

LAURA RICHARDS

HONOR BRIGHT

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Laura E. Richards

Honor Bright / A Story for Girls

CHAPTER I

AT PENSION MADELEINE

Honor Bright was twelve years old when her parents died, and left her alone in the world. (Only, as Soeur Séraphine said, Honor would never be wholly alone so long as the earth was inhabited.) Six of the twelve years had been spent at school in Vevay, at the Pension Madeleine, the only home she knew. She was too little to remember the big New York house where she was born, and where her toddling years were spent. She was only two when her father accepted the high scientific mission which banished him to the far East for an indefinite time. Of the years there she retained only a few vague memories; one of a dark woman with tinkling ornaments, who sang strange old songs, and whom she called “Amma”; one of an old man-servant, bent and withered like a monkey, who carried her on his shoulder, and bowed to the ground when she stamped her little foot. All beside was a dim mist with curious people and animals moving through it. Long robes, floating veils, shawls and turbans; camels and buffaloes, with here and there an elephant, or a tiger (stuffed, this, with glaring eyes, frightening her at first, till Amma bade her be proud that Papa Sahib had shot so great a beast); ringing of bells, smell of incense and musk and flowers, stifling dust and drowning rain; all part of her, in some mysterious dream-way.

When the child was six, the climate began to tell upon her, as it does on all white children, and her parents were warned that she must leave India. They brought her to Switzerland, to Vevay, the paradise of schoolgirls, and left her there with many tears. Since then she had seen them only twice or thrice; the journey was long and hard; her mother delicate.

The last time they came, it was a festival for the whole school. Mrs. Bright, beautiful and gentle, “like a jasmine-flower,” as Stephanie Langolles said; Mr. Bright, kind and bluff, his pockets always full of chocolate, his eyes twinkling with friendliness; they were in and out of the Pension constantly, during the month they spent at the Grand Hotel in Vevay. It was destructive to school routine, but as Madame Madeleine said to Soeur Séraphine, what would you? The case was exceptional. How to deny anything to these parents, so tender, and so desolated at parting from their cherished infant? Happily another year would, under the Providence of God, see this so affectionate family happily and permanently united.

“One more little year,” said Mrs. Bright, as she embraced Honor at parting. “Then Papa’s long task is done, and we shall go home, and take you with us. Home to our own dear country, my little one, where children can live and be well. No more pensions for you, no more strange lands for us. Home, for all three; home and happiness!”

“And now,” sighed Soeur Séraphine. “At twelve years old, an orphan! Our poor little one! And she has seen them so seldom; what tragedy!”

Madame Madeleine shook her head sorrowfully. “As for that, my sister,” she said, “it appears to me less tragic than if these so-honored parents had surrounded, as it were, the daily life of the child. *Tiens!* She has been with us four years, is it not so? In that period she has seen her parents thrice, a week each time. What would you? A child is a child. Honor weeps to-day; to-morrow she will dry her tears; after to-morrow she will smile; in a month she will forget. And there, if you will, is tragedy!”

Madame Madeleine was right. A week after the sad news came, Honor was telling Stephanie (who had been away for a fortnight) all about it: I must not say with enjoyment, for that would be untrue: but with a dramatic interest more thrilling than sorrowful.

“Figure to yourself!” she said. “We are in the classroom: it is arithmetic, and I am breaking my head over a problem wholly frightful. On the estrade is Madame, calm as a statue, her little white shawl over her shoulders, *comme ça*. Vivette is making signs to Loulou: it is the peace of every day. Enter Margoton, a *telegramme* in the hand. Madame opens it; reads; a cry escapes her. Calming herself on the instant, she bids us be *très sages*, and leaves the room. Shortly appears our Sister, and calling me tenderly to her side, takes my hand and conducts me to Madame’s boudoir. There I hear the fearful tidings. My parents are in Paradise!”

Honor paused, and drew a long breath, shaking her hair back with a dramatic gesture. Stephanie clasped her hands.

“*Chérie*, how terrible! But continue! What – how did this happen? An accident?”

“Cholera!” (I fear Honor was enjoying this part!) “The *choléra Asiatique*, most terrible of all diseases, bringing death in an instant. Two days ago, – figure to thyself, Stephanie: two days ago, they were in health: Mamán, whom you remember, all beautiful; Papa, good as bread, who overwhelmed us with chocolate – the pestilence breathed upon them, and Heaven opened to receive them. Ah! that is terrible, if you will!”

The two girls were sitting together in Honor’s little room. Ordinarily, they would have sat on the floor, but to-day her mourning was to be considered. The waxed floor shone with a brilliant polish; no speck of dust was visible anywhere in the spotless cell (it was hardly more in size); still, one could not be too careful.

“Black is very becoming to thee, my poor dear!” said Stephanie. “Thy hair is like a cloud of golden fire above it. Nothing could be more beautiful, I assure thee.”

Honor looked anxiously in the little mirror that hung over the chest of drawers. It was a pleasant image that she saw; a round rosy face, with a pretty, wilful mouth, dark blue eyes heavily fringed with black lashes, a straight little nose, and, as Stephanie said, a perfect cloud of curly red-gold hair. All this, I say, was pleasant enough; but Honor did not notice the general effect; what she saw was a collection of small brown spots on the bridge of the straight little nose, and extending to the cheeks. Freckles! No one else at Madame Madeleine’s had freckles. Patricia Desmond, with her complexion like moonlight on ivory; Vivette, with the crimson glow mantling in her brown cheeks, Stephanie herself with her smooth, pale skin —

“Ah!” cried poor Honor. “This hideous disfigurement! Shall I ever outgrow it, I wonder? Maman said I should, but I know not!”

Stephanie thought the freckles quite as dreadful as Honor did, and looked her sympathy.

“*Tiens!*” she said. “We have the appearance that the good God gives us.”

Here she glanced at her own reflection, with complacent approval of her brown velvet eyes and black satin hair.

“My poor Honor! But your hair is always beautiful, and there are no eyelashes like yours in Vevay. Take courage! In the story your hair is dark, is it not? The story marches always? When shall I hear another chapter?”

Honor’s face brightened. The story was always a comfort when the freckles became too afflicting. It was to be a romance, in three volumes: the story of her life, beginning when she was sixteen. (She was now twelve!) It opened thus:

“I was young; they called me fair. My mirror revealed masses of jet-black hair which rippled smoothly to the floor and lay in silken piles on the velvet carpet. My eyes – there was one who called them starry pools of night. My cheek was a white rose.”

Stephanie thought this a wonderful description. Honor, as I say, always found comfort in it, and forgot the freckles while she was following the fortunes of her dark-eyed counterpart.

“To-morrow, perhaps! Now – Stephanie, thou must help me in a sorrowful task. It is to put away – ”

“Thy colored dresses, *chérie*? But surely! but thou wilt wear white, Honor? It is everywhere admitted as mourning, thou knowest!”

“Fiordispina and Angélique!” Honor spoke with sorrowful dignity and resolve. “Yes, Stephanie, it must be so! While my parents lived, do you see, I was a child; now – ” An eloquent shrug and wave completed the sentence. “I am resolved!” she said. “These dear ones, with whom my happy childhood has been passed, must retire to – finally, to the shades of memory, Stephanie!”

“How noble!” murmured Stephanie. “Thou art heroic, Honor!”

Shaking her head sadly, Honor opened a cupboard door, and with careful hands drew out – certainly, two of the most beautiful dolls that ever were seen. Maman had chosen them with her own exquisite taste, in Paris and Rome. Angélique, the Parisian maiden, was blonde as Patricia herself, with flaxen hair and eyes of real sky-blue; Fiordispina, on the other hand, might almost stand for Honor’s dream-self. Her hair did not reach the ground, much less lie in silken piles on the velvet carpet, but it was long enough to braid, and it was real hair: moreover it was hair with a story to it. Maman had bought it in Rome, from a woman whose daughter had just entered a convent, and had her beautiful hair cut off. The woman wept, and assured Mrs. Bright that there was no such hair in Rome. Most of it had been purchased by two noble Princesses whom age had deprived of their own *chevelure*; there was but this little tress left. She had thought to preserve it as a memento of her child, but for the *puppazza* of so charming a *donzella* as the – finally – she named a price, and Fiordispina received her head of hair, in place of the bit of fuzzy lamb’s wool which had disfigured her pretty head.

Honor looked long and tenderly at the doll; then, dipping her hand into the pitcher of water that stood on the commode close by, she sprinkled some crystal drops on the calm bisque face.

“*Tiens!*” she said. “She weeps, my Fiordispina! how lovely she is in affliction, Stephanie! If I dressed her in mourning, but deep, you understand – do you think I might keep her? But no! I have resolved. The sacrifice is made!”

She produced two neat box beds, and laid Fiordispina, serenely smiling through her tears, in one, while Stephanie tucked Angélique snugly in the other. They were covered with their own little satin quilts, embroidered with their names; the boxes were closed and tied with satin ribbon.

“The sacrifice is made!” repeated Honor. “It is accomplished. Don’t tell the other girls!”

And she burst into tears, and wept on Stephanie’s shoulder.

CHAPTER II

HOW HONOR FOUND HER NEW NAME: AND HOW THEY LIVED AT THE PENSION MADELEINE

“Black and red!” said Patricia Desmond. “You look like a Baltimore oriole, Honor!”

“What is that?” asked Vivette. “Bal-ti-moriole? *Qu’est-ce que c’est que ça?*”

“Baltimore – oriole! Roll your ‘r’ twice, Vivi! More – ori-ole!”

“Moro-morio – bah! That does not say itself, Patricia. Moriole, that is prettier, not so?”

“Have it your own way! It’s a bird, and Honor looks like one in her black dress, that’s all. She moves like a bird too; ‘flit’ is the word there, Vivi.”

“Fleet?” Vivette repeated carefully. “Is that co-rect, Patricia?”

Patricia yawned; Vivette was rather tiresome with her English.

“‘Fleet’ will do,” she said. “She’s that too. No, I can’t explain: I’m busy, Vivette.”

“Bee-sy? Like a bee, is that, Patricia? *Très occupée, n’est-ce pas?*”

“It does; and if you don’t go away, Vivette, I’ll show you with a hatpin what a bee does!”

“*Tiens!*” murmured Vivette; “none the less, ‘Moriole’ is pretty, and far more facile to say than ‘Honor’!”

That was how Honor came to be called “Moriole” among the girls; the name clung long after the black dress had been laid aside.

Two years passed; years of calm, peaceful, happy days. Two years of study in the gray classroom, with its desks and blackboards, and its estrade where Madame Madeleine or Soeur Séraphine sat benevolently watching, knitting or rosary in hand, ready to encourage or reprove, as need should arise. They were sisters, the two ladies of the Pension Madeleine, though, as the girls often said, no one would have thought it. Madame Madeleine was the elder by many years. She was more like a robin than one would have thought a person could be; round and rosy, with bright black eyes and a nose as sharp as a robin’s bill. She wore black always, with a little white knitted shoulder shawl; and flat shoes of black cloth which she made herself, no one knew why.

Soeur Séraphine was slender and beautiful, so beautiful in her gray dress and white coif, that every new girl longed to dress like her, and all the girls made up romances about her, no one of which was true. Both ladies were “good as bread,” and everybody loved them, even people who loved no one else; old Cruchon, the milkman, for example, who announced boldly that he hated all human kind.

Two years of *récréation* in the garden, with its high box hedges, and its brick-paved alleys from which the girls were set once a week to remove the weeds and mosses that came sprouting up between the small bright red bricks. (Thus they learned, Madame would explain, the ceaseless industry and perseverance of Nature, overcoming every obstacle; besides strengthening the muscles of the back in a manner altogether special.)

It was a delightful garden, with its square plots of flowers and vegetables, alternating along both sides of the broad central *allée* which ran its entire length; its fruit trees fastened primly to the brick walls, “like one’s hair in curl-papers,” as Patricia said; its currant and gooseberry bushes, and the great grapevines that buried the lower wall in a mass of heavy green.

The *grande allée* was not bricked, but was covered with sand, white and firm and delightful to run on. Was it not rolled every morning by Margoton, daughter of Anak, the gigantic gardener and chorewoman? Here the girls might run at will (within bounds of health, prudence, and good taste, as Madame explained) either for mere pleasure and exercise, or by way of preparation for the *Courses*, which were held here; the races for the *Pommes d’Atalante*, the little gilded apples which were more coveted than any other school prize. Of this more hereafter.

Two years of quiet evenings in Madame's own parlor, the dim, pleasant room with its dark shining floor and old tapestries, its wonderful chandelier of Venetian glass and the round convex mirror that was so good (said Soeur Séraphine) for repressing the sin of vanity in the breast of the Young Person. We sat upright on cross-stitch tabourets, and knitted or embroidered, while Madame or the Sister read aloud, "Télémaque," or "Paul et Virginie," or "La Tulipe Noire."

It was a happy time. Dull, some of the girls found it; Stephanie, for example, who pined for excitement; Rose-Marie, who was desperately homesick for Aigues-Mortes (thought by some the dullest place in Europe); Loulou, who considered all study a forlorn waste of time.

Honor loved it all, and was happy; but as Madame Madeleine frankly said, Honor would be happy anywhere.

"She carries her world with her!" Madame would shrug her kind shoulders under their little white shawl. "We are but scenery, *ma mie*!"

Whereupon Soeur Séraphine would sigh and murmur, "Poor Honor! poor dear child!" and say a special prayer to Ste. Gêneviève for her favorite pupil.

There were ten of them: three Americans, Patricia Desmond, Maria Patterson, and Honor herself, the rest French or French-Swiss. Rose-Marie was the oldest and had been there longest; poor Rose-Marie, so good, so dull, the despair of all except Soeur Séraphine, who never despaired of any one. Loulou was the youngest, a little mouse-like girl afflicted with a devouring curiosity, which was always getting her into scrapes: scrapes, for which Stephanie, who, I am sorry to say, was somewhat similarly afflicted, was apt to be partly responsible.

Stephanie was pretty, lively, sentimental, and always in love with somebody. She had tried worshipping Patricia, when she first came, but that, Patricia intimated to her quietly, was a thing she could *not* endure, and the sooner she, Stephanie, dropped it, the better for all concerned. Since then there had been little love lost between the two girls. Stephanie transferred her adoration to Honor, who took it simply, as she took most things, and thought it was wonderful of Stephanie to care for her.

Vivette was pretty, too, – indeed, most of the girls were pretty, a fact which gave Soeur Séraphine more pleasure than she felt it quite right to take in anything so temporary and ensnaring as flesh and blood. But, she would reflect, Vivette, for all her beauty, was serious. *Tiens!* If she should prove to have a Vocation! When this thought first came to her, Soeur Séraphine felt her heart sink in a strange and certainly a very sinful manner. She loved her vocation; for herself, it had been a heavenly refuge from certain tragic sorrows of her youth. When her convent had been broken up a few years ago, she had been at first like a homeless bird, till the good elder sister, long widowed, had come to her, and folded her in strong, tender arms, and taken her away to Vevay, to share her home, her work, and all her good, peaceful life.

Yes; but why then did Soeur Séraphine's heart sink at thought of Vivette's having a vocation for the cloister? Well, because the little Sister desired that everybody might be happy; and in her heart of hearts she would have liked to see every young girl blissfully married to a young man without fault, of marvelous beauty, large fortune and irreproachable lineage. That was all. Of course, where a young person had a real vocation, it was another matter. Vivette had hitherto shown no signs of special piety, but what would you? She was yet young. If even an unuttered thought should in any mysterious way turn her from heavenly paths, that would be grievous sin on the part of the thinker. Satan was very watchful, and her own heart, Soeur Séraphine reflected, was desperately wicked. The Sister did penance for this, and fasted on a feast day, to the amazement of the girls and the great distress of Madame Madeleine.

She need not have disturbed her sweet self; Vivette had no vocation whatever, except for teaching. She was a very practical girl, and had, at the age of fifteen, mapped out her life methodically. She explained it all to Honor: somehow they all explained things to *la Moriolo*; she was sympathetic, you understood.

“I also shall *bee*-come an *orphanne*!” she said in her careful English. “For you, my all-dear, this was unattended, —*hein?* ‘Unexpected?’ *Merci bien, chérie!*— your honored parents being still in the middle ages. *Ainsi – hein?* I have again made fault?”

Honor explained patiently; “middle ages” meant something wholly different; it meant Charlemagne and Lorenzo de Medici and all that kind of thing; in short, the Feudal System! Besides, she said, Maman was really young, but quite young for an old person; nor was Papa so old as many.

“But go on, Vivi! Why should you become an orphan?”

Vivette explained in turn. Her parents had married late; her father was already bald as a bat, her mother in feeble health. What would you? They had told her all simply that it would be necessary for her to earn her own living when they joined the Saints, or else to make an advantageous marriage.

“It is like that!” said Vivette, simply. “I assure thee, Moriole, I have observed, but with a microscope, every desirable *parti* in Vevay. There is not one with whom I would spend a day, far less my life. Enough! I desire to teach. To master the English tongue, to go to *Amérique*, to instruct the young in my own language —*voilà!* it is my secret, *chérie!* I confide it to thee as to the priest.”

Honor, with shining eyes, promised to keep the secret, which, by the way, half the school knew. It was very noble of Vivette, she thought. How strange, how incomprehensible, to be able to teach! To write, now, that was different. That was as natural as breathing.

It was noble also of Jacqueline de La Tour de Provence to accept the lot which Fate had in store for her. This also was confided to Honor, in a twilight hour in the garden. Jacqueline was a slender, lily-like girl, too pale and languid, perhaps, for real beauty, but graceful and highbred, aristocrat to her fingertips. She was a Royalist, she told Honor. How could it be otherwise with one of her House.

“What is your house?” asked Honor innocently. “Is it in Vevay? Is it one of the *chateaux* on the hill?”

Jacqueline laughed her pretty silvery laugh; that also was high-bred, if her speech did not always match.

“The Americans are incredibly ignorant, are they not?” she said amiably. “It is that you have no *noblesse*, my poor Honor. Every Frenchman knows that in the veins of the family of La Tour de Provence runs the blood royal of France.”

“Oh, Jacqueline! not really? How thrilling!” murmured Honor.

“A La Tour de Provence married a cousin of the Grand Monarque!” said Jacqueline, acknowledging the murmur with a regal bend of the head. “But that is nothing; the Bourbons, you understand, are of yesterday. On my mother’s side —” she paused, and proceeded slowly, dropping each word as if it were a pearl — “I am a daughter of St. Louis, and of those from whom St. Louis sprang. I am directly descended from *la reine Berthe!*”

“Jacqueline! What do you tell me? Not Bertha Broadfoot?”

Jacqueline again bent a regal head. “Wife of Pepin d’Heristal!” she said calmly. “Mother of Charlemagne! From that royal and sainted woman descends the House of La Tour de Provence!”

She paused to enjoy for a moment Honor’s look of genuine awe and astonishment; when she continued, it was with a touch of queenly condescension, which might have moved to unseemly mirth any one less direct and simple-minded than Honor.

“We were not in the direct line of succession; our ancestor was a younger brother, you understand, of the Emperor. We have never reigned! But we know our descent, and we never stoop. Such as you see me here —” Jacqueline made a disparaging gesture — “in a tiny pension (though the Madeleines are well-born, it goes without saying, otherwise were I not here!) surrounded by a little *bourgeoisie* like this, I remain Myself.”

Jacqueline was silent a moment, contemplating her polished finger-nails.

“I have the Capet hand, you perceive!” she raised a very pretty, useless-looking hand; not to be compared for beauty with Patricia’s hand, thought Honor, that combination of white velvet and steel, but pretty enough.

“Was – was Queen Bertha really lame?” asked Honor timidly; it was really astonishing to be talking with a Capet; she wondered whether she ought to bow when she spoke. “And did she really spin?” And Honor repeated the familiar rhyme that every French child knows:

“Ah! the good time for every one
When good Queen Bertha spun!”¹

“My sainted ancestress,” replied Jacqueline, “was all devoted to her people. Her time was principally passed in spinning and weaving garments for the poor. So great was her industry that she spun even on horseback, carrying her distaff with her. Her constant labors at wheel and loom caused one foot, that which worked the treadle, to become larger than the other; this at least is the legend in our House. You can figure to yourself, Moriole, my feelings at seeing, as lately among these children of unknown people, the holy and venerable Queen made part of a childish game.”

Honor blushed to her very ears. She and Stephanie had been playing only that day with Loulou and Toinette, the two youngest pupils, the old nursery game, never dreaming of harm.

“Avez-vous bien des filles, cousin,
Cousine la reine boiteuse —”

She hoped Jacqueline had not seen her. Madame Madeleine had asked her to amuse the little ones for half an hour. Next time they would play something else, “*Compagnons de la Marjolaine*,” or “*Nous n’irons plus au bois!*”

“How does your – your family” (Honor could not somehow bring herself to say “House”; it sounded so undemocratic!) “feel about the Republic?”

“We do not recognize it!” said Jacqueline calmly. “For us, it does not exist. We serve his sacred Majesty Louis Philippe Robert, whom you probably know only as the Duc d’Orleans.”

“I don’t know him at all!” said poor Honor.

Jacqueline gave her a compassionate smile. “His Majesty lives in retirement!” she said. “Little people like thee may be excused for an ignorance which is rather the fault of others than of thyself, Moriole. For the rest, we bide our time! We follow the customs of our House, and mate – so nearly as may be – with our equals.”

She then went on to tell Honor of the Fate that awaited her. She was to remain another year at school. Then, when she was eighteen, she was to be married, to the Sieur de Virelai, a nobleman of their own neighborhood, a friend of her father’s. He was somewhat older than her father, but a *grand seigneur*, with one of the historic castles of France.

“When I am the Lady of Virelai, my poor Honor,” said Jacqueline, “you must visit me, you must indeed. I shall receive you with pleasure.”

The supper bell rang just then, and the future Lady of Virelai jumped up with more animation than she often showed.

“There are to be apple fritters for supper!” she cried. “Margoton told me so! Quick, Moriole, or those greedy children will get the top ones.”

“Why shouldn’t they?” asked Honor, as they sped up the *allée*. “There’ll be plenty for every one.”

Jacqueline turned a look of surprise on her.

¹ “Ah! le bon temps que c’était Quand la reine Berthe filait!”

“The top ones,” she said, “are the last off the griddle; naturally, one desires them!”

CHAPTER III

THE MOUNTAINEERS

It was Madame's birthday, a bright June day; it was also the feast of St. Zita.

Every girl, Catholic and Protestant alike, had laid a flower on the Saint's shrine, the pretty little marble shrine at the end of the garden, with the yellow roses climbing over it. Every girl had presented her gift to Madame at breakfast, to the good lady's unbounded astonishment. They had been making the gifts under her benevolent nose for a month past, but she had seen nothing; Soeur Séraphine said so, and she ought to know. The steel beads of Honor's neck chain (Honor was not skilful with her needle, but she could string beads with the best!) had flashed in sun and lamp light, had dropped on the floor and been rescued from corners and cracks; Madame never noticed. She did not even notice when Maria Patterson's handkerchief case fell into the soup, which, as Patricia said, served Maria right for tatting at table. Soeur Séraphine saw, and Maria got no pudding, but Madame Madeleine never so much as looked that way, and never faltered in her recital of the virtues and sufferings of St. Zita.

She almost wept with pleasure over her gifts; never, she declared, were such charming objects seen. And of a utility! *Tiens!* this beautiful blotter, how it would adorn her desk! And the exquisite chain! Would it not sustain her spectacle case, which in future would never, as had so often happened, become wholly lost? And – “Ma Patricia! this beautiful scarf cannot be for me: tell me not so, my child! It is for a princess rather!” etc., etc.

Dear Madame Madeleine! Surely her birthday was the happiest day of the happy year for herself and all of us.

After the presentation, all was joyous bustle and hurry: baskets to pack, shawls and cloaks to collect, *fiacres* to summon; all for the annual expedition to the *Rochers de Meillerie*, the most wonderful picnic place in the world. The *fiacres* (three of them! it made quite a procession!) took the party down to the lake, where the little steamer lay at her pier, the smoke pouring from her funnel. What terror lest they should be late! What frantic signals waved from the six windows of the procession of *fiacres*! The steamer gave no sign, but puffed away stolidly; they had been on board half an hour, sitting on their camp stools in a serried phalanx, before she rang her bell, shrieked thrice through her whistle and began her leisurely progress across the lake.

What a voyage of wonder that was! The morning was crystal clear, the mountains stood in dazzling white and resplendent green, the lake was a great sparkling sapphire studded with gold and diamonds.

Honor, sitting near the stern, watched the swirling wake, stretching far behind, saw the rainbow bubbles rise, dance, break, fall away in silver showers. She was fascinated, could not even look up at her beloved mountains.

“*Tiens!*” whispered Stephanie. “This tall stranger, very distinguished, who regards us, Moriole!”

Honor shook her shoulders a little impatiently. Stephanie was always seeing distinguished strangers; they seldom, if ever, were distinguished in Honor's eyes.

Suppose, she thought, an Arm should suddenly appear, rising from the bosom of the lake, “Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful!”

Suppose Undine were there – no! she lived in a fountain; well, other nymphs then! There must be ever so many. But it was to be some time yet before Honor came to her water world.

“Regard the mountains, my child!” said Madame. “They also are dressed to welcome us, is it not so?”

Honor looked up, and the mountains took possession of her again. One could hardly look at the white giants themselves, they were too dazzling, midway between the vivid blues of sky and lake, the blinding sunlight beating on them. Instinctively one's eyes blinked, fell, rested on the lovely green of the lower forest-clad heights; lower still, on the mellow brown huddle at their feet, on the very edge of the water, the Rocks of Meillerie.

"Behold!" said Madame. "The good rocks which await us!"

The good rocks, basking in sunshine as soft as it was warm, neither dazzled nor blinded; they welcomed. They were actually warm under the feet, as, released from the steamer, the happy girls clambered over them, laden with baskets, shawls, campstools.

"This way!" the brown rocks invited: "to the left here, my children, under our shadow, for the sun is hot! here rather to the right, since the footing is better. Yonder is a place of treachery; avoid always that emerald patch! Unknown depths lurk beneath."

And so on, and so on! Did the rocks actually speak, or was it Soeur Séraphine panting in the rear, cautioning, adjuring? Never mind! Here they were at last in the picnic place, their own place, discovered by the two good sisters, Madame Madeleine and Soeur Séraphine, hundreds of years ago, when they were girls themselves. No one else knew of it, they were sure; except, of course, Atli and Gretli, and they were safe. It was a family affair, the rock parlor, with its brown walls and its carpet of softest moss. No treachery here! The moss was as dry as it was soft; a wonderful moss, like tiny velvet ferns; Honor and Stephanie agreed it could grow nowhere else in the world. Here and there baby rocks jutted through the green, making perfect stools; there was even an armchair for Madame; it was arranged, Soeur Séraphine assured them gaily. Nature, the good Mother Superior of the White Sisters yonder – she indicated the towering giants above them – had designed this place for them.

"Sit down, my children! My sister, this cushion for thy back, is it not so? *Voilà!*"

The snowy cloth was laid on the moss before Madame's rock armchair; the baskets were unpacked, amid squeaks of rapture. Oh! the great pie! ah! the *brioche*s, the *galette*, the Lyons sausage, all the good, good Swiss dainties! how wonderful they were, eaten here in the rock parlor, at the very foot of the mountains! And when the girls were thirsty – Ah! at the good hour! Here were Atli and Gretli.

Down through the brown rocks, stepping as sturdily and easily as if on level ground, came the gigantic twins, Margoton's brother and sister; he bearing a shining milkcan, she a comb of golden honey in a blue bowl. This also was a part of the regular programme. Never were twins more alike. Clip Gretli's flaxen hair and put her into Atli's white shirt, broad green breeches and worsted stockings; furnish Atli with two heavy braids hanging to his waist, and dress him in bodice and petticoat – Madame asked you – was there a difference? They were superb, even Patricia allowed that. Their massive, regular features, their blue eyes, the flash of their white teeth, the ruddy brown of cheek and chin, contrasting with the milk-white strip of forehead when the shady hat came off – all this with the figure of a Norse viking and – "Is there such a word as 'vi-queen'?" asked Patricia. Soeur Séraphine thought not: the idea, however, was admirable. That was certainly what our good Atli and Gretli resembled. Vee-king! vee-quin – : ki – veen! my faith! That was difficult, if you would! a majestic language, but of a complexity!

Honor thought silently that they were more like the Norse Gods: Baldur the Beautiful, Nanna the Fair: there was a story about them in a little brown book —

Atli, all unconscious of either kinglike or godlike attributes, poured the rich, foaming milk into the tin cups held out by a dozen eager hands: Gretli dispensed the honey with golden smiles; then the twins sat down simply, and had their share of *galette*, *brioche*, and all the rest of it, and answered the questions showered upon them by the two ladies. Yes, the cows were well, with thanks to the holy ladies for their interest; that is, the present time found them in health. La Dumaine had been ill in the spring: but desperately ill! They had despaired of her. During a week they had

watched beside her as those expecting the end. She was good as bread, the poor sufferer; her moans were as eloquent as words. When she said “Moh!” one knew she had thirst, one brought water on the instant; when she sneezed, it expressed affection.

“It is that we understand!” said Gretli simply; “she is our sister, do you see?”

Atli nodded gravely.

“It is like that!” he confirmed her. “We are all creatures of the good God. Few human beings have the virtues of La Dumaine. The Duchesse, now, is of another quality; that cow is malicious, if you will. Figure to yourselves, my ladies, her endeavoring to snatch from our poor Dumaine the tuft of clover that I had found for her (with difficulty, for the season was late) and brought up from the valley. An evil beast! my faith, she was well paid for that, the Duchesse; good strokes of the cudgel rewarded her.”

“And the goats?” asked Soeur Séraphine. “They have wintered well? The little white one lives always, that you named for me, kind young persons that you are?”

The twins threw back their heads – their movements were apt to be not only identical but simultaneous – and their laughter rang among the rocks; every one else laughed, too, from sheer infection of merriment.

“If she lives?” chuckled Atli.

“The marvel is that others still survive!” cried Gretli. “It is we that owe you a thousand apologies, my Sister, for giving your holy and beautiful name to such a creature. She is mistress – what do I say? She is tyrant of the whole flock. She drives them before her like lambs of a month old; they have no peace, the unhappy ones. Only the two he-goats, old Moufflon himself, and his son, our handsome Bimbo, can withstand her. These, also, however, she conquers, but with wiles, you understand. She has charm, *la Séraphine*; my faith, yes! Even Atli gives her her own way, when I would give her the stick rather.”

“The creature!” said Atli indulgently. “She is of a beauty, my ladies! White as cream, and her eyes so dark and appealing. My ladies will graciously visit the *châlet*, as of custom? There will be great rejoicing at sight of them.”

But yes, said Madame; that was one of the chief pleasures of this happy day, long looked forward to. On the instant even, it would be well for them to begin the ascent. Already it was two o’clock, and the steamer left at five. Also, though young persons could imitate the goats in their manner of ascent, for those of advanced years it was necessary to allow time. Forward then, my children! to the *châlet* of the Rocks!

In the twinkling of an eye the baskets were repacked and safely stowed beneath an overhanging rock; every scrap of paper and crust of bread picked up and burned, under Soeur Séraphine’s watchful eye; then the whole party began the ascent, Gretli leading the way with Soeur Séraphine, whose slight figure was as active as that of her namesake, Atli bringing up the rear, carefully guiding and supporting Madame Madeleine. Between the two couples went the girls in a hubbub of delight, skipping, slipping, leaping, chattering French and English as they went.

“He is far more handsome than last year!” sighed Stephanie. “Regard his moustache, how it embellishes him! What king was that thou callest him, Patricia? *Le roi Vi, n’est-ce pas?*”

“No king at all! The Vikings were sea-rovers, pretty much pirates, I suppose.”

“Pirate? That is *corsair*?” asked Vivette, who was getting on nicely with her English. “My ancestor was a corsair of St. Malo. He captivated three British ships – ”

“By his beauty?” asked Patricia. “You mean ‘captured,’ Vivi!”

“Cap-ture, capti-vate, is it not the same thing? A captive, is he not captivated? How then?”

“Catastrophe of a language!” murmured Stephanie, who detested English.

“Hop, Froggy!” said Patricia and Maria in one breath.

Seeing battle imminent, Honor broke in hastily, “Oh, look, girls! *Regarde, Stephanie!* The *châlet*! Race to it!”

No more words were spoken. Panting, breathless, the girls pressed on. Soon they overtook Gretli and Soeur Séraphine, and some would have passed them, but Patricia made an imperious gesture.

“Manners?” she suggested; “one doesn’t rush ahead of one’s hostess, I *think*; or does one, Stephanie?”

Honor did wish they would not quarrel so. Of course Patricia was right, but – she slid her hand into Stephanie’s, and they dropped back behind the others.

“I hate her!” said Stephanie.

“No, you don’t,” said Honor stoutly. “You dislike her, and that is a pity, because she is splendid, and if you didn’t dislike her, you would like her so tremendously; but you don’t hate her.”

“The same thing!” muttered Stephanie.

“No!” Honor’s cheek flushed and her eyes flashed. “To dislike, that comes to every one; to hate, that is wicked, and the good God is vexed.”

“My children,” called Soeur Séraphine. “Behold us arrived! forward then! Our Gretli has a surprise for us, of which I learn but on the instant. Follow me!”

CHAPTER IV THE OUTGOING

The *Châlet des Rochers* (I hope it is still standing!) wore an air of high festivity. Garlands wreathed the open door and swung in festoons from the low thatched roof. Around the door stood a group of young men and maidens, all in the old-time Swiss costume, one of the prettiest in the world; the girls with dark bodices laced over the full white blouse, short full skirts of bright green, blue or red, snowy stockings and well-blackened shoes; the youths in knee-breeches, white shirts, short jackets and pointed hats.

“Are we at the *Opéra Comique*?” whispered Patricia. “They will begin to yodel in a moment!”

And they did! As the School advanced, the whole group broke out in – song, shall I say? Certainly into a sound as musical as it was strange. “A-i! o-oh! u-u-u –” No! it may not be described. It must be heard, and heard in the mountains.

“It is the *Ranz des Vaches*!” cried Soeur Séraphine. “I heard it – how many years ago? When I was a little young girl! What pleasure! what delight! What means this, my Gretli?”

Gretli’s face was aglow; she clapped her hands and laughed, joyously.

“It is the Spring Festival, my Sister!” she cried. “The festival of the Outgoing, when the animals go to the mountain pastures. Hearing that the gracious Ladies would be with us to-day, we held back the outgoing that they might see. These are our neighbors, come to help us and join our simple feast. Marie, Madelon, Jeanne, here are the gracious Ladies of whom you have heard so much. Ah! *à la bonne heure*! And here is our Zitli himself to welcome you.”

A boy stood in the doorway, beaming welcome; a boy of fifteen, also wearing the gay Swiss dress, but otherwise contrasting strangely with the stalwart, sunburnt shepherds and farm maidens. He leaned on crutches; his face was white and drawn, with lines of pain that should not belong to so young a creature; yet no face in all the group shone more brightly than that of Zitli, the younger brother, the joy and pride of the mighty Twins.

Now Atli hastened forward to bring stools for the Ladies. Soon the whole group was established before the *châlet*, the Ladies sitting in dignity on their stools, the girls at their feet, on rugs and shawls carefully spread by the Twins and their friends; “To protect from dampness!” explained Gretli. “And from chill!” chimed in Atli. “My faith! our Mountain’s heart is warm, but his bones are cold. Now! my ladies find themselves in comfort? At the good hour! The creatures become impatient. Hark to la Duchesse! That one is in a temper!”

An angry bellow was heard from the farmyard, where we could see white horns tossing over the rough stone wall. It was answered by a “Moo!” in a very different tone: a moo full of quiet dignity, with a touch of rebuke.

“Well done!” cried Gretli. “La Dumaine responds; she puts that other in her place. Is it not well done, friends?”

There was a general murmur of applause, amid which Atli, making a sign, vanished into the yard, followed by the other young men. Presently the sound of bells was heard, first one, then another, then a chime, all on different notes, all in harmony. A lovely melody! And now the girls, led by Gretli’s powerful voice, began to sing: a quaint air, with quainter words, which may be roughly translated as follows:

“Ten young maidens fair and free;
All the ten would married be:
There was Dine, there was Chine,
There was Claudine and Martine;

Ah! ah! Cath'rinette and Cath'rina:
There was beautiful Suzon;
Duchess fair of Montbazou;
There was Célimène;
There was La Dumaine."

As they sang, the farmyard gate opened, and out came the cows. Usually the herd was already in the mountain pastures by the time of the Birthday Fête; the School had never seen it before. Honor gazed in silent wonder and delight at the superb creature who led the way: a cow white as cream, graceful as a deer, holding her head like a queen. Round her neck was a broad collar of leather, richly embroidered in bright-colored silks, from which hung a large bell. As she moved, she tossed her beautiful head, and the deep mellow notes of the bell rang out sweetly on the quiet air. "Ting! ling-a-ling! ling-a-ling!"

"Ling-ling!" responded another bell! another, and another. The two cows following the leader were also beauties: one a delicate fawn color with white feet and a white star on her forehead; the other —

"But this is the Purple Cow!" cried Patricia.

"I never saw a purple cow,
I never thought to see one!
But now I do!"

Honor had never read "The Lark," never, poor Continental child, so much as heard of it; but there was no doubt about it; here was a purple cow, or one of so deeply violet-tinted a gray that purple was the one idea suggested.

"What an original tint has this!" cried Madame Madeleine. "And what a beauty! Truly, Gretli, she rivals La Dumaine herself!"

As if she understood the words, the purple cow flung up her head with an angry movement; then lowering it, jostled rudely against the leader as if trying to push past her. La Dumaine paid no heed, but continued to advance slowly, her beautiful eyes turned lovingly toward Atli, who walked beside her, his arm on her neck. The fawn-colored cow, however, with a quiet but firm shove of her powerful shoulder, jostled the purple one back into her place.

"Aha!" cried Gretli. "Well done, Célimène! This, my ladies, is a creature of discernment, and of judgment. Célimène, I am content with thee, my friend!"

The purple cow bellowed angrily; Gretli replied with asperity, "As for thee, thou wilt do well to be silent. No one desires speech of thee, be assured!"

"What is her name?" asked Patricia. "The purple one; she is the handsomest of all, I think."

"It is the Duchesse de Montbazou, Mademoiselle! An animal of beauty, as all acknowledge, but of an evil and envious disposition. Her jealousy of La Dumaine passes bounds. The truth is, two years ago our beloved Queen had an illness, was not able to seek the mountains with the rest. Wishing to be entirely just, we allowed La Duchesse to lead the herd, as in beauty and in quality of milk she properly ranked next. Figure to yourself that a month later, when Atli led the wholly-recovered Dumaine to the mountain pasture, this one refused to yield her place. She roared, she tore up the ground — there was a scene, I promise you! Atli was forced to belabor her well with the milking-stool before she could be brought — I say not to reason, — she is incapable of it — but to simple obedience. There again our worthy Célimène was of assistance; she, loving La Dumaine like a sister, advanced to the attack of that other, who was threatening our queen in a manner wholly savage, and overthrew her."

"Ah!" cried a shrill voice behind her. "That was a thing to see! Paff! and there she rolled, the four legs in the air."

Gretli turned smiling to the boy who, leaning always on his crutches, rubbed his hands with delight, while a glow spread over his pale face.

“Thou saw’st it, Zitli, didst thou not?” she said approvingly. “As thou sayst, it was a thing to see. Regard, my Ladies! La Dumaine comes to pay her respects to our honored guests!”

Stepping daintily over the short turf, guided by Atli’s hand on her neck, the beautiful creature advanced to within a few paces of the group before the door, and stretching her neck, sniffed inquiringly, fixing her great violet-brown eyes on Soeur Séraphine with an appealing look.

“Beautiful one!” the little Sister patted the snowy muzzle gently. “What wouldst thou?”

Zitli thrust into her hand a saucer containing a lump of salt. “She desires bonbons!” he said. “Behold the bonbons of La Dumaine, my Ladies!”

Honor, curled up at the Sister’s feet, watched entranced as the pink tongue curled eagerly round the salt. She was in such a state of wonderment and rapture, she was conscious of nothing save the cows; but suddenly a hand clutched hers, and a voice whispered,

“Moriolo, I faint! I die! I can bear no more!”

Honor, turning in amazement, beheld Stephanie, white as chalk, her eyes starting from their sockets, her teeth absolutely chattering.

“But what is it?” she cried. “Stephanie, what ails thee? My Sister, Stephanie is ill!”

“My child!” Soeur Séraphine turned in anxiety. “You find yourself ill?”

“She’s afraid of the cows!” said Patricia bluntly.

“But no! of these gentle creatures? Can it be? Come, my child! Lay your hand on the beautiful head! Observe her gentleness! A lamb is less mild!”

She tried to draw Stephanie toward her: and in so doing drew back the saucer a little. La Dumaine pursued it, snuffing and blowing appreciatively: at this Stephanie uttered a wild shriek, and springing up, rushed to one side to escape the terrible animal, who, she cried out, would devour her.

Alas! Stephanie had recently had a present of a scarlet parasol, of which she was inordinately proud. So proud that she had brought it with her to the *fête*, regardless of the gibes of the other girls. In her sidewise rush, the parasol, still clutched in her hand, was presented full to the view of the Duchess of Montbazou, within two feet of her purple nose. The Duchess, in no mood to endure this, lowered her head with a furious bellow, and leaving her place in the ranks, advanced upon Stephanie, who fled with shrieks that rent the air. The other cows, startled, huddled together: at the rear, Le Roi, the splendid young bull, raised his great head, crowned with the milking-stool, and uttered a loud moo of inquiry.

It was a bad moment; but Atli and the Queen were equal to the emergency. A touch on the neck, a word in the ear; La Dumaine turned from her “bonbons” and with regal pace and head lifted high, started across the plot of greensward and up the track that led to the mountain pasture. After a moment’s confusion, the other cows, aided by voice and hand of the farm maidens, followed in their regular order. Gretli rescued the shrieking Stephanie and carried her bodily into the house. The shepherds, shouting with laughter, corralled the Duchess of Montbazou in a corner of the yard, and drove her, still bellowing rage and defiance, after the herd. She followed for some paces behind Le Roi, who, conscious of his duty to guard the rear, turned his head frequently to utter snorts of rebuke and remonstrance. Finally, jealousy and ambition triumphed over the sulks. Breaking into a clumsy gallop, La Duchesse plunged past the bull, past Dine and Chine, Claudine, Martine and the rest, and shouldered her way in behind La Dumaine and beside Célimène. The former pursued her serene way, taking no notice; the latter – well, cows cannot laugh, but Célimène’s carriage was very expressive as with a whisk of her tail and a “wallop” of her hind-quarters, she made place for the rebel beside her. So the herd swept out and away, Atli still walking beside his Queen: and after them, shouting and laughing, went the neighbor boys and girls, to finish their holiday with a feast of curds and whey, cheese and black bread in the mountain pasture.

CHAPTER V

BIMBO

The living room (kitchen, sitting room and dining room in one) of the Châlet was also in festal trim as Gretli ushered her guests in; good, faithful Gretli, who had planned all, gladly giving up her part in the mountain feast for the sake of entertaining her “honored patrons” and their pupils. The floor was white with scrubbing; the little windows gleamed like diamonds; the sunbeams darting through them made lively play among the brass and copper vessels ranged on the dresser, or hanging on the whitewashed walls.

The only dark thing in the room was the fireplace, and that had a good right to its warm sootiness. All about it hung hams and flitches of bacon, and strings of sausages, the pride of the thrifty Twins: there was bread, too, though some people might not have recognized it in the large flat round cakes with a hole in the middle, strung on ropeyarn and hanging in festoons from the rafters. Madame Madeleine glanced upward and nodded approval.

“A fine showing, my Gretli! Thou hast provision for many winters there.”

Gretli beamed with modest pride. “We do our possible!” she said. “Atli is indeed a marvel of strength and industry; and we have our Zitli!” she added, glancing at the lame boy, a lovely look in her face. “Without Zitli, where should we be? He turns the hams, he keeps the fire at the proper height, he stuffs the sausages; unaided he does it! As for the cheese – it is well known that he is called the little Prince of Cheesemakers. Let my gracious Ladies descend, if they will have the condescension, and inspect the cheese room!”

The cheese room was dark and cool – and dripping! No ice in mountain châteaux, but through the middle of the room ran a little crystal stream whose water needed no ice.

“It comes down from the Alps!” Zitli explained. “My brother persuaded it, with a wooden conduit; my faith, the good Nix was willing enough; ever since then she sends her stream; in the driest summer, it never fails. No other châteaux has such a stream. It is because of the virtue of my brother and sister!” he added simply.

“Zitli!” Gretli spoke in gentle reproof. “These are not words to say before honorable guests, though I love thee for them, my little one. See, my ladies! here stand the pans, thus, on either side the stream; these are for the cream cheeses, the other for those of milk alone. Observe now the cheeses!”

She led the way proudly to the end of the room – it was really more like a cavern – where, on broad shelves, stood the great round cheeses, tier on tier, all neatly marked with date and weight.

“I didn’t suppose there was so much cheese in the world!” said Honor.

Gretli laughed merrily. “My faith, mademoiselle! Twice in the year we send forth this quantity, from this one châteaux, by no means one of the largest of this Alp.”

“But assuredly one of the best!” said Madame Madeleine.

“Madame is kindness in person! We do our possible. Consider then, mademoiselle, that in fifty châteaux on this single Alp, equal numbers or larger are made, are sent out twice in the year; and that there are countless Alps in our dear country; mademoiselle sees, without doubt, that there is no danger of the world being without cheese. Look! on this shelf, behold the little cheeses of cream, called *Neufchatel* from that good town where first they were produced. If Madame permits, we would like, Zitli and I, to present to each of the demoiselles one of these small objects.”

“Oh!” cried the girls in chorus. “Oh, Gretli! Oh, Madame, may we?”

Madame looked doubtful. “It is too much – ” she began.

“With respect!” cried Gretli. “They are made entirely of cream; is it not so, Zitli? Yesterday we made them, Zitli and I, expressly for our demoiselles. Quite frankly, the new-born infant might eat them without injury. They are even thought to be stomachic in their quality.”

“That was far from being my thought,” Madame explained graciously. “I feared we might rob you, my Gretli; but since you have made this charming present for my pupils – come, my children! you have permission to accept – not forgetting, I trust, the thanks that are due!”

A chorus of delight and thanks broke out, as the neat little rolls of silver-papered cheese, each stamped *Châlet des Rochers*, were dealt out. Maria Patterson and Vivette proposed to eat theirs on the spot; Loulou tried to stuff hers into her pocket.

Gretli offered a better suggestion. “This basket,” she said, “will hold all, and my young ladies will, I trust, enjoy at their supper the little fruits of the Châlet. For the moment, I will ask you to mount once more to the room.”

Then, bending down from her towering height, she whispered in Honor’s ear. “In the basket is already a *fromage Camembert* for the evening repast of my Ladies. It is their favorite cheese; we send it, Atli, Zitli and I, as a little surprise, Mademoiselle understands.”

Honor nodded comprehension, and took the basket, in which the silver rolls were now neatly stored.

Zitli had preceded them some minutes ago, up the ladder-stair which led down to the cheese room. As they came up blinking into the strong sunlight, they saw his beaming face behind a little table, on which was a plate of curious little biscuits or cookies stamped in the shape of a cow, a glass pitcher of rich cream, and a number of little wooden bowls and spoons.

“Oh! oh! oh!” cried the girls in chorus.

“A little *goûter!*” (luncheon) Gretli hastened forward to explain. “Before making the descent! My Ladies remember well the *biscuits des Rochers*, to be eaten with cream; sustaining, you observe, and wholesome – ah! *par exemple!*”

“Remember them!” cried Soeur Séraphine. “Could we forget? Regard, my children! When we were young girls of your age, the good grandmother of our friends prepared this feast yearly for us. We came with our honored parents, now in glory; it is to make weep with pleasure and remembrance, the sight of them!”

And indeed, the little Sister actually wiped a tear from her blue eyes.

Tears were far from the eyes of Honor, Patricia, and the rest, as they clustered round the table. It is highly improbable that any of my readers ever tasted the cream of the *Châlet des Rochers*; I, therefore, declare boldly that they do not know what cream is. As for the biscuits, made of cream and honey and wheat flour – they also are not to be described.

“And *how* do you make them like a cow?” asked little Loulou, a newcomer to the school. “*Tiens!* they resemble La Dumaine!”

Gretli cast a proud glance at her brother, who blushed crimson and dropped his eyes.

“It is a portrait of our Queen!” she said. “Behold the cutter, carved by our Zitli. All unconscious, La Dumaine sat – I should rather say stood – for her portrait – while he carved it. The former one, made by our honored grandfather in his youth, had lost its clearness of outline; through age and long use, you understand. Nor – with respect to our venerable ancestor be it said – did it ever equal in beauty the present one.”

I trust that the *Madeleinettes*, as the Vevay children called our girls, were no more greedy than other young persons of their age. They had certainly eaten a great deal of luncheon barely two hours before; yet they fell upon the biscuits and cream, and on the shining combs of honey which supplemented them, “as if after a three days’ fast,” said Soeur Séraphine in gentle reproof.

“*Voyons!* they are young!” said motherly Madame Madeleine.

“It is like that!” cried Gretli, who was manifestly enjoying every mouthful they ate. “Youth, my Ladies,” (Gretli was twenty-two!), “demands nutrition. If simple and wholesome, can there be

too much of it? For example! did my Sister ever try to fill a young goat to repletion? There, if you will, is gluttony!”

The little feast over, Madame declared that it was time to begin the descent. They must go slowly, more slowly even than in ascending, and they had no more than time to reach the pier in good time. Every one knew that Madame’s “good time” meant a full half hour before the boat started, so it was without too much haste that the girls took leave of Zitli and the ch  let. Gretli, as they knew, would see them safe at the foot of the Alp before saying good-by.

“Oh!” said Honor, as they came out on the green space before the house, “but we have not seen the goats, Gretli!”

“*A la bonne heure!*” said Gretli. “And on the instant, Mademoiselle Honor, here the creatures come!”

The goats knew it was not yet supper-time. Very leisurely they came up the track, old Moufflon in advance, young Bimbo bringing up the rear. Between them the she-goats, twenty or thirty of them, straggled along, stopping here to nibble a tuft of grass or clover, there to investigate a bush or stone. They are inquisitive creatures, goats. Now and then a shrill bleat was heard, and some goat would canter a few paces ahead, then fall to nibbling again.

“It is S  raphine who annoys them!” Gretli said. “The creature! Look, my demoiselles. Nanni, her own aunt, you observe, has found a green tuft of the most succulent, and begins to take her pleasure. Now in a moment – regard! comes la S  raphine! biff! it is over! Poor Nanni flies, and that one enjoys the morsel. My faith, she is really of an evil nature, the S  raphine, and gluttonous beyond description. Again, I make my heartfelt apologies to my Sister for giving her holy name to this creature. For example! if I had named La Dumaine for her, now, it would be different!”

Soeur S  raphine laughed heartily at the antics of her namesake, and declared that she had had much the same disposition in her youth. “But not the beauty!” she added. “As Atli says, it is difficult to be severe with so charming a creature.”

“It’s funny that the best cow and the worst goat should be white, isn’t it?” said Vivette.

“As mademoiselle says! A thing very curious. Bimbo, now! a black goat may by right be mischievous, is it not so, my ladies? Yet Bimbo also is handsome, we think.”

As if he heard and understood, Bimbo, the young he-goat, lifted his head, and reconnoitered the party standing on the green; then, slowly and with an air of elaborate carelessness, he detached himself from the flock, and began a circuitous approach, pausing to nibble – or to make a pretence of nibbling – at every other step. He was jet black, with white horns and hoofs; a superb animal, already larger than Moufflon, his father and leader.

“He *is* a beauty!” said Patricia. “I should like to have a pair of him to drive, wouldn’t you, Moriolo? We’d take Stephanie out – and upset her into the lake!” she added in an undertone.

Stephanie did not hear her. Her eyes were fixed in terror on the advancing flock, and especially on Moufflon, a goat of great dignity, with wide-branching horns and a notable beard.

Stephanie was naturally afraid of all animals. Their size mattered little; a cow or a mouse threw her into almost equal agonies of terror. Indeed, the mouse was the more to be dreaded of the two, since – horror! it could, and certainly would if given the opportunity – run up one’s sleeve, in which case one would die on the spot, on the instant. Moreover, the poor child’s nerves had been thoroughly upset by the Purple Cow episode (which naughty Patricia was already turning into verse in her mind!). She had made up her mind that Moufflon meant to attack her. Pressing close to Gretli’s side, shaking in every limb, she kept her eyes fixed on him in the fascination of terror. Ah! but she did not notice – *nobody* noticed Bimbo! Gretli herself, keeping a watchful eye on the mischievous S  raphine, prepared to check and punish any outbreak on the part of that obstreperous young beauty, had no eye for the black goat, quietly circling to the rear of the party, quietly moving forward, with a sharp glance now and then through his forelock. If any one had cast a glance at

Bimbo, he would have been seen nibbling grass, serenely unconscious; the catastrophe might have come just the same: but no one did cast a glance.

Presently, Madame Madeleine called Gretli to her, to ask some question about the descent. Gretli, stepping forward some paces, left Stephanie for the moment standing alone, still holding the unlucky red parasol. Directly in front of her stood Honor, her eyes fixed on the mountains, lost in a dream of the Norse gods. Bimbo's moment had arrived. Two at a time! glorious sport. Lowering his head, he advanced at a smart gallop. Biff! *bang!* a wild shriek rang out. Stephanie and Honor were rolling together at the feet of Soeur Séraphine, and the others, turning in bewilderment, saw the black goat quietly nibbling grass, apparently unconscious of them and of the world.

Stephanie sprang up and rushed sobbing and screaming to throw herself into the tender arms of Madame Madeleine. Honor lay still. The air was black and full of sparks; there was a pain somewhere, a rather sickening pain.

Gretli and Soeur Séraphine ran to raise her, and she uttered a little cry.

"It's all right!" she said. "I hit my head, I think, and my ankle – but it's all right!" Here she tried to get up, and instead crumpled into a little heap and fainted away.

CHAPTER VI IN THE CHÂLET OF THE ROCKS

When Honor opened her eyes, it was to look round her in amazement. Where was she? Certainly not at home in the Maison Madeleine. This bed, with its fragrant sheets of coarse heavy linen and its wonderful quilt, was not her own, nor was the little room with its bare white walls and dormer windows.

A quaint little room, homely, yet friendly. Along one wall ran a shelf, on which were many pieces of wood-carving, some of exquisite delicacy. Honor's still-bewildered eyes rested with delight on a miniature ch[^]âlet, with tiny cattle and goats, half the length of her little finger, browsing round it, with a fairy sennerin smiling in the doorway. A wonderful piece of work it seemed to her. There must be a very skilful carver here. The wooden bedstead on which she lay was carved too, and its four tall posts were surmounted by four heads, with smiling, friendly faces. What a curious, delightful place!

"Where am I?" said Honor.

Soeur S[^]raphine was bending over her, her face full of tender anxiety.

"Thank God!" she said. "My little one, you are yourself again, is it not so? But no!" she added, as Honor tried to rise, and sank back with a little moan. "It is to lie quite still, my child! You have sprained your ankle, and must remain tranquil till it restores itself. Our Gretli will care for you, as tenderly as we ourselves could do. A few days only; then Atli will fashion a carrying chair and bring you down the mountain and home to us. Madame left her fondest love for you; she was forced to go, you understand, and now I must follow, lest the boat depart without me. My child, with no one save Gretli and Atli could we possibly have left thee, thou knowest that. The ankle is well bandaged, and Gretli is a skilful nurse; adieu, my little Honor! Thou wilt be good and not unhappy? Adieu!"

The Sister's kind blue eyes were full of tears as she kissed Honor's forehead and hurried away. A few moments after, Gretli appeared, and sat down by the bedside with an air of business-like cheerfulness.

"*Voilà!*" she said. "I have seen her well started, the holy Sister. My faith, she is a good mountaineer; she leaps like a goat. She will soon overtake Madame, who, being of a certain age, must proceed more cautiously. And how does mademoiselle find herself? Not too ill, I hope?"

Honor was still looking about her in a bewildered fashion. "I am all right," she said, "only my head aches, and my ankle hurts when I try to move. What happened, Gretli? Did somebody knock me down? Why?"

"That," said Gretli, "is a thing known only to the good God, who created goats. With sorrow and shame I avow it, Mademoiselle Honor; Bimbo, that child of Satan, attacked Mademoiselle Stephanie, from the rear, you understand, with a violence not to be credited had one not seen it. She was flung forward upon you, who stood before her; a loose stone, it would appear, turned under your foot. You fell to the ground, striking your head on another stone. I ran to raise you; you swooned in my arms, poor child. Ah! what confusion! Mademoiselle Stephanie shrieking to the skies that she was killed; Zitli belaboring the misguided beast with his crutch; the *demoiselles* clustering together in affright; my Ladies full of anxiety and distress. What would you? It was the hour of departure; there is no other boat to-day, and though all would be more than welcome to the Ch[^]âlet, they could not pass the night in comfort.

"They proposed to carry you between them, these benevolent ladies; I respectfully begged them to reconsider. 'Leave the little one' – I demand pardon, mademoiselle; it is only yesterday, it appears, that I carry you in my arms! – 'leave her with us!' I said. 'My faith, I am well used to the

care of sprains; she will be safe as in Ste. Gêneviève's pocket. I will give her soup of cream and onion with cheese, a restorative not worse than another; for her amusement Zitli will tell stories – but, *par exemple!* he is a story-teller, that little one! The creatures will all be at her feet, except that ruffian Bimbo, who will not be suffered to approach her. By and by, when all is well, Atli will carry her down the mountain like an egg of glass, will deposit her by your side. *Et voilà!* My Ladies perceived the reasonableness of the idea. They wept, but finally consented to leave their cherished pupil to make a good and beautiful recovery in the *Châlet des Rochers*. Finally, mademoiselle, behold us here, three of us – four, when Atli returns to-morrow from the higher Alp. We shall do well, is it not so? And now, to prepare the soup! It will be good, I promise you!”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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