

**D. K. Broster**



***"Mr. Rowl"***

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Published by Good Press, 2022

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EAN 4064066368210

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# CHAPTER I

## “LE JEUNE ET BEAU DUNOIS”

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“Here is neither labour to be endured nor danger to be dreaded, yet here is all that labour or danger can procure or purchase. Look round and tell me which of your wants is without supply: if you want nothing, how are you unhappy?”—*Rasselas*, chap. iii.

It was quite likely that at an earlier stage of the afternoon the youthful and lively little company in the drawing room at Northover had been playing forfeits, or something equally childish. But when Mr. Ralph Bentley, the owner of Northover, strolled along the terrace about half-past five o'clock with a couple of companions, they were making music, for a very pleasant tenor voice came floating through the windows, which, because it was a fine mid-March day, were slightly open. The voice was singing “Since First I Saw Your Face.”

The middle-aged gentlemen outside stopped to listen. “Very tuneful, egad!” observed one of them. “Who’s the minstrel, Bentley?”

“Judging from the ‘r’s,’ I should say it is our captive friend des Sablières,” responded the master of the house with a smile. “Don’t you think so, Ramage?”

“The sun whose beams most glorious are,” sang the voice, but the brow of the gentleman just addressed in no way resembled that luminary.

“What right has a French prisoner to be singing English songs?” he growled. “If he must sing at all, let him keep to his own jargon!”

“But surely one should admire the Frenchman’s enterprise,” objected the first speaker. “And he sings the old song very well. How did he learn it, I wonder?”

“Better ask him, Sturgis,” replied Mr. Bentley with a twinkle, as the unseen singer declared that where’er he went he would leave his heart behind him, and applause greeted the end of the song.

“I had almost asked *you*, Bentley,” said Mr. Sturgis, who had only that day arrived on a visit to Northover, “what a French prisoner was doing singing any kind of song in your house, having forgotten for the moment that Wanfield was now a parole town. You have a good few of Boney’s officers here, I expect?”

“Only about eighty—not nearly so many as at Reading or Oswestry. Wanfield is quite a small place, as you know.”

“Eighty too many!” remarked Mr. Ramage, who seemed possessed by a grievance. “They are a damned nuisance, and Bannister, the agent, is too easy with them. Hardly a week passes but one of them breaks his parole or is up to some dirty trick or other!”

“Come, come, Ramage,” interposed Mr. Bentley, “you exaggerate, my dear fellow. We have not really had a case since December, 1812—since last year, in fact—when that major of engineers took the key of the fields, as I believe he would call it. He got clear off, too.”

“Yes, and how?” enquired Mr. Ramage indignantly, the very wig he conservatively wore bristling with indignation.

“Disgraceful to say, with English assistance! To think what some people will do for money—that for the sake of gain there should exist throughout the country a regular gang of escape agents who live by it as by a trade! But I have got my eye on that man Zachary Miller—pedlar, poacher, and what not—and one day I shall catch him at his nefarious practices! I am convinced that it was he was the go-between with Major Suchet and those even greater scoundrels on the coast.”

“Zachary Miller?” enquired a fresh voice, proceeding from a tall, fair, handsome gentleman of about thirty who had come unperceived along the terrace and joined them. “What about Zachary Miller? Not poaching again, I hope? I had him up before me last month, but he managed to prove an alibi.”

Mr. Ramage turned eagerly to the newcomer. “Not poaching, no, Sir Francis. I suspect him of something much worse—only there again nothing can be proved against him.”

“Ramage thinks he is a sort of escape agent for the prisoners, Mulholland,” supplied Mr. Bentley rather quizzically. “That is a somewhat more ambitious occupation than poaching.”

“A better paid one, anyhow,” observed Sir Francis Mulholland. “If you would tell me what you know about Zachary Miller, Mr. Ramage, I should be greatly obliged to you, for I am tired of finding him prowling in my woods for no apparent reason. But let us remove ourselves for the purpose, since I know that Mr. Bentley finds it hard to believe anything to the discredit of the French prisoners.”

“Now, my dear fellow!” protested his host, but Sir Francis, with a smile which seemed to show that he was only jesting, slipped his arm through that of the detractor of Zachary Miller and they walked away, he inclining his head to listen to the gesture-emphasized disclosures of the smaller man.

“That is Mulholland of Mulholland Park, I take it?” observed Mr. Sturgis to his friend. “I did not quite catch his name when you introduced us just now. I seem to remember that he had just succeeded his uncle in the estate when I visited you two years ago, but that he had not yet taken up his residence. The prospect, however, if I am not mistaken, was then causing a considerable flutter among the young ladies of the district and their mammas.”

Mr. Bentley smiled. “It was, and the flutter continued unabated until about three months ago, when he ceased to be the very eligible *parti* at whom they were all setting their caps.”

“Ceased? Why?”

“Because he became engaged. And the mortifying thing to the fair of the neighbourhood was, that he laid Mulholland Park at the feet of no local aspirant after all, although—and this perhaps made it the more bitter—his chosen lady was staying at Wanfield at the time, in this house, in fact. Sir Francis Mulholland is betrothed to a very charming young lady, Miss Juliana Forrest, a school friend of my daughter’s.”

“Juliana Forrest—Lord Fulgrave’s daughter?”

“The same. She is one of the party in the drawing room now, for she has been staying with Mrs. Mulholland—though she goes away the day after to-morrow, and then returns, I

hope, to visit us here at Northover. Don't fall in love with her if you can help it, Sturgis; I have a fancy that, though he tries not to show it, Mulholland is infernally jealous."

"He could hardly be jealous of an old man of sixty! And so they met here, at Northover?"

"He was accepted last January under this very roof—to be exact, I believe, in the small room off the drawing room where I keep my Chinese porcelain."

Mr. Sturgis looked away for a moment. Sir Francis and his companion had disappeared round the corner of the house. "I should have thought, Bentley," he said slowly—"pardon an old friend, won't you?—that Mulholland and your own pretty girl ... had you never thought of the match?"

Mr. Bentley showed a heartfree smile on his daughter's account. "Laetitia, my dear fellow, is going to marry her second cousin. And—try to believe that it is not a case of sour grapes—she does not greatly like Mulholland; I can't think why. Possibly because—well, you know what girlish friendships are. Yet hers and Juliana's seems as strong as ever; in fact, I sometimes wonder how Sir Francis likes his betrothed spending as much time at Northover as, I am glad to say, she does, and what he said when he heard that she was going to pay us, and not his mother, a visit in April.... Where have he and Ramage got to, I wonder?"

"Some quiet spot where they can discuss the chance of getting this Mr. Zachary Miller transported, I imagine," returned his friend. "It is transportation now, is it not, for helping a prisoner of war to escape?"

"Since last year, yes. But I cannot say that so far the fact has done much to deter escapes, though I suppose it has

raised their cost. It is a very surprising thing to me, this inability of the French to respect their parole of honour. My old Royalist friend, the Comte de Sainte-Suzanne, who has been an exile for twenty years and lived here for twelve of them, assigns it all, of course, to the spirit which came in at the Revolution. He says that the majority of these officers are destitute alike of breeding and of military tradition, so what can one expect?"

"Ah, you have a Frenchman of the other party living here?" exclaimed Mr. Sturgis with interest. "Yes, of course, I remember him now. How do the two kinds mix?"

"About as well as oil and vinegar. The Comte ignores any Bonapartist prisoner he may happen to meet. Young des Sablières, who was singing just now, is about the sole exception, and I think he tolerates him only because he is of good family and has a pleasing address. It is a mercy that it is so, for Sainte-Suzanne being such an old friend, and having the freedom of Northover, he and Mr. Rowl meet here fairly often."

"Mr. Rowl?" queried his guest.

Mr. Bentley smiled. "The shop people and so on, who can't get their tongues round M. Raoul des Sablières' family name, call him by that form of his Christian one."

"Is Mr. Rowl the only one of the paroled officers who has the privilege of your hospitality?"

"No; I daresay there are about half-a-dozen others. But he is here the most frequently. A charming fellow, we all think him, even though he is an enemy—and when he was at large, I somehow fancy, a pretty daring one. Not that he

ever talks of his exploits. He is a hussar, and was wounded and captured at Salamanca last summer.”

They took a turn up and down. Someone was now playing the pianoforte with vigour. “That’s Laetitia,” said her father. “We might go in when she has finished her performance.”

“Before we do, and before the patriotic Mr. Ramage comes back,” said Mr. Sturgis, taking his friend by the arm, “tell me something, my dear Bentley. I presume that here, as elsewhere, the prisoners are strictly limited as to where they may go—one mile along the turnpike road from either confine of the town being their boundary, eh?”

Mr. Bentley nodded.

“Well, my dear friend, when last I visited you the first milestone—I distinctly remember the fact—stood a few yards to the left of your entrance gates, *between* you and Wanfield. Now it is a few yards on the right! Has Northover shifted its position since 1811? I understand that an earthquake tremor *was* felt last year in some parts of England.”

“It wasn’t an earthquake, Sturgis. I had the distance from the town remeasured, and it was found to be ... slightly incorrect.” And as Mr. Sturgis laughed and shook his finger at him the good gentleman added half apologetically: “The poor devils have so few distractions! And as I am a magistrate, and was actually deputy sheriff at the time of the—the correction, no one dared to say anything. Yet some day” (and here Mr. Bentley lowered his voice and glanced over his shoulder), “I half expect to find that Ramage has remeasured the distance yet again on his own account, and

laid his discovery before another magistrate—Mulholland perhaps.”

“Curious, if you come to think of it,” said Mr. Sturgis reflectively, “that all over England and Scotland these French officers on parole are living freely amongst us, and in many cases are received into our family circles!”

“And why not?” asked Mr. Bentley. “They fought clean; every soldier from the Peninsula says that. Well, let us go in; I fancy that Laetitia is drawing to the close of that newest display of fireworks of hers, the ‘Siege of Badajoz.’ If the actual event was really as noisy as that, I am glad I was not there.”

It was a charming scene into which Mr. Bentley ushered the new arrival, for the wide, low room, whose last-century chintzes still survived in this thirteenth year of the new, was brightened by groups in narrow high-waisted gowns and sandals, in long-tailed blue or brown coats and tight pantaloons and frills, the wearers of which, all young and all animated, seemed to be enjoying themselves hugely, and, now that the strains of Mr. Wesley’s “characteristic sonata” no longer resounded, were making a good deal more noise than even the pianoforte had done.

Laetitia Bentley, a pretty, fair girl in white and yellow, still sat at that instrument, but she was looking up and talking to another of her own sex. Leaning against the pianoforte, and studying some music outspread upon it, was a young man of about four and twenty who caught the eye at once by reason of his unlikeness to any of the other young men present; and that not so much by his good looks as by his naturally more lively expression, his air of being able to set

himself instantly in motion with the minimum of effort, like a well-trained runner or a deer. He was dark-haired, but fair-skinned, with a suggestion of sunburn that had survived captivity and winter; his little moustache, so slight that it was hardly more than a pencilled line across his lip, like that of a Stuart gallant, left the firm but sweet-tempered mouth revealed. Yet its mere presence sufficed to stamp him as not English. "That, of course, is 'Mr. Rowl,'" said Mr. Sturgis to himself.

The sound of the door opening had been drowned in chatter, but suddenly Laetitia caught sight of her father and rose quickly from the music stool; the young Frenchman too raised his head and saw him, and his face lit up with a very pleasant smile. There was a general chorus of exclamation, and Mr. Sturgis, welcomed a little shyly by his host's daughter, was presented to all the ladies severally, and before long found himself engaged in converse with her whose acquaintance had been specially promised him—Miss Juliana Forrest.

She was a tall, dark, handsome girl with a beautifully modelled head on a long neck, an exquisite mouth, and an air of race—"a typical beauty," thought Mr. Sturgis to himself, "and with all the airs and graces of one too, I'll warrant." But as he chatted to her a little, telling her how he had known her father at Cambridge, he found her not quite what he had looked to find, but more lively, natural, and open, more charming, in short, than he had surmised from his first glance at her.

A little later, after he had been called away by Mr. Bentley to be presented to someone else, he perceived that

the young French officer (who, however, was not in uniform) had gone up to her where she sat in her long-sleeved gown of lilac sarcenet, spotted with amber, on a small couch in a corner of the room. She looked beautiful and animated; his face the observer could not see. "Making pretty speeches, of course," he reflected—"a Frenchman's main idea of conversation with a woman."

But, if he could have overheard, he would have discovered the chief subject of the little interview to be quite other. So too might Sir Francis Mulholland who, having just come in, was watching the couple, unobserved, from his place near the door.

"And so you are leaving us on Saturday, Mademoiselle?" the young man was saying.

"Yes, for about a month, Monsieur. But I shall find you here, no doubt, when I return?"

Raoul des Sablières made a little face. "My chance of being exchanged is so small that I fear you will. Pardon my ill manners! At any rate, I have something to look forward to—your return, Mademoiselle ... I must strive, must I not, that my English, improved, I dare to hope, by the books which you and Miss Bentley have been so kind as to lend me, shall not fall away while you are absent."

"Your English is very good indeed, Monsieur," said Miss Forrest, who had lent the young Frenchman books in that tongue just because, speaking and understanding it so well (he had passed his childhood in England), he could appreciate them. "Ah, that reminds me—how annoying! I had intended before leaving Wanfield to lend you my copy of *Rasselas*, and to bring it here to-day, but I forgot. It is

written, you know, in the most excellent style; you could not do better than study it.”

“I should be only too delighted,” said M. des Sablières with an inclination. “But, alas, I cannot come and fetch it from Mulholland Park, since that is out of bounds.”

“So it is,” agreed Miss Juliana. “How vexatious! I must send the book then to your lodgings by one of the servants—you lodge with Miss Hitchings, I think? But then I shall not be able to point out to you my favourite passages, as I had designed.”

“*Mais celà, c’est désolant!*” exclaimed the prospective reader. “What is one to do?” He could not, of course, suggest that she should accompany the book to his lodgings.

The Honourable Juliana pondered. She was a very high-spirited young lady, accustomed to having her own way, and equally unaccustomed to having that way criticized—much less controlled, as a certain person was trying to control it at present. Still, to inform a young foreigner, whom, after all, she did not know very well, that she purposed coming to Northover to-morrow afternoon to take farewell of Laetitia Bentley, and to apprise him of her homeward route in case he also should be taking a walk ... no, even with so laudable an aim as the personal bestowal on him of Doctor Johnson’s model of style, it would not do....

“I must mark the passages before I send *Rasselas* to you, Monsieur des Sablières,” was her conclusion, and Raoul had hardly bowed his acquiescence before a deputation of young ladies was upon him, begging him to sing again—a French song this time, and by preference a new one, since

he had sung them so very antiquated an English air; Heaven knew where he could have unearthed it!

“New?” repeated Captain des Sablières doubtfully. “*Mais, chères demoiselles*, where do you think I have been these last three years to learn the new ditties of Paris?”

“Did you never sing in Spain, then, ‘Mr. Rowl’?” half mischievously enquired one damsel.

“Yes—hymns,” replied Raoul with entire gravity. But before the protesting laughter had subsided he admitted, “*Eh bien*, yes, I know one new song—at least, it was new two years ago. I heard it first on the banks of the Caya—Queen Hortense’s ballad about *le jeune et beau Dunois, partant pour la Syrie* in the time of the ... the *Croisades*. I can play the air *tant bien que mal*.” Bowing to Miss Forrest, he went towards the pianoforte, the little group following him with questions about the song and its writer, and Juliana Forrest was left alone in her corner, on which Sir Francis Mulholland immediately stalked across to her, his face rather thunderous. But Miss Forrest, if she noticed any meteorological symptoms, did not betray her knowledge, as she remarked evenly, “Ah, there you are, Francis!”

“There I have been for some time,” returned her betrothed. “I was waiting until you were disengaged.”

His tone was not exactly disagreeable, but neither was it the tone of mere jest. Juliana shot a little glance up at him. That Francis was jealous, and sometimes insanely jealous, she had discovered about three days after her engagement; at first the fact had amused her, but it had soon ceased to do so.

“But that was very unnecessary,” she returned cheerfully. “I, on my part, had been wondering where you were got to all this time.”

“I did not observe any signs of solicitude. Had there really been any speculation in your mind, you could have seen me standing by the farther door these five minutes or so.”

“My dear Francis,” returned the girl with a shade of impatience, “you surely do not desire to see me craning my neck in all directions to observe your whereabouts every moment that I have not the pleasure of your society! I would not wish to make either of us ridiculous. And, as you are now happily arrived, pray sit down and listen to the new French song which M. des Sablières is about to sing to us.”

Sir Francis did not sit down. The word “ridiculous” had brought a slight colour to his cheek. “I have no desire to hear French songs. I came to ask you to give me a few minutes’ private conversation—in the Chinese room over there, for instance.”

“Willingly,” replied Miss Forrest, “when the song is over. Hush—it is just going to begin. Pray, Francis ...”

*“Partant pour la Syri....e,”*

sang Mr. Rowl, seated at the pianoforte,

*“Le jeune et beau Dunois*

*Venait prier Mari....e*

*De bénir ses exploits.*

*Faites, reine immortell....e,*

*Lui dit-il en partant,*

*Qu'aimé de la plus bell....e  
Je sois le plus vaillant!"*

And, fidget and scowl though Miss Forrest's future lord did throughout the following three verses, he had to remain beside her. The moment, however, that the last note was drowned in applause, he gave her a significant glance, and going to a neighbouring door, held it open for her. Unhurriedly, the Honourable Juliana rose and passed through it into a little room containing an old spinet, one or two fine Queen Anne chairs, and much Chinese porcelain, mostly imprisoned in cabinets.

She turned on the young man as he shut the door behind them. "So this is to be an interview *en règle*! We had another in here once!" And she smiled, a delightful roguish smile calculated, one would have thought, to dissipate the most obstinate male sulks. "But what is it that needs such solemn precautions, and that cannot be said when we go home presently in your curricle?"

"You forget the groom," replied Sir Francis rather shortly. He took a turn down the room and then began to study a *famille verte* vase on its shelf, while Miss Forrest, sinking into a chair, watched him half mischievously. "Juliana," he said at length, not looking at her, "you may not like what I am about to say to you, but I beg you to believe that I must say it."

"If it is a duty, then I certainly would not keep you from its performance," said Miss Forrest equably. "Pray proceed, or we may be interrupted before your task is accomplished."

Thus adjured, the gentleman turned from the porcelain and faced her.

“I desire, I request you, when you return to Wanfield next month, to have nothing more to do with Captain des Sablières.”

The colour sprang up in Juliana’s cheeks, and her hands went to the short walnut-wood arms of her chair.

“And the reason, pray?”

“Because I do not like him,” said Sir Francis with brevity.

“But if I do?”

“I must still ask you to oblige me in the matter.”

Juliana returned her hands to her lap. “I find him intelligent, amusing, and well-bred,” she announced calmly. “What have you against him?”

“He is a French prisoner—and what does one know of a French prisoner’s antecedents?”

“Captain des Sablières is a gentleman—his name alone shows it,” observed Miss Forrest.

“His name may not be his own.”

“Then his bearing, his manners show it.”

“Even that fact does not make him a suitable companion for a girl of your station, Juliana.”

“A girl of my station, Francis, is accustomed to judge of that for herself.”

“Pardon me, not in the case of a man to whom her future husband objects.”

“No, perhaps not—if the man in question were really a ‘companion,’” admitted Miss Forrest somewhat coldly. “But look at the facts, Francis. I have seen very little more of Monsieur des Sablières than of any other prisoner at Wanfield—for indeed it is Laetitia Bentley, and not I, who has had most of his society. I meet him occasionally at other

houses, rather more often here, but always in company. As it happens, I have never spoken with him actually alone.”

“I should think not, indeed!” commented Sir Francis between his teeth.

Miss Forrest stopped in her discourse and looked at him.

“And of what, pray, would you be afraid if I *were* to find myself alone with a young man for a quarter of an hour or so? Do you realize, Francis, that you are making very strange and unflattering reflections on my character and upbringing?”

Her betrothed came nearer. “Do not try to misinterpret me so, Juliana,” he protested, in a voice of mingled injury and indignation. “You know that I am doing nothing of the kind. But the idea of your being alone with that fellow for any length of time is outrageous. Do you not know what Frenchman are?”

“No,” said Miss Forrest. A sprite appeared in her eyes. “But now that you have excited my curiosity I think I should like to find out.”

“*Juliana!*”

She swept on, unheeding the explosion. “But how a young man—even one of these terrible Frenchmen—conducts himself with a lady depends chiefly, I imagine, upon the lady. Do you think that *I*”—she drew up her long neck and looked like Diana—“that *I* am likely to allow any man to take liberties with me?”

“Not for a moment, Juliana—not for a moment!” asseverated the jealous lover. “But it is impossible to believe that a man exists who would not try to make love to you if he had the chance.”

“Which,” completed Juliana with a little smile, “you do not intend that any man living but yourself shall have?”

He stooped over her and possessed himself of a hand. “Can you blame me? No, I do not intend it, and you, you beautiful creature, when you accepted this,” he kissed the gleaming ruby on her finger, “you assented to that compact, did you not?”

“Yes,” said the girl. “And I have kept my share of it. But in this matter of Monsieur des Sablières——”

“You will do what I ask, will you not, my darling?” he broke in, and made a movement as though to kiss her. Juliana slipped instantly out of the chair. Then she turned to him, and her look was grave.

“No, Francis, it is as useless trying to cajole me as it is to dragoon me. Day by day this ridiculous and quite causeless jealousy of yours is growing more insupportable. Now it is this man, now another; soon I shall be able to speak to none under the age of a grandfather without incurring your frowns. I have tried to be patient, but now I see that it is culpable in me to give way to you, that by doing so I am preparing a sort of slavery for myself. For I am an Englishwoman, and you are not living in Turkey, as you sometimes appear to think.”

An attack so direct plainly staggered Sir Francis Mulholland. He seemed to be about to make a fiery retort, then he lost his balance and countered lamely, “So my wishes—*my* wishes—have no weight with you?”

“Yes, certainly they have, when they are reasonable. But to forbid a perfectly innocent acquaintance with a well-

behaved and rather lonely young man whom chance has thrown in my way——”

“Lonely!” ejaculated her affianced, recovering himself. “That foreign nightingale in there *lonely!* And chance, indeed! Was the part he took with you in those theatricals last month due to chance?”

Miss Forrest’s gravity relaxed. “No, to talent,” she retorted. “As he happened to be the only young man in the neighbourhood who did not look uncouth and absurd disguised as a woman——”

“His selection was due to you! Do not deny it!”

“Certainly not. I am proud to think that it was Monsieur des Sablières as the gipsy girl who was the success of the evening.”

“Especially in the scene with you! I watched you both, Juliana——”

“I should hope you did! I was told I looked very well as a wood-cutter’s daughter. Though if you had condescended to act yourself, as you were requested, Francis, you would not have been under the painful necessity of looking on—if it was painful.”

Sir Francis stifled some remark which sounded remarkably like a curse. “Juliana, for God’s sake drop this levity, this trifling with a serious question! You are——”

She interrupted him firmly. “You quite misapprehend, Francis. I am not trifling—far from it. It is indeed a serious question. You are trying to impose on me a perfectly unreasonable demand. And, leaving aside that it is unreasonable in itself, how do you suppose that, when I come to stay in this house, I am to avoid meeting a guest

who frequents it as much as Monsieur des Sablières does? Stay in my room—by your orders—when this dangerous foreigner is announced ... or ask Laetitia to have him refused entrance—and tell her why? He would have to be told too ... and might be flattered at your apprehensions, I imagine.”

Sir Francis, darkly red, was gripping the back of a chair. “Juliana,” he said thickly, “are you trying to see how far you can go with me?”

“No,” answered she, her head very high, “only trying to show you how far *you* go—to lengths which, three months ago, in this very room, we could neither of us have foreseen, I think.”

Mulholland’s colour suddenly faded, faded to real pallor. The words seemed to hold a veiled threat. But he had no opportunity of ascertaining this, for (with a good deal of preliminary rattling, it is true) the door leading from the drawing room opened, and their host apologetically put his head in.

“I am sorry, but they are clamouring for you, Juliana, in there, and I could deny them no longer. Do not hate me, my dear.”

Juliana went to him and put her hand through his arm. “I think you come at a good moment, Mr. Bentley,” she said, and, without a glance at her betrothed, entered the drawing room.

But, as that gentleman instantly discovered, the bone of contention was no longer there.

# CHAPTER II

## “MR. ROWL” GETS INTO TROUBLE

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“Pride ... is seldom delicate: it will please itself with very mean advantages.”—*Rasselas*, chap. ix.

After finishing his warmly received rendering of Queen Hortense’s ballad M. Raoul des Sablières had removed himself with what speed he might from the neighbourhood of the pianoforte, for he was a modest young man and had no desire whatever to monopolise attention, particularly in the anomalous situation which was his. With the idea of suggesting to Miss Bentley that the time had come for her father to sing them “A-Hunting We Will Go,” as his custom was, he sought for her among the little groups, and soon descried her in a corner talking to a very erect old gentleman, at sight of whose back he stopped and bit his lip. But at that moment the old man turned round, revealing a deeply marked, austere countenance with piercing blue eyes. His hair was snow-white; his clothes, spotless as they were, had seen long service. He wore a ribbon in his buttonhole.

“Ah, a French song for once, Monsieur des Sablières, but unfamiliar to me for all that,” he said, with a courteous little inclination. “A pretty air, though I did not hear the words as I should have done had I been younger. May I ask what it was?”

The singer’s colour rose faintly. “No, you would not know it, Monsieur,” he answered quickly. “It is new—only two or

three years old.... Mademoiselle, I came to ask if Mr. Bentley  
——”

But Miss Bentley, disregarding his haste to leave the subject, ill-advisedly pursued it. “Monsieur des Sablières ought to tell you about it, Comte, as he was telling us just now, for it is so interesting. The song as written by a Queen—words and music too—by Queen Hortense.”

The old Royalist raised his eyebrows. “And pray who is Queen Hortense?”

The little smile that accompanied the question was so acid that Miss Laetitia realized (too late) what delicate ground she had thus rashly invaded. “I think ... I forget ... is she not Queen of Westphalia—or is it——?” she faltered, stealing in her confusion a glance at M. des Sablières, only to find that he, looking fixedly at his compatriot, was frowning—a phenomenon she had never witnessed in him before.

“Your ignorance, my dear Miss Laetitia,” said the Comte de Sainte-Suzanne with an intensification of his double-edged manner, “is fully excusable, since I, a Frenchman, share it. But Monsieur des Sablières can no doubt enlighten us—if indeed it be worth while—or rather, enlighten me, since I see your father making signs to you over there.”

It was true, and Laetitia, after a rather troubled glance at her two French friends, left them together. Immediately she had gone Raoul des Sablières remarked very stiffly in their common tongue:

“I should hardly have thought it was worth your while, Monsieur, to affect ignorance of the identity of Her Majesty the Queen of Holland.”

"I beg your pardon," replied the old man. "The Queen of ... *Holland*; thank you! But I am, you see, no ... botanist; I am not well acquainted with the nomenclature of the mushroom tribe."

"Really, Monsieur de Sainte-Suzanne," exclaimed the young hussar angrily, "you exceed the bounds of——"

"And you, Monsieur des Sablières, are obviously aware of no bounds at all! So, lest you should be contemplating rendering any further compositions by the self-styled monarchs of that family, I will betake myself to the library. As far as I am concerned, you will then be free to sing the *Ça ira*, if it pleases you." And, brushing aside the young man's half stupefied protest, he marched to the door, an attempt on Raoul's part to follow him being neatly frustrated by the intervention of two ladies and a very young gentleman who beset him with supplications.

"Monsieur des Sablières, do not go away, please! We want you to give us a translation of the words you sang. Here is Miss Curtis who understood but half, and Mr. Molyneux who understood none" (the very young gentleman blushed), "and I who have but the vaguest idea of what it was all about. The marriage of Dunois—was there not a marriage?—appeared so sudden!"

"It was a reward for his ... what we call *prouesse*," stammered Raoul, the English word evading him for a moment under the blue lightning shaft which was launched at him just before the door closed on the Comte de Sainte-Suzanne. He tugged angrily for a second at his tiny moustache. Preposterous behaviour—and all for what! Then he recovered himself, and the smile which was never far

from it twitched the corners of his mouth. "Sudden? ... yes, Mesdemoiselles, a little. In war, you know... But I will translate from the beginning."

And, with one elbow on the mantelpiece, he rendered the words of the romance into English, laughing himself when he came to

*"De ma fille Isabelle  
Sois l'époux à l'instant!"*

and unaware of another listener, Mr. Sturgis, who had drifted to that corner of the room, and was thinking to himself as he watched the scene, "Strange how natural and easy they are, these French! Graceful young beggar—pity he's not in uniform ... no, perhaps on the whole just as well, young ladies are so susceptible. ... But light, unreliable, of course, like all his nation." For Mr. Sturgis had no great first-hand knowledge of the French.

"Yet, Mesdemoiselles," he heard the expositor conclude, "the English chanson which I murdered to you just now is worth six of '*Le jeune et beau Dunois*,' for it has real feeling; this is ... pasteboard."

"You are quite right, Sir," observed Mr. Sturgis, coming forward. "I had the pleasure of hearing you sing '*Since First I Saw Your Face*,' and you certainly brought out that feeling." There was a little twinkle in his eye.

But the young man was a match for him. He betrayed no sort of embarrassment; on the contrary he observed with a candid smile, "*Mais*, Monsieur, one must feel what one

sings, must one not, even when in truth one does not feel it at all?"

"Oh, Monsieur des Sablières," exclaimed the eldest of his little audience in a disappointed tone, "how unromantic! And we who were thinking while you sang of—of the lady with whom you left your heart over there in France, and compassionating her for your absence!"

"But you need not have done that, Mademoiselle," remarked the young hussar. "She will certainly have consoled herself by now—if she ever existed," he added, with a mischievous smile which showed his even little teeth.

But a young lady at the piano had now begun to play what she proclaimed to be "an adagio and march in the Turkish style," and under cover of it Captain Raoul des Sablières of the Third Hussars slipped quietly from the room with the intention of finding and making his peace with the Comte de Sainte-Suzanne. But he himself could not regard his alleged offence very seriously; indeed if he were not so much the younger man it might well be his to demand an apology. Nor did he think the old Royalist need have hurled the *Ça ira* at him in that ridiculous manner; as if he had ever sung it, or indeed, had ever heard it sung! But *ce vieillard-là* imagined that one was still in the year of blood '93.

Whether this was true of him or no, *ce vieillard-là* himself had something the outward appearance of belonging to that vanished world, where he stood choosing a book from a case in Mr. Bentley's library, the light from the branched candlestick in his hand falling kindly on his silver hair and worn aquiline features. He looked round as Raoul came in,

and put down the candlestick, his mouth tightening for an instant.

“I have come to offer my apologies, Monsieur le Comte,” said the young soldier, standing rather erect, “for what I am sure you must be aware was a perfectly unintentional offence. And having done so, I would permit myself to tell you, with all respect, that I repudiate the sentiments and associations of the *Ça ira* quite as strongly as you do, and that to credit me with the intention of singing it——”

But M. de Sainte-Suzanne put up his delicate old hand.

“I am already ashamed of my speech, Monsieur des Sablières. I have a hasty temper, still imperfectly controlled, I fear, for all my long apprenticeship to adversity. I ask you to forgive my outburst, and, if you can, to forget it.”

“Willingly, Monsieur,” returned Raoul, immediately mollified. “I hope, in return, that you will believe I never meant to hurt you.”

“Nobody can do that now, Monsieur des Sablières.” He turned his astonishingly blue, keen gaze more fully on his young compatriot. “But a few, a very few, can make me feel regret—and you are one of them. I do not need to tell you why... If I did not think the climbing rose outside this window here a fine plant I should not be so sorry to see the blight on it summer after summer... My only son, Monsieur des Sablières, was about your age when he was killed twenty years ago at Rülzheim, serving with Condé; and indeed he was not at all unlike you in voice and bearing. But, though life has never been the same for me since his loss, nothing can take away from me the consolation of knowing that he fell as his forefathers fell, and under the

same flag which had led them so often to victory. If you had been killed in Spain, could that have been said of you?"

"I should have fallen for France, Monsieur," returned Raoul proudly, "and been glad to give my body for her. None of my ancestors—or yours—did more. Does it matter whether the flag which wraps a French soldier bears the lily or the eagle?"

M. de Sainte-Suzanne made a gesture. "Ah, Monsieur des Sablières, there is the blight I lament! Do you think it immaterial that you can so lightly give the title of Queen to the half-creole wife of an upstart who is barely a Frenchman, when She who last bore the title in France...." His voice sank and died; he turned away, as from the scaffold he could never cease to see.

"But, Monsieur, we are not now in the Terror!" exclaimed Raoul. "Had I been born when your son was born, it would have been very different with me. Should I not also have served that beautiful and unfortunate lady? But, because of outrages and crimes which took place when I was a child of three or four, events of which I have not even a memory, must I be inactive all the best years of my life? I wanted to be a soldier, to fight for my country—for France of to-day, the new France. Twenty years ago I should have fought for the old. Is it my fault that I am, as you no doubt consider, born twenty years too late?"

The old Royalist turned once more and looked at him as he stood there, young, ardent, handsome, and argumentative, and his face softened a little.

"It is extraordinary the way you resemble him," he murmured almost inaudibly. "*Mais lui, il avait la tête blonde*