

A shrill cry interrupted the little man, and sent his dilated eyes up to the window above, from which it had proceeded.

"A woman in terror!" whispered he. "*Morbleu!* I long to greet the owner of such a voice. So clear, so fresh. Sweet madam, I pray you shriek again!"

St. Udo knocked louder.

"Go, go, Vinnie," uttered a frantic voice. "It is a band of Northern soldiers. They will blow up the house if you don't let them in!"

"*Milles diables!*" muttered the chevalier, in a startled tone. "Who speaks with these accents? *Ma foi!* I want the eclairsissement."

The door grudgingly opened, and a pretty quadroon girl looked out.

"Bring your mistress," ordered St. Udo.

She fearfully retreated, leaving the door open, and rushed up a broad staircase, down which was wafted the hurried tones of a terrified consultation.

Then she reappeared and conducted the officers into a magnificent drawing-room assuring them that her mistress would see them in a few moments.

"*Machere*, whose house is this?" demanded the chevalier.

"Colonel Estvan's," whispered the quadroon.

"Where is he?" asked St. Udo, sharply.

She turned pale.

"*Pouf!* do not affright this pretty one," interposed the gallant chevalier. "Monsieur Estvan is fighting like the devil against the Northerners, is he not, *pauvre-rette?*"

"Yes," faltered she; "but madam forbade me to tell it."

"*Ouais*, madam is shrewd," laughed Calembour. "Now, *mon enfant*, where is madam?"

"She has not arisen yet," said the trembling maid, "but will come soon to speak with you. Madam asks will you have refreshments?"

"Ten thousand thanks. Yes, yes, *machere*, and make haste," said the hungry Hun, with alacrity.

No sooner was the girl gone when Calembours turned his attention to the examination of the elegantly embellished apartment, and, with an ejaculation of delight, extolled the pictures, statuettes, and *bijouterie* which were scattered about with such profusion; and then he burst into a gay old French song.

St. Udo, being seated within view of the hall, which he could see through the half-open door, was the sole witness of what followed, however.

A woman floated down the staircase and approached the door. Her demeanor was expressive of the wildest emotion. She clung to the door-handle, half-fainting, and listened breathlessly to the chevalier's song. She seemed a vision of wonderful grace, with her rich dressing-robe huddled up in her arms, and her long, light tresses sweeping over her shoulders, and, with her soul standing in her passion-darkened eyes, and her scarlet lips apart, she embodied the spirit of a Sabrina listening to the voice of the gods.

Suddenly the fire died out of her face, and a weary change came over it—fear, anger, and doubt struggled for the mastery—and at last she dropped her hand, wrung it in its lovely fellow, and swiftly fled up stairs again.

"Now, who is this woman?" mused St. Udo, "and what does she know of my friend, the chevalier? Shall I interfere? No—I think he would scarcely brook my meddling. In his place, I should not."

He made no remark, therefore; and when the chevalier's song came to an end, Madam Estvan entered the room.

What a transformation!

St. Udo stood in speechless surprise.

A woman with a stout figure, keen, dark face, and pale, green eyes.

Where were the graceful, lissome figure, the dainty complexion, the passion-darkened eyes.

And madam's hair was gray as Thoms' grizzly locks—no waving tresses of serpentine gold saw he. Madam's lips were blue with fright, no longer thin, scarlet beauty-lines with a string of pearls between. Madam was old, awkward, and spoke nothing but French.

Puzzled in the extreme, St. Udo was obliged to content himself by watching the next incident of interest, Madam Estvan's behavior to Colonel Calembours.

They met—he with round, suspicious eyes snapping with eagerness, she with downcast lids and brassy brow, and each performed a charming obeisance.

"Le Chevalier de Calembours," says he.

"Madam Estvan, at your service, *mes-sieurs*," returns she.

They bow again, retire a pace, their eyes meet—they both smile a little; but Calembours' color fades to a sickly yellow, and madam's face reddens under the brown.

"We are forced to request your house for a temporary hospital," remarks St. Udo, breaking the utter silence.

The spell dissolves—they both turn to him, and both become natural, and that is all St. Udo can discover in the meeting.