

He could scarcely sit still a moment; and on the morning when he was expected, he rode to Montbrison to meet him.

As he walked up and down under the plane trees of the promenade, it seemed as if years instead of days had elapsed since the one on which he had handed out of the diligence Madame d'Auban and Mina. When the same cumbrous vehicle drove to the inn door, his heart beat fast, and before Colonel d'Auban had fairly set foot on the ground, he found himself clasped in the chevalier's arms.

"Ah! my young friend," he exclaimed, "I need not ask you who you are. The warmth of your welcome would make me know it, even if you were not so like what your father was at your age, when we were at college together."

"Monsieur, he must have been younger than I am now," said Raoul, who did not like to be considered as a collegian.

"Ah! but I knew him, too, after we had left Vannes, when he was about to be married."

"He married very young indeed," cried Raoul, eagerly, "when he was about eighteen."

D'Auban then inquired after the health of all the members of the baron's family, and spoke of their kindness to his wife and daughter.

"Mademoiselle Mina is an angel!" Raoul said, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

D'Auban smiled, and then both mounted their horses and rode out of town.

D'Auban was delighted with his young companion. There was something so ingenuous, so frank, and so noble about him, and then he was evidently in love with his little Mina. He related the story of Osseo's death with such an ardent enthusiasm about her goodness and her courage, and described how beautiful she looked by the side of the dying Indian, that the father's heart was touched, and tears stood in his eyes.

"If only," he murmured to himself, "if only the spirit does not wear out the frame!" and then turning playfully to his companion, he said aloud, "I had rather, M. Raoul, she had been playing at dominoes than playing the heroine. She has played enough of that sort of thing for a child like her."

"Ah! she is not a child, M. le Colonel."

"I fear not. Would she was, my young friend! She has known too early what it is to suffer. Is she looking well?" d'Auban anxiously asked, for he did not like to think of the scene she had gone through.

"Oh! yes. She has the most lovely colour in her cheeks, like that of a deep red rose, and such a brilliant light in her eyes!"

The boy's enthusiastic description made the father sigh. But when Mina ran out into the court of the castle to meet him, he was satisfied. She was looking stronger than in Paris, and seemed very happy. After receiving the most affectionate greetings from all the family, and seen the young people go off on a fishing excursion, Mina on the dun pony, and Bertha on a grey one, and Raoul walking alongside of them, their merry voices still ringing in his ears, he drew his wife's arm in his own, and they went into the parterre to take a quiet stroll, and to talk over the incidents of the preceding days. If ever there was an instance of the romance of wedded love in advancing life, and amidst the many changes it had brought

with it, this was one. These two beings loved each other with the most intense of all affections—that of married love. The dangers they had gone through, if they had not added to the intensity of that affection, had preserved it in all the freshness of its romantic beginnings.

"This is happiness," she exclaimed, as they hurried into the garden, and sitting down on a bench which overlooked the valley, rested her head against her husband's shoulder with a sense of repose. He smiled, and fondly gazed on the pale face he so passionately loved.

"And you do not mind, sweetheart," he said, "that we are poorer than ever, and that when we get to Bourbon we may have to live in a small cottage, and in a very different manner than at St. Agathe?"

"Perhaps," she said, with a little *malice*, "you are going to ask me, M. d'Auban, if I have no regret for the King of France's magnificent offer, or for the suite of apartments I was to have occupied at the palace of Fontainebleau."

He laughed, and said, "It must be owned, madame, that you have treated his majesty somewhat unceremoniously."

"You know I had no direct message from the king. But, Henri, you have heard of Mina's heroic conduct about the poor Indian robber. I assure you that when she stood that night, with her little foot on the dead serpent, and the cross in her hand, it was like a heavenly vision. She rises before me over and over again in that attitude, and with the peculiar look in her eyes we have sometimes noticed. But I have something to communicate to you. What will you think of it? Madame Armand de la Croix has been speaking to me about our child. It seemed to me very strange. Our own destiny has been so extraordinary, and Mina is so young really, although she looks grown up, that a regular proposal of marriage took me by surprise."

D'Auban started, and looked amazed.

"A proposal of marriage for Mina?"

"Yes; the baron is about to ask you for her hand for his grandson."

"If I did not hear it from you, love, I should deem it impossible. Raoul is the baron's heir; would he wed him with a portionless girl?"

"Madame Armand has owned to me, that a heavy debt of gratitude is due from their family to yours; that your grandfather and your father never would accept of the large sum which at the time of the League the former gave as a ransom for the life of the Baron Charles de la Croix; but that the debt is not cancelled in their hearts or in their memories. From the moment the baron heard that you had a daughter, he determined, in his own mind, that the Chevalier Raoul should marry her, and since they have known Mina he is more bent upon it than ever."

"And what do you say to it, madame? Is the chevalier a good enough match for your daughter? I have always resolved to leave the decision of fate in your hands."

His wife smiled and answered, "I ask only one thing for my child, that she should be free to accept or reject the offer made for her hand. The twofold experience of my life has taught me beyond measure to value freedom on that