and swift, but it was unfrenzied and silent. Neither of them saw Luke or Rebecca; the sun was in their eyes and at that instant Charmer and Dandy, having met some momentary delay, once more bayed joyously and sprang into view. Like Luke, Euonymus faced the brutes. With another fierce outcry Hardy blew his recall of all the four dogs.

Three turned at once but the youngster launched himself at Luke's throat where he stood breast-high in the glassing current. The slave caught the dog's whole windpipe in both hands and went with him under the flood. Hardy's supreme care for Charmer had lost him the strategic moment, but he fired straight at Rebecca.

She did not fall and his weapon flew up for a second shot! but by some sheer luck I knocked the pistol spinning yards away into the river. While it spun I saw other things: Rebecca clasping a wounded arm; Luke and the dog reappearing apart, the dog about to repeat his onset; and Hardy dumb with rage.

"Call the puppy!" I cried, "you'll save him yet."

The master winded his horn, and the dog swam our way. At the same time his fellows came about us, while on the farther bank Luke helped his wife writhe up through the waterside vines, and with her disappeared. Only Euonymus remained in the water, at the far edge of the gravel-bar.

I was so happy that I laughed. "All right," I cried, "I'll pay for the revolver."

Foul epithets were Hardy's reply while he spurred madly to and fro in search of an opening in the vines to let his horse down into the stream. I rode with him, knee to knee. "You'll pay for this with your life !" he yelled down my throat. "I'll kill you, so help me God! *Charmer! Dandy! go, take the nigger!*"

The whole baying pack darted off for Euonymus's crossing. "*Take the nigger, Charmer! Ah! take him, my lady!*" We saw that Euonymus could not swim. Still knee to knee with Hardy, I drew and fired. "Puppy's" mate yelped and rolled over, dead.

"Call them back," I said, holding my weapon high; but Hardy only shrieked curses and cried:

"Take the nigger, Charmer, take him!"

I fired again. Poor Dandy! He sprang aside howling piteously, with melting eyes on his master.

"Oh, God!" cried Hardy, leaping down beside the wailing dog, that pushed its head into his bosom like a sick child. "Oh, God, but you shall die for this!"

He was half right but so was I and I checked up barely enough to cry back: "Call 'em off! Call 'em off or I'll shoot Charmer!"

With Dandy clasped close and with eyes streaming he blew the recall. Looking for its effect, I saw Euonymus trying to swim and Charmer quitting the chase. But the young dog kept on. The current was carrying Euonymus away. Twice through vines and brush, while I cried: "Catch the fallen tree below you!"

Catch the tree!" I tried to spur my horse down into the stream, and on the third trial I succeeded.

The flood had cut the bank from under a great buttonwood. It hung prone over the water, and one dipping fork seized and held the fainting swimmer. The dog was close, but had entered the current too far down and was breasting it while he bayed in protest to his master's horn. Now, as Euonymus struggled along the tree the brute struck for the bank, and the two gained it together. Euonymus ran, but on a bit of open grass dropped to one knee, at bay. The dog sprang. In the negro fashion the runaway's head ducked forward to receive the onset, while both hands clutched the brute's throat. Not dreaming that they would keep their hold till I could get there, I leaped down in the shoal to fire; but the grip held, though the dog's teeth sank into legs and arms, and all at once Euonymus straightened to full stature, lifting the dog till his hind legs could but just tiptoe the ground.

"Right!" I cried; "bully, my boy! Lift him one inch higher and he's whipped!"

But Euonymus could barely hold him off from face and throat.

"Turn him broadside to me!" I shouted, having come into water breast-deep. "Let me put a hole through him!"

But the fugitive's only response was: "Run, Robelia! 'Ever mind me! Run! Run!"

And here came Hardy across the gravel-bar, in the saddle. I aimed at him: "Stand, sir! Stand!"

He hauled in and lifted the horn. Euonymus had heaved the dog from his feet. The horn rang, and with a howl of terror the brute writhed free, leaped into the river and swam toward his master. I sprang on my horse and took the deep water: "Wait, boy! Wait!"

It was hard getting ashore. When I reached the spot of grass I found only the front half of the runaway's hickory shirt, in bloody rags. I spurred to a gap in the bushes, and there, face down, lay Euonymus, insensible. I knelt and turned the slender form; and then I whipped off my coat and laid it over the still, black bosom. For Euonymus was a girl.

XVII

Her eyelids quivered, opened. For a moment the orbs were vacant, but as she drew a deep breath she saw me. Her shapely hand sought her throat-button, and finding my coat instead she turned once more to the sod, moaning, "Brother! Mingo!"

"Is he Robelia?" I asked. "Come, we'll find him."

Clutching my coat to her breast, she staggered up. I helped her put the coat on and sprang into the saddle. "Now mount behind me," I said, reaching for her hand; but with an anguished look:

"Whah Mingo?" she asked. "Is dey kotch Mingo?"

"No, not yet. Your hand--now spring!"

She landed firmly and we sped into the woods.

My merely wounding Dandy was fortunate. It kept Hardy from following me hotfooted or rousing the neighborhood. I dare say he wanted no one but himself to have the joy of killing me.

At a "store" and telegraph-station I let my charge down into a wild plum-patch, bought a hickory shirt, left my half-dead beast, telegraphed my livery-stable client where to find him, and so avoided the complication of being a horse-thief. Then I recovered Euonymus and about ten that night the five of us met on the bank of a creek. Near its farther shore, on a lonely railroad siding, we found a waiting freight-train and stole into one of its empty cars; and when at close of the next day hunger drove us out our pursuers were beating the bush a hundred miles behind.

Fed from a negro-cabin and guided by the stars, we fled all of another night afoot, and on the following day lost Mingo. At broad noon, with an overseer and his gang close by in a corn-field, the seductions of a melon-patch overcame him and he howled away his freedom in the jaws of a bear-trap. His father and mother wept dumb tears and laid their faces to the ground in prayer. Euonymus was frantic. With all her superior sanity, she would not have left the region could she have persuaded us to go on without her.

Well! Day by day we lay in the brush, and night after night fled on. I could tell much about the sweet, droll piety of my three fellow runaways, and the humble generosity of their hearts. No ancient Israelite ever looked forward to the coming of a political Messiah with more pious confidence than they to a day when their whole dark race should be free and enjoy every right that any other race enjoys.

"Even a right to cross two races?" I once asked Luke, smilingly, though with intense aversion.

"No, suh; no, suh! De same Lawd what give' ev'y man a wuck he cayn't do ef he ain't dat man, give' ev'y ra-ace a wuck dey cayn't do ef dey ain't dat ra-ace." I fancy he had been years revolving that into a formula; or--he may have merely heard some master or mistress say it.

"Still," I suggested, "races have crossed, and made new and better ones."

"I don't 'spute dat, suh; no, suh. But de Lawd ain't neveh gwine to make a betteh ra-ace by cross'n' one what done-done e'en-a' most all what even yit been done, on to anotheh what, eh----"

Sidney (Onesimus) put in: "What ain't neveh yit done noth'n'!" And her mother sighed, "Amen!"

XVIII

"Yes?" inquired Mme. Castanado. "Well?"

"Ah, surely!" cried several, "Tha'z not all?"

Mme. De l'Isle appealed to her husband: "Even two, three hun'ed mile', that din'n' bring the line of Canada, I think."

"No, but, I suppose, of the Ohio."

"And that undergroun' railway!" said Scipion.

"Yes," Mme. Alexandre agreed, "but that story remain' unfinizh' whiles that uncle of Mr. Chezter couldn' return at his home."

"Not even his State," ventured mademoiselle.

"But he did," Chester said; "he came back."

M. Dubroca spoke up: "Oh, 'tis easy to insert that, at the en'--foot-note."

"And Hardy?" asked Beloiseau, "him and yo' uncle, they di'n' shoot either the other?"

"I believe they did, each the other. I never quite understood the hints I got of it, till now. I know that six months in bed with a back full of *somebody's* buckshot saved my uncle's life."

"From lynching! That also muz' be insert'!"

Chester thought not. "No, centre the interest in the runaway family, as in mademoiselle's 'Clock in the Sky.'" And so all agreed.

A second time he walked home with mademoiselle, under the same lenient escort as before. One thus occupied, by moonlight, can moralize as he cannot with any larger number. "It's hard enough at best," he said, "for us, in our pride of race, to sympathize--seriously--in the joys, the hopes, the sufferings of souls under dark skins yet as human as ours if not as white."

"Yes, 'tis true. Only one man, Mr. Chester, I ever knew, myself, who did that."

"Your father?"

"Yes, my dear father."

"Will you not some day tell me his story?"

"Mr. Castanado will tell you it. Any of those will tell you."

"I can't question them about you, and besides----"

"Well, here is my gate. 'And besides--' what?"

"Besides, why can't you tell me?"

"Ah, I'll do that--'some day,' as you say."

The gate-key went into the lock.

"But, mademoiselle, our 'Clock in the Sky'--our 'Angel of the Lord'--shan't we join them?"

"Ah, they are already one, but you have yet to hear that *first* manuscript, and that is so very separate--as you will see."

"Isn't it also a story of dark skins?"

"Ah, but barely at all of souls under them; those souls we find it so hard to remember."

"*Chère fille*"--M. De l'Isle had come up, with Mme. Alexandre--"the three will go *gran'ly* together! Not I al-lone perceive that, but Scipion also--Castanado-Dubroca. Mr. Chester, my dear sir, the pewblication of that book going to be heard roun' the worl'! Tha'z going produse an epoch, that book; yet same time--a bes'-seller!"

Mademoiselle beamed. "Does Mr. Chester think 'twill be that? A best-seller?"

Chester couldn't prophesy that of any book. "They say not even a publisher can tell."

"Hah!" monsieur cried, "those cunning pewblisher'! they pref-er *not* to tell."

"Some poetry," Chester continued, urged by mademoiselle's eyes, "doesn't pay the poets over a few thousand a year--per volume; while some novels pay their authors--well--fortunes."

"That they go," madame broke in, "and buy some *palaces in Italie*! And tha'z but the biginning; you have not count' the dramatization--hundreds the week! and those movie'--the same! and those tranzlation'!"

"Well, I think we will be satisfied, Mr. Chester, with the tenth of that, eh?"

Chester's reply was drowned in monsieur's: "No, my child! But nine-tenth' *maybe*, yes! No-no-no! if those pewblisher' find out you are satisfi' by one-tenth, one-tenth is all you'll ever see!"

"Ah," said mademoiselle to madame, "even the one-tenth I mustn't tell to my aunts. They wouldn't sleep to-night. And myself--'publication, dramatization, movies, translation'--I believe I'll lie awake till daylight, making that into a song--a hymn!"

A wonderful sight she was, pausing in the open gate, with the little high-fenced garden at her back, a street-lamp lighting her face. Chester harked back to that first manuscript. It "ought not to wait another week," he declared.

"No," monsieur said, "and since we all have read that except only you."

Chester looked to mademoiselle: "Then I suppose I might read it with the Castanados alone."

"No," madame put in, "you see, you can't return at Castanado's immediately to-morrow or next day. That next day, tha'z Sunday, but you don't know if madame goin' to have the stren'th for that fati-gue. Yet same time you can't wait forever! And bisside', yo' Aunt Corinne, Aunt Yvonne--Mr. Chezter he's never have that lugsury to meet them, and that will be a very choice o'casion for Mr. Chezter to do that, if----"

"If he'll take the pains," the niece broke in, "to call Sunday afternoon. Then I'll have the manuscript back from Mr. Castanado and we'll read it to my Aunt Corinne and my Aunt Yvonne, all four together in the garden."

"Yes, yet not in this li'l garden in the front, but in the large, far back from the house, in the h-arbor of 'oneysuckle and by the side of the li'l lake, eh?" So prompted madame.

"Assuredly," said the smiling girl; "not in the front, where is no room for a place to sit down!"

Chester's acceptance was eager. Then once more the batten gate closed and the key grated between him and Aline--marvellous, marvellous Aline Chapdelaine.