

than an every-day, rich, old woman. Shall we all call, or will you go it alone?

Mimi responds that she will go it alone. Her cigarette is smoked out. Mr. Lacy lights her another, as she pulls the four prancing bays up at the gates of The Cottage.

Her pretty face is slightly paler than usual; her lips are set in a tight line; a sombre light, that bodes no good to the lady she proposes to visit, is in her blue eyes. She sits a moment, and scans the house and grounds.

'Not much of a place,' remarks Mr. Lacy, slightly; 'only a shootin'-box for the black boy—I mean the nephew. Lots of space though; could be made a tip-top country-seat if they liked. Want to get down?'

Mimi waves his hand aside, and leaps lightly to the ground.

'Wait for me here,' she says, and out of her voice all the snap and timbre have gone—or no; drive on, and come back in half an hour. I will be ready for you then.'

'Wish we had an old shoe to throw after you for luck, Mimi,' calls out the Bounding brother. 'Don't let the ogress of the castle eat you alive if you can help it.'

'And don't fall in love with the high-ted nephew,' says the young person by his side.

'Or, what is more likely, don't let the high-toned nephew fall in love with you,' adds Mr. Lacy. 'Sure to do it once he sets eyes on you. Ta, ta, Mimi! Speak up prettily to the old lady. Don't be ashamed of yourself.'

She waves her cigarette, opens the iron gates, and enters. The carriage and four-in-hand whirl on—vanish.

With the yellow afternoon sun sitting down on her through the lofty maples and larches, Mimi, with head defiantly erect, and blue eyes dangerously alight, walks up to the front of The Cottage.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN WHICH WE VISIT MADAM VALENTINE.

It is an unpretentious building, as its name implies, a low, white frame structure, with a 'stoop,' or veranda, running the whole length of its front; set in wide, wild grounds, and nothing anywhere to betoken that the lady, who is mistress there, is a lady of great wealth, and still greater dignity and social distinction. There are great beds of gorgeous, flaunting dahlias, Mimi notices, and other beds of brilliant geraniums; no other flowers. Two great dogs start up at

her approach, and bark loudly; otherwise it is all as still, in the afternoon hush, as the castle of the sleeping beauty. But human life is there, too, and not asleep. A lady, slowly pacing up and down the long stoop in the warm sunshine, pauses, turns, stands, looks, and waits for the visitor to approach.

It is Madam Valentine herself. Mimi knows it at a glance, though she has never seen her before. But she has seen her picture and heard her described, 'ah! many times. She is a tall, spare old lady, with silvery hair, combed high over a roll, a la Pompadour, silvery, severe face, made vivid by a pair of piercing dark eyes. She wears a dress of soundless, lusterless black silk, that sweeps the boards behind her. She looks like one born to rich, soundless silks, and priceless laces, and diamond rings. Many of these sparkle on the slender white hands, folded on the gold knob of her ebony cane, as she stands and waits. A lofty, stately figure, her trained robe trailing, her jewels gleaming; but her majesty of bearing is altogether lost on her daring and dauntless visitor. With her fair head well up and back, her blue eyes alight, smiling defiance in every feature, and still smoking, straight up and on marches Mimi until the two women stand face to face.

The dogs, at a sign from their mistress, have ceased barking, and crouch, growling, near. The cottage rests in its afternoon hush, the long shadows of the western sun fall on and gild the two faces—one so fair, so youthful, so bold, so reckless; the other so stern, so old, so set, so proud. Madam Valentine breaks the silence first.

'To whom have I the pleasure of speaking?' she asks, her voice as hard as her face, deep and strong almost as a man's.

'You don't know me,' Mimi says, airily; 'well, that is your fault. I never was proud. Still, you might recognize me, I think. Look hard, Madam Valentine; look again, and as long as you like. I am used to it; it's in my line of business, you know; and tell me did you never see any one at all like me?'

She removed her cigarette, knocks off the ash daintily with her little finger-tip, and holds it poised, as she stands at ease, a smile on her face, and stares straight into Madam Valentine's eyes.

'I do not know you,' that lady answers in accent of chill disgust. 'I have no wish to know you. If you have any business, state it and go.'

'Hospitable!' Mimi laughs, 'and polite. So you do not know me, and have no desire to know me? Well, I can believe that. No,