

# **At La Glorieuse**

M.E.M. Davis

# Table of Contents

<u>At La Glorieuse</u> .....	1
<u>M.E.M. Davis</u> .....	1

# At La Glorieuse

M.E.M. Davis

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

MADAME RAYMONDE-ARNAUT leaned her head against the back of her garden chair, and watched the young people furtively from beneath her half-closed eyelids. "He is about to speak," she murmured under her breath; "she, at least, will be happy!" and her heart fluttered violently, as if it had been her own thin bloodless hand which Richard Keith was holding in his; her dark sunken eyes, instead of Félice's brown ones, which drooped beneath his tender gaze.

Marcelite, the old bonne, who stood erect and stately behind her mistress, permitted herself also to regard them for a moment with something like a smile relaxing her sombre yellow face; then she too turned her turbaned head discreetly in another direction.

The plantation house at La Glorieuse is built in a shining loop of Bayou L'Éperon. A level grassy lawn, shaded by enormous live-oaks, stretches across from the broad stone steps to the sodded levee, where a flotilla of small boats, drawn up among the flags and lily-pads, rise and fall with the lapping waves. On the left of the house the white cabins of the quarter show their low roofs above the shrubbery; to the right the plantations of cane, following the inward curve of the bayou, sweep southward field after field, their billowy blue-green reaches blending far in the rear with the indistinct purple haze of the swamp. The great square house, raised high on massive stone pillars, dates back to the first quarter of the century; its sloping roof is set with rows of dormer-windows, the big red double chimneys rising oddly from their midst; wide galleries with fluted columns enclose it on three sides; from the fourth is projected a long narrow wing, two stories in height, which stands somewhat apart from the main building, but is connected with it by a roofed and latticed passageway. The lower rooms of this wing open upon small porticos, with balustrades of wrought ironwork rarely fanciful and delicate. From these you may step into the rose garden—a tangled pleasaunce which rambles away through alleys of wild-peach and magnolia to an orange grove, whose trees are gnarled and knotted with the growth of half a century.

The early shadows were cool and dewy there that morning; the breath of damask-roses was sweet on the air; brown, gold-dusted butterflies were hovering over the sweet-pease bloom in sunny corners; birds shot up now and then from the leafy aisles, singing, into the clear blue sky above; the chorus of the negroes at work among the young cane floated in, mellow and resonant, from the fields. The old mistress of La Glorieuse saw it all behind her drooped eyelids. Was it not April too, that long-gone unforgotten morning? And were not the bees busy in the hearts of the roses, and the birds singing, when Richard Keith, the first of the name who came to La Glorieuse, held her hand in his, and whispered his love story yonder, by the ragged thicket of crêpe-myrtle? Ah, Félice, my child, thou art young, but I too have had my sixteen years; and yellow as are the curls on the head bent over thine, those of the first Richard were more golden still. And the second Richard, he who

Marcelite's hand fell heavily on her mistress's shoulder. Madame Arnault opened her eyes and sat up, grasping the arms of her chair. A harsh grating sound had fallen suddenly into the stillness, and the shutters of one of the upper windows of the wing which overlooked the garden were swinging slowly outward. A ripple of laughter, musical and mocking, rang clearly on the air; at the same moment a woman appeared, framed like a portrait in the narrow casement. She crossed her arms on the iron window-bar, and gazed silently down on the startled group below. She was strangely beautiful and young, though an air of soft and subtle maturity pervaded her graceful figure. A

## At La Glorieuse

glory of yellow hair encircled her pale oval face, and waved away in fluffy masses to her waist; her full lips were scarlet; her eyes, beneath their straight dark brows, were gray, with emerald shadows in their luminous depths. Her low-cut gown, of some thin, yellowish-white material, exposed her exquisitely rounded throat and perfect neck; long, flowing sleeves of spidery lace fell away from her shapely arms, leaving them bare to the shoulder; loose strings of pearls were wound around her small wrists, and about her throat was clasped a strand of blood-red coral, from which hung to the hollow of her bosom a single translucent drop of amber. A smile at once daring and derisive parted her lips; an elusive light came and went in her eyes.

Keith had started impatiently from his seat at the unwelcome interruption. He stood regarding the intruder with mute, half-frowning inquiry.

Félice turned a bewildered face to her grandmother. "Who is it, mère?" she whispered. "Did you give her leave?"

Madame Arnault had sunk back in her chair. Her hands trembled convulsively still, and the lace on her bosom rose and fell with the hurried beating of her heart. But she spoke in her ordinary measured, almost formal tones, as she put out a hand and drew the girl to her side. "I do not know, my child. Perhaps Suzette Beauvais has come over with her guests from Grandchamp. I thought I heard but now the sound of boats on the bayou. Suzette is ever ready with her pranks. Or perhaps "

She stopped abruptly. The stranger was drawing the batten blinds together. Her ivory-white arms gleamed in the sun. For a moment they could see her face shining like a star against the dusky glooms within; then the bolt was shot sharply to its place.

Old Marcelite drew a long breath of relief as she disappeared. A smothered ejaculation had escaped her lips, under the girl's intent gaze; an ashen gray had overspread her dark face. "Mam'selle Suzette, she been an' dress up one o' her young ladies jes fer er trick," she said, slowly, wiping the great drops of perspiration from her wrinkled forehead.

"Suzette?" echoed Félice, incredulously. "She would never dare! Who can it be?"

"It is easy enough to find out," laughed Keith. "Let us go and see for ourselves who is masquerading in my quarters."

He drew her with him as he spoke along the winding violet-bordered walks which led to the house. She looked anxiously back over her shoulder at her grandmother. Madame Arnault half arose, and made an imperious gesture of dissent; but Marcelite forced her gently into her seat, and leaning forward, whispered a few words rapidly in her ear.

"Thou art right, Marcelite," she acquiesced, with a heavy sigh. "'Tis better so."

They spoke in nègre, that mysterious patois which is so uncouth in itself, so soft and caressing on the lips of women. Madame Arnault signed to the girl to go on. She shivered a little, watching their retreating figures. The old bonne threw a light shawl about her shoulders, and crouched affectionately at her feet. The murmur of their voices as they talked long and earnestly together hardly reached beyond the shadows of the wild-peach tree beneath which they sat.

"How beautiful she was!" Félice said, musingly, as they approached the latticed passageway.

"Well, yes," her companion returned, carelessly. "I confess I do not greatly fancy that style of beauty myself." And he glanced significantly down at her own flower-like face.

## At La Glorieuse

She flushed, and her brown eyes drooped, but a bright little smile played about her sensitive mouth. "I cannot see," she declared, "how Suzette could have dared to take her friends into the ballroom!"

"Why?" he asked, smiling at her vehemence.

She stopped short in her surprise. "Do you not know, then?" She sank her voice to a whisper. "The ballroom has never been opened since the night my mother died. I was but a baby then, though sometimes I imagine that I remember it all. There was a grand ball there that night. La Glorieuse was full of guests, and everybody from all the plantations around was here. Mère has never told me how it was, nor Marcelite; but the other servants used to talk to me about my beautiful young mother, and tell me how she died suddenly in her ball dress, while the ball was going on. My father had the whole wing closed at once, and no one was ever allowed to enter it. I used to be afraid to play in its shadow, and if I did stray anywhere near it, my father would always call me away. Her death must have broken his heart. He rarely spoke; I never saw him smile; and his eyes were so sad that I could weep now at remembering them. Then he too died while I was still a little girl, and now I have no one in the world but dear old mère." Her voice trembled a little, but she flushed, and smiled again beneath his meaning look. "It was many years before even the lower floor was reopened, and I am almost sure that yours is the only room there which has ever been used."

They stepped, as she concluded, into the hall.

"I have never been in here before," she said, looking about her with shy curiosity. A flood of sunlight poured through the wide arched window at the foot of the stair. The door of the room nearest the entrance stood open; the others, ranging along the narrow hall, were all closed.

"This is my room," he said, nodding towards the open door.

She turned her head quickly away, with an impulse of girlish modesty, and ran lightly up the stair. He glanced downward as he followed, and paused, surprised to see the flutter of white garments in a shaded corner of his room. Looking more closely, he saw that it was a glimmer of light from an open window on the dark polished floor.

The upper hall was filled with sombre shadows; the motionless air was heavy with a musty, choking odor. In the dimness a few tattered hangings were visible on the walls; a rope, with bits of crumbling evergreen clinging to it, trailed from above one of the low windows. The panelled double door of the ballroom was shut; no sound came from behind it.

"The girls have seen us coming," said Félice, picking her way daintily across the dust-covered floor, "and they have hidden themselves inside."

Keith pushed open the heavy valves, which creaked noisily on their rusty hinges. The gloom within was murkier still; the chill dampness, with its smell of mildew and mould, was like that of a funeral vault.

The large, low-ceilinged room ran the entire length of the house. A raised dais, whose faded carpet had half rotted away, occupied an alcove at one end; upon it four or five wooden stools were placed; one of these was overturned; on another a violin in its baggy green baize cover was lying. Straight high-backed chairs were pushed against the walls on either side; in front of an open fireplace was a low wooden mantel two small cushioned divans were drawn up, with a claw-footed table between them. A silver salver filled with tall glasses was set carelessly on one edge of the table; a half-open fan of sandal-wood lay beside it; a man's glove had fallen on the hearth just within the tarnished brass fender. Cobwebs depended from the ceiling, and hung in loose threads from the mantel; dust was upon everything, thick and motionless; a single ghostly ray of light that filtered in through a crevice in one of the shutters was weighted with gray lustreless motes. The room was empty and silent. The

## At La Glorieuse

visitors, who had come so stealthily, had as stealthily departed, leaving no trace behind them.

"They have played us a pretty trick," said Keith, gayly. "They must have fled as soon as they saw us start towards the house." He went over to the window from which the girl had looked down into the rose garden, and gave it a shake. The dust flew up in a suffocating cloud, and the spoked nails which secured the upper sash rattled in their places.

"That is like Suzette Beauvais," Félice replied, absently. She was not thinking of Suzette. She had forgotten even the stranger, whose disdainful eyes, fixed upon herself, had moved her sweet nature to something like a rebellious anger. Her thoughts were on the beautiful young mother of alien race, whose name, for some reason, she was forbidden to speak. She saw her glide, gracious and smiling, along the smooth floor; she heard her voice above the call and response of the violins; she breathed the perfume of her laces, backward-blown by the swift motion of the dance!

She strayed dreamily about, touching with an almost reverent finger first one worm-eaten object and then another, as if by so doing she could make the imagined scene more real. Her eyes were downcast; the blood beneath her rich dark skin came and went in brilliant flushes on her cheeks; the bronze hair, piled in heavy coils on her small, well-poised head, fell in loose rings on her low forehead and against her white neck; her soft gray gown, following the harmonious lines of her slender figure, seemed to envelop her like a twilight cloud.

"She is adorable," said Richard Keith to himself.

It was the first time that he had been really alone with her, though this was the third week of his stay in the hospitable old mansion where his father and his grandfather before him had been welcome guests. Now that he came to think of it, in that bundle of yellow, time-worn letters from Félix Arnault to Richard Keith, which he had found among his father's papers, was one which described at length a ball in this very ballroom. Was it in celebration of his marriage, or of his home-coming after a tour abroad? Richard could not remember. But he idly recalled portions of other letters, as he stood with his elbow on the mantel watching Félix Arnault's daughter.

"Your son and my daughter," the phrase which had made him smile when he read it yonder in his Maryland home, brought now a warm glow to his heart. The half-spoken avowal, the question that had trembled on his lips a few moments ago in the rose garden, stirred impetuously within him.

Félice stepped down from the dais where she had been standing, and came swiftly across the room, as if his unspoken thought had called her to him. A tender rapture possessed him to see her thus drawing towards him; he longed to stretch out his arms and fold her to his breast. He moved, and his hand came in contact with a small object on the mantel. He picked it up. It was a ring, a band of dull worn gold, with a confused tracery graven upon it. He merely glanced at it, slipping it mechanically on his finger. His eyes were full upon hers, which were suffused and shining.

"Did you speak?" she asked, timidly. She had stopped abruptly, and was looking at him with a hesitating, half-bewildered expression.

"No," he replied. His mood had changed. He walked again to the window and examined the clumsy bolt. "Strange!" he muttered. "I have never seen a face like hers," he sighed, dreamily.

"She was very beautiful," Félice returned, quietly. "I think we must be going," she added. "Mère will be growing impatient." The flush had died out of her cheek, her arms hung listlessly at her side. She shuddered as she gave a last look around the desolate room. "They were dancing here when my mother died," she said to herself

## At La Glorieuse

He preceded her slowly down the stair. The remembrance of the woman began vaguely to stir his senses. He had hardly remarked her then, absorbed as he had been in another idea. Now she seemed to swim voluptuously before his vision; her tantalizing laugh rang in his ears; her pale perfumed hair was blown across his face; he felt its filmy strands upon his lips and eyelids. "Do you think," he asked, turning eagerly on the bottom step, "that they could have gone into any of these rooms?"

She shrank unaccountably from him. "Oh no," she cried. "They are in the rose garden with mère, or they have gone around to the lawn. Come;" and she hurried out before him.

Madame Arnault looked at them sharply as they came up to where she was sitting. "No one!" she echoed, in response to Keith's report. "Then they really have gone back?"

"Madame knows dat we is hear de boats pass up de bayou whilse m'sieu an' mam'selle was inside," interposed Marcelite, stooping to pick up her mistress's cane.

"I would not have thought Suzette so so indiscreet," said Félice. There was a note of weariness in her voice.

Madame Arnault looked anxiously at her and then at Keith. The young man was staring abstractedly at the window, striving to recall the vision that had appeared there, and he felt, rather than saw, his hostess start and change color when her eyes fell upon the ring he was wearing. He lifted his hand covertly, and turned the trinket around in the light, but he tried in vain to decipher the irregular characters traced upon it.

"Let us go in," said the old madame. "Félice, my child, thou art fatigued."

Now when in all her life before was Félice ever fatigued? Félice, whose strong young arms could send a pirogue flying up the bayou for miles; Félice, who was ever ready for a tramp along the rose-hedged lanes to the swamp lakes when the water-lilies were in bloom; to the sugar-house in grinding-time, down the levee road to St. Joseph's, the little brown ivy-grown church, whose solitary spire arose slim and straight above the encircling trees.

Marcelite gave an arm to her mistress, though, in truth, she seemed to walk a little unsteadily herself. Félice followed with Keith, who was silent and self-absorbed.

The day passed slowly, a constraint had somehow fallen upon the little household. Madame Arnault's fine high-bred old face wore its customary look of calm repose, but her eyes now and then sought her guest with an expression which he could not have fathomed if he had observed it. But he saw nothing. A mocking red mouth; a throat made for the kisses of love; white arms strung with pearls these were ever before him, shutting away even the pure sweet face of Félice Arnault.

"Why did I not look at her more closely when I had the opportunity, fool that I was?" he asked himself, savagely, again and again, revolving in his mind a dozen pretexts for going at once to the Beauvais plantation, a mile or so up the bayou. But he felt an inexplicable shyness at the thought of putting any of these plans into action, and so allowed the day to drift by. He arose gladly when the hour for retiring came that hour which he had hitherto postponed by every means in his power. He kissed, as usual, the hand of his hostess, and held that of Félice in his for a moment; but he did not feel its trembling, or see the timid trouble in her soft eyes.

His room in the silent and deserted wing was full of fantastic shadows. He threw himself on a chair beside a window without lighting his lamp. The rose garden outside was steeped in moonlight; the magnolia bells gleamed waxen-white against their glossy green leaves; the vines on the tall trellises threw a soft network of dancing shadows on the white-shelled walks below; the night air stealing about was loaded with the perfume of roses and sweet-olive; a mocking-bird sang in an orange-tree, his mate responding sleepily from her nest in the old

## At La Glorieuse

summer-house.

"To-morrow," he murmured, half aloud, "I will go to Grandchamp and give her the ring she left in the old ballroom."

He looked at it glowing dully in the moonlight; suddenly he lifted his head, listening. Did a door grind somewhere near on its hinges? He got up cautiously and looked out. It was not fancy. She was standing full in view on the small balcony of the room next his own. Her white robes waved to and fro in the breeze; the pearls on her arms glistened. Her face, framed in the pale gold of her hair, was turned towards him; a smile curved her lips; her mysterious eyes seemed to be searching his through the shadow. He drew back, confused and trembling, and when, a second later, he looked again, she was gone.

He sat far into the night, his brain whirling, his blood on fire. Who was she, and what was the mystery hidden in this isolated old plantation house? His thoughts reverted to the scene in the rose garden, and he went over and over all its details. He remembered Madame Arnault's agitation when the window opened and the girl appeared; her evident discomfiture of which at the time he had taken no heed, but which came back to him vividly enough now at his proposal to visit the ballroom; her startled recognition of the ring on his finger; her slurring suggestion of visitors from Grandchamp; the look of terror on Marcelite's face. What did it all mean? Félice, he was sure, knew nothing. But here, in an unused portion of the house, which even the members of the family had never visited, a young and beautiful girl was shut up a prisoner, condemned perhaps to a life-long captivity.

"Good God!" He leaped to his feet at the thought. He would go and thunder at Madame Arnault's door, and demand an explanation. But no; not yet. He calmed himself with an effort. By too great haste he might injure her. "Insane?" He laughed aloud at the idea of madness in connection with that exquisite creature.

It dawned upon him, as he paced restlessly back and forth, that although his father had been here more than once in his youth and manhood, he had never heard him speak of La Glorieuse nor of Félix Arnault, whose letters he had read after his father's death a few months ago those old letters whose affectionate warmth indeed had determined him, in the first desolation of his loss, to seek the family which seemed to have been so bound to his own. Morose and taciturn as his father had been, surely he would sometimes have spoken of his old friend if Worn out at last with conjecture; beaten back, bruised and breathless, from an enigma which he could not solve; exhausted by listening with strained attention for some movement in the next room, he threw himself on his bed, dressed as he was, and fell into a heavy sleep, which lasted far into the forenoon of the next day.

When he came out (walking like one in a dream), he found a gay party assembled on the lawn in front of the house. Suzette Beauvais and her guests, a bevy of girls, had come from Grandchamp. They had been joined, as they rowed down the bayou, by the young people from the plantation houses on the way. Half a dozen boats, their long paddles laid across the seats, were added to the home fleet at the landing. Their stalwart black rowers were basking in the sun on the levee, or lounging about the quarter. At the moment of his appearance, Suzette herself was indignantly disclaiming any complicity in the jest of the day before.

"Myself, I was making o'ange-flower conserve," she declared; "an' anyhow I wouldn't go in that ballroom unless madame sent me."

"But who was it, then?" insisted Félice.

Mademoiselle Beauvais spread out her fat little hands and lifted her shoulders. "Mo pas connais," she laughed, dropping into patois.

Madame Arnault here interposed. It was but the foolish conceit of some teasing neighbor, she said, and not worth further discussion. Keith's blood boiled in his veins at this calm dismissal of the subject, but he gave no sign. He



## At La Glorieuse

saw her glance warily at himself from time to time.

"I will sift the matter to the bottom," he thought, "and I will force her to confess the truth, whatever it may be, before the world."

The noisy chatter and meaningless laughter around him jarred upon his nerves; he longed to be alone with his thoughts; and presently, pleading a headache indeed his temples throbbed almost to bursting, and his eyes were hot and dry he quitted the lawn, seeing but not noting until long afterwards, when they smote his memory like a two-edged knife, the pain in Félice's uplifted eyes, and the little sorrowful quiver of her mouth. He strolled around the corner of the house to his apartment. The blinds of the arched window were drawn, and a hazy twilight was diffused about the hall, though it was mid-afternoon outside. As he entered, closing the door behind him, the woman at that moment uppermost in his thoughts came down the dusky silence from the further end of the hall. She turned her inscrutable eyes upon him in passing, and flitted noiselessly and with languid grace up the stairway, the faint swish of her gown vanishing with her. He hesitated a moment, overpowered by conflicting emotion; then he sprang recklessly after her.

He pushed open the ballroom door, reaching his arms out blindly before him. Once more the great dust-covered room was empty. He strained his eyes helplessly into the obscurity. A chill reaction passed over him; he felt himself on the verge of a swoon. He did not this time even try to discover the secret door or exit by which she had disappeared; he looked, with a hopeless sense of discouragement, at the barred windows, and turned to leave the room. As he did so, he saw a handkerchief lying on the threshold of the door. He picked it up eagerly, and pressed it to his lips. A peculiar delicate perfume which thrilled his senses lurked in its gossamer folds. As he was about thrusting it into his breast pocket, he noticed in one corner a small blood-stain fresh and wet. He had then bitten his lip in his excitement.

"I need no further proof," he said aloud, and his own voice startled him, echoing down the long hall. "She is beyond all question a prisoner in this detached building, which has mysterious exits and entrances. She has been forced to promise that she will not go outside of its walls, or she is afraid to do so. I will bring home this monstrous crime. I will release this lovely young woman who dares not speak, yet so plainly appeals to me." Already he saw in fancy her star-like eyes raised to his in mute gratitude, her white hand laid confidently on his arm.

The party of visitors remained at La Glorieuse overnight. The negro fiddlers came in, and there was dancing in the old-fashioned double parlors and on the moonlit galleries. Félice was unnaturally gay. Keith looked on gloomily, taking no part in the amusement.

"Il est bien bête, your yellow-haired Marylander," whispered Suzette Beauvais to her friend.

He went early to his room, but he watched in vain for some sign from his beautiful neighbor. He grew sick with apprehension. Had Madame Arnault But no; she would not dare. "I will wait one more day," he finally decided; "and then "

The next morning, after a late breakfast, some one proposed impromptu charades and tableaux. Madame Arnault good-naturedly sent for the keys to the tall presses built into the walls, which contained the accumulated trash and treasure of several generations. Mounted on a stepladder, Robert Beauvais explored the recesses, and threw down to the laughing crowd embroidered shawls and scarfs yellow with age, soft muslins of antique pattern, stiff big-flowered brocades, scraps of gauze ribbon, gossamer laces. On one topmost shelf he came upon a small wooden box inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Félice reached up for it, and, moved by some undefined impulse, Richard came and stood by her side while she opened it. A perfume which he recognized arose from it as she lifted a fold of tissue-paper. Some strings of Oriental pearls of extraordinary size, and perfect in shape and color, were coiled underneath, with a coral necklace, whose pendant of amber had broken off and rolled into a corner.

## At La Glorieuse

With them he hardly restrained an exclamation, and his hand involuntarily sought his breast pocket at sight of the handkerchief with a drop of fresh blood in one corner! Félice trembled without knowing why. Madame Arnault, who had just entered the room, took the box from her quietly, and closed the lid with a snap. The girl, accustomed to implicit obedience, asked no questions; the others, engaged in turning over the old-time finery, had paid no attention.

"Does she think to disarm me by such puerile tricks?" he thought, turning a look of angry warning on the old madame; and in the steady gaze which she fixed on him he read a haughty defiance.

He forced himself to enter into the sports of the day, and he walked down to the boat-landing a little before sunset to see the guests depart. As the line of boats swept away, the black rowers dipping their oars lightly in the placid waves, he turned with a sense of release, leaving Madame Arnault and Félice still at the landing, and went down the levee road towards St. Joseph's. The field gang, whose red, blue, and brown blouses splotched the squares of cane with color, was preparing to quit work; loud laughter and noisy jests rang out on the air; high-wheeled plantation wagons creaked along the lanes; negro children, with dip-nets and fishing-poles over their shoulders, ran homeward along the levee, the dogs at their heels barking joyously; a schooner, with white sail outspread, was stealing like a fairy barque around a distant bend of the bayou; the silvery waters were turning to gold under a sunset sky.

It was twilight when he struck across the plantation, and came around by the edge of the swamp to the clump of trees in a corner of the home field which he had often remarked from his window. As he approached, he saw a woman come out of the dense shadow, as if intending to meet him, and then draw back again. His heart throbbed painfully, but he walked steadily forward. It was only Félice. Only Félice! She was sitting on a flat tombstone. The little spot was the Raymonde-Arnault family burying-ground. There were many marble head-stones and shafts, and two broad low tombs side by side and a little apart from the others. A tangle of rose-briers covered the sunken graves, a rank growth of grass choked the narrow paths, the little gate interlaced and overhung with honeysuckle sagged away from its posts, the fence itself had lost a picket here and there, and weeds flaunted boldly in the gaps. The girl looked wan and ghostly in the lonely dusk.

"This is my father's grave, and my mother is here," she said, abruptly, as he came up and stood beside her. Her head was drooped upon her breast, and he saw that she had been weeping. "See," she went on, drawing her finger along the mildewed lettering: "'Félix Marie Joseph Arnault . . . âgé de trente-quatre ans' . . . 'Hélène Pallacier, épouse de Félix Arnault . . . décédée à l'âge de dix-neuf ans.' Nineteen years old," she repeated, slowly. "My mother was one year younger than I am when she died my beautiful mother!"

Her voice sounded like a far-away murmur in his ears. He looked at her, vaguely conscious that she was suffering. But he did not speak, and after a little she got up and went away. Her dress, which brushed him in passing, was wet with dew. He watched her slight figure, moving like a spirit along the lane, until a turn in the hedge hid her from sight. Then he turned again toward the swamp, and resumed his restless walk.

Some hours later he crossed the rose garden. The moon was under a cloud; the trunks of the crêpe-myrtles were like pale spectres in the uncertain light. The night wind blew in chill and moist from the swamp. The house was dark and quiet, but he heard the blind of an upper window turned stealthily as he stepped into the latticed arcade.

"The old madame is watching me and her," he said to himself.

His agitation had now become supreme. The faint familiar perfume that stole about his room filled him with a kind of frenzy. Was this the chivalric devotion of which he had so boasted? this the desire to protect a young and defenceless woman? He no longer dared question himself. He seemed to feel her warm breath against his cheeks. He threw up his arms with a gesture of despair. A sigh stirred the deathlike stillness. At last! She was there, just within his doorway; the pale glimmer of the veiled moon fell upon her. Her trailing laces wrapped her about like a

## At La Glorieuse

silver mist; her arms were folded across her bosom; her eyes he dared not interpret the meaning which he read in those wonderful eyes. She turned slowly and went down the hall. He followed her, reeling like a drunkard. His feet seemed clogged, the blood ran thick in his veins, a strange roaring was in his ears. His hot eyes strained after her as she vanished, just beyond his touch, into the room next his own. He threw himself against the closed door in a transport of rage. It yielded suddenly, as if opened from within. A full blaze of light struck his eyes, blinding him for an instant; then he saw her. A huge four-posted bed with silken hangings occupied a recess in the room. Across its foot a low couch was drawn. She had thrown herself there. Her head was pillowed on crimson gold-embroidered cushions; her diaphanous draperies, billowing foamlike over her, half concealed, half revealed her lovely form; her hair waved away from her brows, and spread like a shower of gold over the cushions. One bare arm hung to the floor; something jewel-like gleamed in the half closed hand; the other lay across her forehead, and from beneath it her eyes were fixed upon him. He sprang forward with a cry. . . . .

At first he could remember nothing. The windows were open; the heavy curtains which shaded them moved lazily in the breeze; a shaft of sunlight that came in between them fell upon the polished surface of the marble mantel. He examined with languid curiosity some trifles that stood there a pair of Dresden figures, a blue Sèvres vase of graceful shape, a bronze clock with gilded rose-wreathed Cupids; and then raised his eyes to the two portraits which hung above. One of these was familiar enough the dark melancholy face of Félix Arnault, whose portrait by different hands and at different periods of his life hung in nearly every room of La Glorieuse. The blood surged into his face and receded again at sight of the other. Oh, so strangely like! The yellow hair, the slumberous eyes, the full throat clasped about with a single strand of coral. Yes, it was she! He lifted himself on his elbow. He was in bed. Surely this was the room into which she had drawn him with her eyes. Did he sink on the threshold, all his senses swooning into delicious death? Or had he, indeed, in that last moment thrown himself on his knees by her couch? He could not remember, and he sank back with a sigh.

Instantly Madame Arnault was bending over him. Her cool hands were on his forehead. "Dieu merci!" she exclaimed, "thou art thyself once more, mon fils."

He seized her hand imperiously. "Tell me, madame," he demanded "tell me, for the love of God! What is she? Who is she? Why have you shut her away in this deserted place? Why "

She was looking down at him with an expression half of pity, half of pain.

"Forgive me," he faltered, involuntarily, all his darker suspicions somehow vanishing; "but oh, tell me!"

"Calm thyself, Richard," she said, soothingly, seating herself on the side of the bed, and stroking his hand gently. Too agitated to speak, he continued to gaze at her with imploring eyes. "Yes, yes, I will relate the whole story," she added, hastily, for he was panting and struggling for speech. "I heard you fall last night," she continued, relapsing for greater ease into French; "for I was full of anxiety about you, and I lingered long at my window watching for you. I came at once with Marcelite, and found you lying insensible across the threshold of this room. We lifted you to the bed, and bled you after the old fashion, and then I gave you a tisane of my own making, which threw you into a quiet sleep. I have watched beside you until your waking. Now you are but a little weak from fasting and excitement, and when you have rested and eaten "

"No," he pleaded; "now, at once!"

"Very well," she said, simply. She was silent a moment, as if arranging her thoughts. "Your grandfather, a Richard Keith like yourself," she began, "was a collegiate-mate and friend of my brother, Henri Raymonde, and accompanied him to La Glorieuse during one of their vacations. I was already betrothed to Monsieur Arnault, but I No matter! I never saw Richard Keith afterwards. But years later he sent your father, who also bore his name, to visit me here. My son, Félix, was but a year or so younger than his boy, and the two lads became at once warm friends. They went abroad, and pursued their studies side by side, like brothers. They came home together,

## At La Glorieuse

and when Richard's father died, Félix spent nearly a year with him on his Maryland plantation. They exchanged, when apart, almost daily letters. Richard's marriage, which occurred soon after they left college, strengthened rather than weakened this extraordinary bond between them. Then came on the war. They were in the same command, and hardly lost sight of each other during their four years of service.

"When the war was ended, your father went back to his estates. Félix turned his face homeward, but drifted by some strange chance down to Florida, where he met her" she glanced at the portrait over the mantel. "Hélène Pallacier was Greek by descent, her family having been among those brought over some time during the last century as colonists to Florida from the Greek islands. He married her, barely delaying his marriage long enough to write me that he was bringing home a bride. She was young, hardly more than a child, indeed, and marvellously beautiful" Keith moved impatiently; he found these family details tedious and uninteresting "a radiant soulless creature, whose only law was her own selfish enjoyment, and whose coming brought pain and bitterness to La Glorieuse. These were her rooms. She chose them because of the rose garden, for she had a sensuous and passionate love of nature. She used to lie for hours on the grass there, with her arms flung over her head, gazing dreamily at the fluttering leaves above her. The pearls which she always wore some coral ornaments, and a handful of amber beads were her only dower, but her caprices were the insolent and extravagant caprices of a queen. Félix, who adored her, gratified them at whatever expense; and I think at first she had a careless sort of regard for him. But she hated the little Félice, whose coming gave her the first pang of physical pain she had ever known. She never offered the child a caress. She sometimes looked at her with a suppressed rage which filled me with terror and anxiety.

When Félice was a little more than a year old, your father came to La Glorieuse to pay us a long-promised visit. His wife had died some months before, and you, a child of six or seven years, were left in charge of relatives in Maryland. Richard was in the full vigor of manhood, broad-shouldered, tall, blue-eyed, and blond-haired, like his father and like you. From the moment of their first meeting Hélène exerted all the power of her fascination to draw him to her. Never had she been so whimsical, so imperious, so bewitching! Loyal to his friend, faithful to his own high sense of honor, he struggled against a growing weakness, and finally fled. I will never forget the night he went away. A ball had been planned by Félix in honor of his friend. The ballroom was decorated under his own supervision. The house was filled with guests from adjoining parishes; everybody, young and old, came from the plantations around. Hélène was dazzling that night. The light of triumph in her cheeks; her eyes shone with a softness which I had never seen in them before. I watched her walking up and down the room with Richard, or floating with him in the dance. They were like a pair of radiant godlike visitants from another world. My heart ached for them in spite of my indignation and apprehension; for light whispers were beginning to circulate, and I saw more than one meaning smile directed at them. Félix, who was truth itself, was gayly unconscious.

"Towards midnight I heard far up the bayou the shrill whistle of the little packet which passed up and down then, as now, twice a week; and presently she swung up to our landing. Richard was standing with Hélène by the fireplace. They had been talking for some time in low earnest tones. A sudden look of determination came into his eyes. I saw him draw from his finger a ring which she had one day playfully bade him wear, and offer it to her. His face was white and strained; hers wore a look which I could not fathom. He quitted her side abruptly, and walked rapidly across the room, threading his way among the dancers, and disappeared in the press about the door. A few moments later a note was handed me. I heard the boat steam away from the landing as I read it. It was a hurried line from Richard. He said that he had been called away on urgent business, and he begged me to make his adieux to Madame Arnault and Félix. Félix was worried and perplexed by the sudden departure of his guest. Hélène said not a word, but very soon I saw her slipping down the stair, and I knew that she had gone to her room. Her absence was not remarked, for the ball was at its height. It was almost daylight when the last dance was concluded, and the guests who were staying in the house had retired to their rooms.

"Félix, having seen to the comfort of all, went at last to join his wife. He burst into my room a second later almost crazed with horror and grief. I followed him to this room. She was lying on a couch at the foot of the bed. One

## At La Glorieuse

arm was thrown across her forehead, the other hung to the floor, and in her hand she held a tiny silver bottle with a jewelled stopper. A handkerchief, with a single drop of blood upon it, was lying on her bosom. A faint curious odor exhaled from her lips and hung about the room, but the poison had left no other trace.

"No one save ourselves and Marcelite ever knew the truth. She had danced too much at the ball that night, and she had died suddenly of heart disease. We buried her out yonder in the old Raymonde–Arnault burying ground. I do not know what the letter contained which Félix wrote to Richard. He never uttered his name afterwards. The ballroom, the whole wing, in truth, was at once closed. Everything was left exactly as it was on that fatal night. A few years ago, the house being unexpectedly full, I opened the room in which you have been staying, and it has been used from time to time as a guest–room since. My son lived some years, prematurely old, heart–broken, and desolate. He died with her name on his lips."

Madame Arnault stopped.

A suffocating sensation was creeping over her listener. Only in the past few moments had the signification of the story begun to dawn upon him. "Do you mean," he gasped, "that the girl whom I that she is was "

"Hélène, the dead wife of Félix Arnault," she replied, gravely. "Her restless spirit has walked here before. I have sometimes heard her tantalizing laugh echo through the house, but no one had ever seen her until you came so like the Richard Keith she loved!"

"When I read your letter," she went on, after a short silence, "which told me that you wished to come to those friends to whom your father had been so dear, all the past arose before me, and I felt that I ought to forbid your coming. But I remembered how Félix and Richard had loved each other before she came between them. I thought of the other Richard Keith whom I I loved once; and I dreamed of a union at last between the families. I hoped, Richard, that you and Félice "

But Richard was no longer listening. He wished to believe the whole fantastic story an invention of the keen-eyed old madame herself. Yet something within him confessed to its truth. A tumultuous storm of baffled desire, of impotent anger, swept over him. The ring he wore burned into his flesh. But he had no thought of removing it the ring which had once belonged to the beautiful golden-haired woman who had come back from the grave to woo him to her!

He turned his face away and groaned.

Her eyes hardened. She rose stiffly. "I will send a servant with your breakfast," she said, with her hand on the door. "The down boat will pass La Glorieuse this afternoon. You will perhaps wish to take advantage of it."

He started. He had not thought of going of leaving her her! He looked at the portrait on the wall and laughed bitterly.

Madame Arnault accompanied him with ceremonious politeness to the front steps that afternoon.

"Mademoiselle Félice?" he murmured, inquiringly, glancing back at the windows of the sitting–room.

"Mademoiselle Arnault is occupied," she coldly returned. "I will convey to her your farewell."

He looked back as the boat chugged away. Peaceful shadows enwrapped the house and overspread the lawn. A single window in the wing gleamed like a bale–fire in the rays of the setting sun.

## At La Glorieuse

The years that followed were years of restless wandering for Richard Keith. He visited his estate but rarely. He went abroad and returned, hardly having set foot to land; he buried himself in the fastnesses of the Rockies; he made a long, aimless sea-voyage. Her image accompanied him everywhere. Between him and all he saw hovered her faultless face; her red mouth smiled at him; her white arms enticed him. His own face became worn and his step listless. He grew silent and gloomy. "He is madder than the old colonel, his father, was," his friends said, shrugging their shoulders.

One day, more than three years after his visit to La Glorieuse, he found himself on a deserted part of the Florida sea-coast. It was late in November, but the sky was soft and the air warm and balmy. He bared his head as he paced moodily to and fro on the silent beach. The waves rolled languidly to his feet and receded, leaving scattered half-wreaths of opalescent foam on the snowy sands. The wind that fanned his face was filled with the spicy odors of the sea. Seized by a capricious impulse, he threw off his clothes and dashed into the surf. The undulating billows closed around him; a singular lassitude passed into his limbs as he swam; he felt himself slowly sinking, as if drawn downward by an invisible hand. He opened his eyes. The waves lapped musically above his head; a tawny glory was all about him, a luminous expanse in which he saw strangely formed creatures moving, darting, rising, falling, coiling, uncoiling.

"You was jes on de eedge er drowndin', Mars Dick," said Wiley, his black body-servant, spreading his own clothes on the porch of the little fishing hut to dry. "In de name o' Gawd whar mek you wanter go in swimmin' dis time o' de yea', anyhow? Ef I hadn' er splunge in an' fotch you out, dey'd er been motnin' yander at de plantation, sho!"

His master laughed lazily. "You are right, Wiley," he said; "and you are going to smoke the best tobacco in Maryland as long as you live." He felt buoyant. Youth and elasticity seemed to have come back to him at a bound. He stretched himself on the rough bench, and watched the blue rings of smoke curl lightly away from his cigar. Gradually he was aware of a pair of wistful eyes shining down on him. His heart leaped. They were the eyes of Félice Arnault! "My God, have I been mad!" he muttered. His eyes sought his hand. The ring, from which he had never been parted, was gone. It had been torn from his finger in his wrestle with the sea. "Get my traps together at once, Wiley," he said. "We are going to La Glorieuse."

"Now you talkin', Mars Dick," assented Wiley, cheerfully.

It was night when he reached the city. First of all, he made inquiries concerning the little packet. He was right; the Assumption would leave the next afternoon at five o'clock for Bayou L'Éperon. He went to the same hotel at which he had stopped before when on his way to La Glorieuse. The next morning, too joyous to sleep, he rose early, and went out into the street. A gray uncertain dawn was just struggling into the sky. A few people on their way to market or to early mass were passing along the narrow banquettes; sleepy-eyed women were unbarring the shutters of their tiny shops; high-wheeled milk carts were rattling over the granite pavements; in the vine-hung court-yards, visible here and there through iron grilles, parrots were scolding on their perches; children pattered up and down the long, arched corridors; the prolonged cry of an early clothes-pole man echoed, like the note of a winding horn, through the close alleys. Keith sauntered carelessly along.

"In so many hours," he kept repeating to himself, "I shall be on my way to La Glorieuse. The boat will swing into the home landing; the negroes will swarm across the gang-plank, laughing and shouting; Madame Arnault and Félice will come out on the gallery and look, shading their eyes with their hands. Oh, I know quite well that the old madame will greet me coldly at first. Her eyes are like steel when she is angry. But when she knows that I am once more a sane man And Félice, what if she But no! Félice is not the kind of woman who loves more than once; and she did love me, God bless her! unworthy as I was."

A carriage, driven rapidly, passed him; his eyes followed it idly, until it turned far away into a side street. He strayed on to the market, where he seated himself on a high stool in L'Appel du Matin coffee stall. But a vague,

## At La Glorieuse

teasing remembrance was beginning to stir in his brain. The turbaned woman on the front seat of the carriage that had rolled past him yonder, where had he seen that dark, grave, wrinkled face, with the great hoops of gold against either cheek? Marcelite! He left the stall and retraced his steps, quickening his pace almost to a run as he went. Félice herself, then, might be in the city. He hurried to the street into which the carriage had turned, and glanced down between the rows of white-eaved cottages with green doors and batten shutters. It had stopped several squares away; there seemed to be a number of people gathered about it. "I will at least satisfy myself," he thought.

As he came up, a bell in a little cross-crowned tower began to ring slowly. The carriage stood in front of a low red brick house, set directly on the street; a silent crowd pressed about the entrance. There was a hush within. He pushed his way along the banquette to the steps. A young nun, in a brown serge robe, kept guard at the door. She wore a wreath of white artificial roses above her long coarse veil. Something in his face appealed to her, and she found a place for him in the little convent chapel.

Madame Arnault, supported by Marcelite, was kneeling in front of the altar, which blazed with candles. She had grown frightfully old and frail. Her face was set, and her eyes were fixed with a rigid stare on the priest who was saying mass. Marcelite's dark cheeks were streaming with tears. The chapel, which wore a gala air with its lights and flowers, was filled with people. On the left of the altar, a bishop, in gorgeous robes, was sitting, attended by priests and acolytes; on the right, the wooden panel behind an iron grating had been removed, and beyond, in the nun's choir, the black-robed sisters of the order were gathered. Heavy veils shrouded their faces and fell to their feet. They held in their hands tall wax candles, whose yellow flames burned steadily in the semi-darkness. Five or six young girls knelt, motionless as statues, in their midst. They also carried tapers, and their rapt faces were turned toward the unseen altar within, of which the outer one is but the visible token. Their eyelids were downcast. Their white veils were thrown back from their calm foreheads, and floated like wings from their shoulders.

He felt no surprise when he saw Félice among them. He seemed to have foreknown always that he should find her thus on the edge of another and mysterious world into which he could not follow her.

Her skin had lost a little of its warm rich tint; the soft rings of hair were drawn away under her veil; her hands were thin, and as waxen as the taper she held. An unearthly beauty glorified her pale face.

"Is it forever too late?" he asked himself in agony, covering his face with his hands. When he looked again the white veil on her head had been replaced by the sombre one of the order. "If I could but speak to her!" he thought; "if she would but once lift her eyes to mine, she would come to me even now!"

Félice! Did the name break from his lips in a hoarse cry that echoed through the hushed chapel, and silenced the voice of the priest? He never knew. But a faint color swept into her cheeks. Her eyelids trembled. In a flash the rose garden at La Glorieuse was before him; he saw the turquoise sky, and heard the mellow chorus of the field gang; the smell of damask-roses was in the air; her little hand was in his, he saw her coming swiftly towards him across the dusk of the old ballroom; her limpid innocent eyes were smiling into his own . . . she was standing on the grassy lawn; the shadows of the leaves flickered over her white gown . . .

At last the quivering eyelids were lifted. She turned her head slowly, and looked steadily at him. He held his breath. A cart rumbled along the cobblestones outside; the puny wail of a child sounded across the stillness; a handful of rose leaves from a vase at the foot of the altar dropped on the hem of Madame Arnault's dress. It might have been the gaze of an angel in a world where there is no marrying nor giving in marriage, so pure was it, so passionless, so free of anything like earthly desire.

As she turned her face again toward the altar the bell in the tower above ceased tolling; a triumphant chorus leaped into the air, borne aloft by joyous organ tones. The first rays of the morning sun streamed in through the

## At La Glorieuse

small windows. Then light penetrated into the nuns' choir, and enveloped like a mantle of gold Sister Mary of the Cross, who in the world had been Félicité Arnault.