

My
Lady's Slipper



Cyrus Townsend
Brady



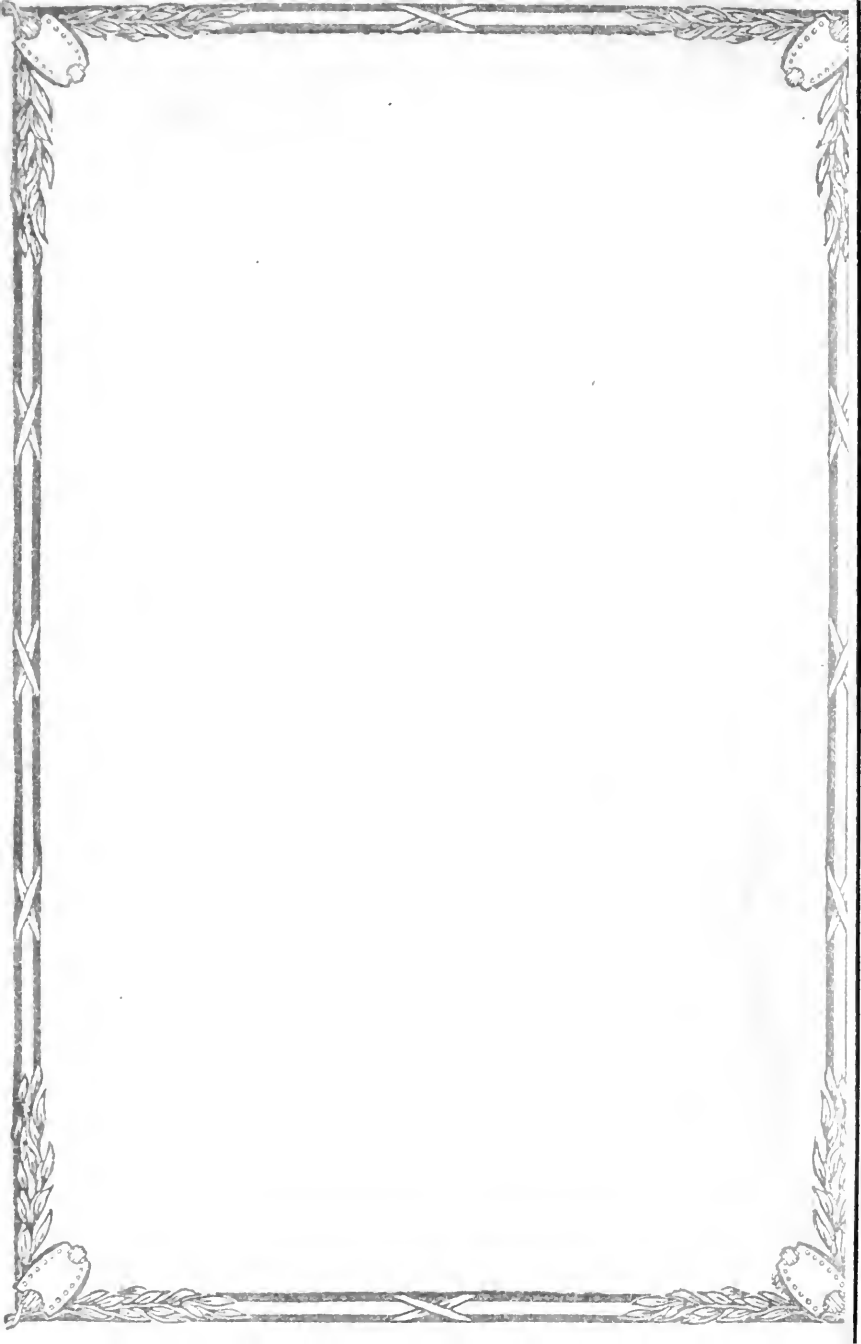
125

(for weight etc)
- (1st ed)



MY LADY'S SLIPPER





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



My Lady's Slipper

MY LADY'S
SLIPPER

BY
CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY




PICTURES
BY
CHARLOTTE WEBER DITZLER

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
MCMV

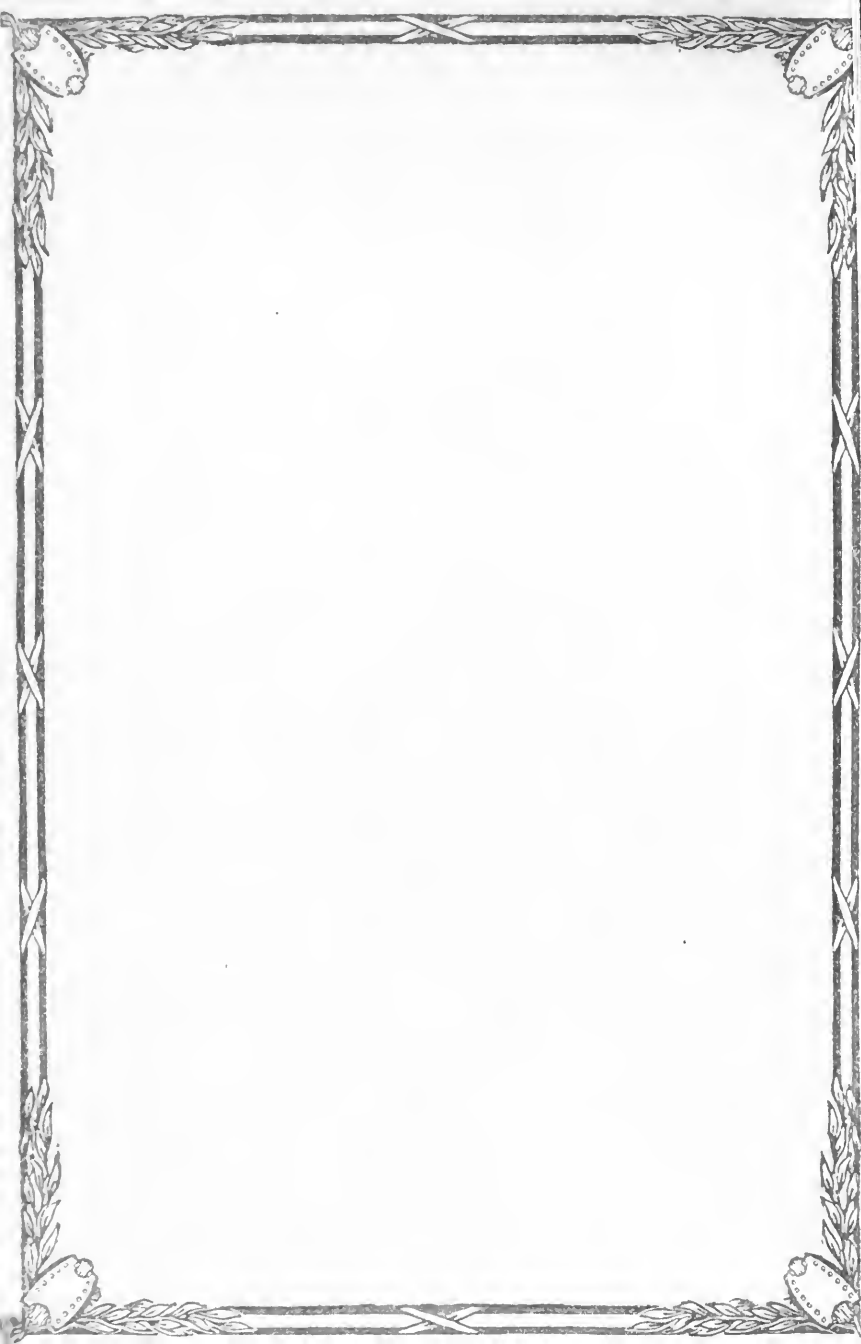
PS
1120
B5
M8

COPYRIGHT, 1905
BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

Published October, 1905



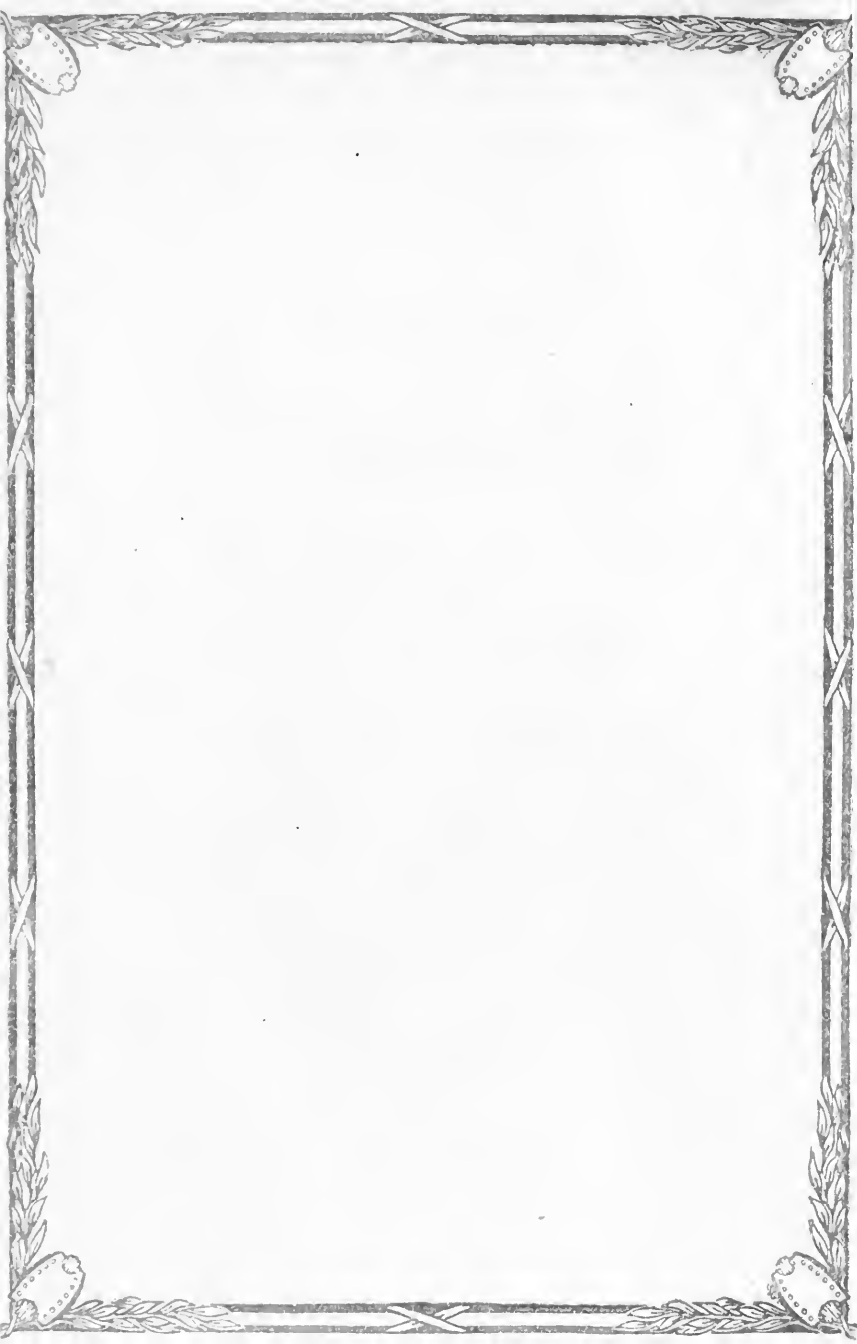
To
JOSEPHINE, PATTI AND JEANNETTE
THREE OF THE CHARMINGEST LADIES
THAT EVER WORE SLIPPERS



CONTENTS



I		
THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT		PAGE 1
II		
THE SLIPPER IS FOUND		49
III		
THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED		67
IV		
THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED		102
V		
THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED		125
VI		
THE SLIPPER AT COURT		156
VII		
THE SLIPPER'S WEARER		204



PICTURES

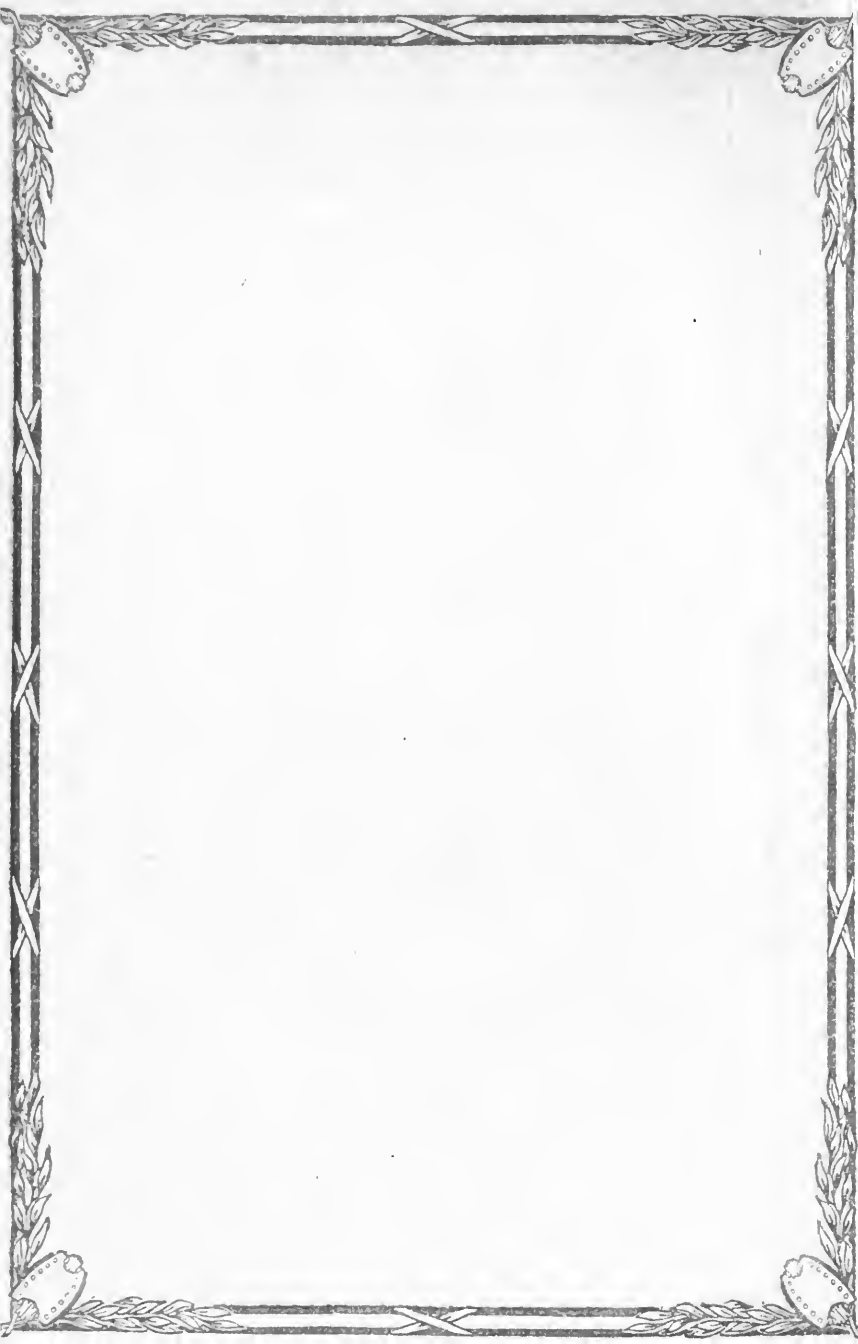


THE SLIPPER *Frontispiece*

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT
Facing page 40

THE SLIPPER AT COURT
Facing page 186

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER
Facing page 226



PREFACE



I MUST admit that I really can see no absolute need for so formidable and serious a thing as a preface, for a book of this kind—a trifle, yet by no means an unconsidered one, I solemnly aver. Yet, true to my habit, I cannot let it go without that final (and complacent!) pat on the back with which the author dismisses his latest creation to make its bow



PREFACE

to the public—the elusive, the captious, the critical, yet the constantly wooed and ever beloved public! Now, I have nothing to say about this romance save to declare that although in its pages a king and a queen are very much at home, to say nothing of Doctor Franklin and Commodore Paul Jones, it is nevertheless not an historical novel—there is no history in it unless it be another version of a thing that has happened since the beginning of time and which is therefore a part of all history—the love story.

PREFACE

It only remains, therefore, to assure the gentler portion of the reading class farther, that although the scene is laid in France a century and a quarter since, there is no fighting in the book. Not one of the characters even draws a sword. In the spirit of Nick Bottom, the immortal weaver, in fear lest I should "fright the ladies," I have made the characters in the play "roar you as gently as any sucking dove . . . as 'twere any nightingale!"

With this I introduce my cheerful novelette to you.



PREFACE

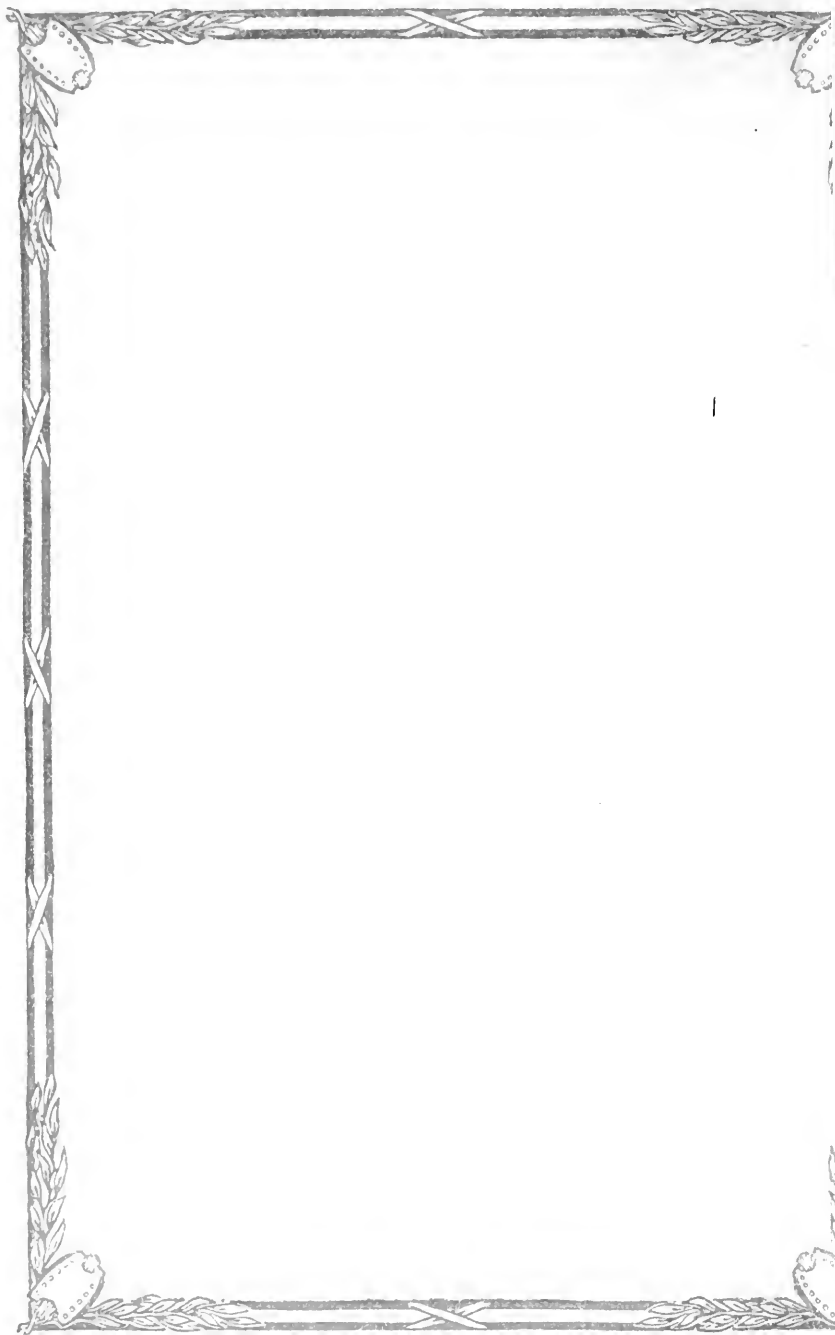
And may you have as much fun out of the love affairs of the modest Master Francis Burnham and the brave and beautiful Comtesse de Villars, as I have had.

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

TOLEDO, OHIO, SEPTEMBER, 1905.

MY LADY'S SLIPPER





CHAPTER I



THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

WHAT had happened to me last night? I was not certain as to details, but I recalled the main facts with singular distinctness. I had lost every coin that I possessed. A hasty search of my pockets in the morning disclosed the absence even of that one Louis from which, on account of its markings, I had resolved never to part, save in the gravest

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

emergency. I was stripped bare, "down to a gantlin'," as old Bucknall would have said. That much was obvious. I had possessed no jewels save the ring I had filched when I took the Frenchman's purse. That, too, was gone. I suppose I played it away with the rest.

I still had my sword. It was a serviceable blade, which I had purchased with the Frenchman's money so soon as I arrived in Paris. A gentleman and his sword, backed by a stout heart—well, one might be in worse plight. But as I thought about the night before

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

I seemed to remember—and here was where I was not yet quite clear—that I had affixed my name to certain pieces of paper, I. O. U.'s! To what amount I was obligated by these transactions I could not tell. But whether it was for one franc or a thousand, I was unable to discharge the debt. My creditors must give me time or—

They were a jolly lot, those Frenchmen, and I had held up my end of the play so long as the gold pieces lasted. America had taken no disgrace from my ability to stand in a game and win or lose like

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

a gentleman. True, it was generally the latter that fell to my play.

Now I was sick of it all! I hated wine and women and gaming. I wished, as never before, that I was on the deck of a stout ship again, with the new flag, the Stars and Stripes, fluttering from the gaff-end and the breath of the salt wind in my face. This and a tidy Englishman of equal force under our lee. Gods! That was a man's work and a man's place. This drifting around from one gambling hell to another in Paris, with a crowd of roysters — and worse — this night

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

after night at the tables—bah, I had had enough of it !

It was a life I had never fancied, and if Dr. Franklin had been at home I had never entered upon it. After I escaped from the British prison-ship, and after I took that Englishman's purse on the highway—only he turned out to be a Frenchman, but it was then too late for me to alter my determination to provide myself with the sinews of war from the enemy—and after I managed to get to Paris and found our Ambassador gone to Holland or Spain or some other outlandish country, what was I to do ?

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

With plenty of money, no occupation, no ship, nor any present chance of getting one, no friends, and a reckless, adventurous disposition, I fell in with a fast set, and this was the outcome.

I could not find her either, although I swear I searched high and low and spent not a little of the proceeds of my highway robbery in trying to run her down.

Well, there was no use in going over all this. I got up from the couch on which I had thrown myself dressed as I was when I came in last night, staggered over to my dressing

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

table, splashed my face with water and caught a glimpse of myself in the little mirror that hung on the wall. Worn, haggard, bloodshot, my own father would scarce have known me. I was ashamed, bitterly so. I had never been a gambler or a drinker, and I vowed that I would never be either again. I had played the fool once and I did not propose to do it a second time—at least not in the same way. Yet these interesting resolutions were forced into the background by the demands of my present situation.

What was I to do? Break-

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

fast! I loathed the idea. Still, I must eat to live. I hadn't a cent with which to bless myself. What was the date? It was the tenth—no, the eleventh—of the month. Dr. Franklin would be back on the thirteenth. Once I could get speech with him all would be well, but how was I to exist until then?

I sat down by the window and tried to think of some device. God knows my situation was critical, but I declare that I could only think of her! Perhaps my inability to find her—for she had vanished as completely as if the earth had

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

opened and swallowed her— had made me reckless, careless, a willing prey to the knaves who had brought me to this pass. I will admit, even then, that I loved her. I closed my eyes and I could see her as I saw her that evening outside of Paris. I could hear her scream in the hands of those ruffians. I went over the whole thing as I had done a thousand times. My rush at the villains! I was a pretty hand at cudgel-playing as well as a good swordsman, for I had no weapon but a stout stick.

The first fellow I caught fairly on the head, and he dropped

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

like a felled bullock. I put my hand up and could feel a little partially healed scar along my cheek where the bullet of the one-eyed scoundrel cut a lock of hair and grazed me. He got a crack on his pistol arm which put him out of action. I could still see his face, convulsed with pain and rage, his one eye shooting fire at me as he retreated before me. The third rascal was a coward, for he fled immediately. I shall never forget the look on Mademoiselle's face when she thanked me! They had torn her mask off when they had dragged her from her horse. I found it again

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

and also managed to catch her horse.

Although I was dressed like a French peasant I think she realized that I was of gentle blood. She was surprised at the ease with which I mounted her on her horse. And then when I went back and picked up the slipper which she had lost in the fray and put it on her charming foot—I marvelled, as I recalled it, that I had not kissed it then before I covered it with the slipper; it was small enough and dainty enough for any man's lips, that little foot, and I was never one to deny myself any simple pleasure that

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

caught my fancy either; yet something in Mademoiselle's face kept me back and I was as stolid as a cobbler.

What was she doing abroad on the high road at that hour, alone, and wearing a blue satin slipper, better suited to a drawing room than a horse's back? I wondered what she really thought of me when she gave me that Louis—my hand went to my breast. Yes, it still hung there! I hadn't gambled that away, thank God! I could see her flash of surprise as I promptly returned her coin for coin. Yet she seemed to understand. I wonder what she

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

did with the gold piece I had forced upon her in exchange for her own. She told me that I had not only saved her from assault but that I had done more, I had saved the honor of France, and that she would some day prove her gratitude. Then she galloped away from me and left me standing staring in the road like a fool, madly in love with her!

Aye, this evidenced my folly, I will admit, but as they say here, "What would you?" She was the first lady I had seen in three years of cruising, and such a woman! If you had seen her you would have

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

understood ! How I had searched for her ! Blue eyes, dark hair ; tall, exquisitely moulded, graceful figure ; a dainty hand to match that foot I had slipped—this vague description might have fitted any woman or a million, and she was one of that million. It was no use. I should never see her again, and if I saw her now, disgraced as I was, I must avoid her.

So absorbed was I in these miserable musings that I hadn't heeded a tap at the door.

"*Ma foi !*" cried a rather shrill metallic voice as a man opened the door and stepped within.

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

“ My dear friend, I have rapped several times, and so I took the liberty . . . ”

“ Oh, come in by all means, Monsieur du Trémigon,” I replied, rising and welcoming the newcomer, although with no great cordiality.

He was the hatefulest of all the crowd with whom I had cast my lot since I had been in Paris, and I more than suspected it was to him that I had passed those little pieces of paper which began more and more definitely to impress themselves upon my recollection.

“ I suppose,” I said, “ that you have come to settle our

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

accounts of last night, Monsieur ?”

“There is no haste about that,” he returned politely enough, “but since you insist, as well now as any other time.”

“I shall be honest with you, Marquis,” I returned bluntly ; “I’m afraid I shall have to ask your indulgence for a short time.”

He drew from his pocket a package of papers and laid them on the table. I took them up as I spoke, and although I am no great hand at figures, I saw that the total was appalling. My heart sank, but I flatter my-

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

self that I displayed as equable a demeanor as the man opposite me. It has always been my practice to put a bold face on everything.

“Pray give yourself no uneasiness whatever about these little matters,” said the Marquis in his most genial manner—and the more gentle and kindly he was, strange to say, the more I hated him! “Or rather,” he continued, interrupting me as I began to speak, “I can show you a way to discharge them with little difficulty to yourself, and that immediately.”

“Show me that way!” I cried. “I will avail myself of it at

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

once. To tell you the truth, I am sick of the life I have led in this city."

"I thought," said du Trémigon, smiling meaningly, "that you were scarcely suited for——"

"What do you mean?" I burst out, glad for the chance to vent my indignation upon some one. "Didn't I bear myself like a gentleman?"

"Oh, quite so, entirely so. You misapprehend me, my dear Burnham," he protested.

"Well, I dare say you are right," I replied carelessly, too troubled to press the quarrel further. "I am a sailor. The

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

sea is my world. I am at home there or on my father's plantation in the Carolinas. But this is nothing to you. The point is, I am in your debt."

"This ring, Monsieur," said the Marquis, lifting his hand. "Do you know whose it is?"

"Yours, I suppose, since you won it," I replied. "It was mine."

"Pardon me, it was originally mine."

"What!"

"Mine."

"Then you are——?"

"The gentleman *en route* to London of whose purse you

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

kindly relieved him a few weeks ago.”

“Impossible !” I cried.

“Impossible, but true, Monsieur. I recognized you when I met you last week at Varesi’s” —the name of a popular gambling resort — “I wasn’t quite sure, however. At least, I had no proof until last night. This ring? You remember taking it?”

“Oh, perfectly,” I said, coolly enough, now that the murder was out.

“And this Louis?” He handed me that curiously marked coin. “A pocket piece I have had for a long time. I should know it

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

among a thousand," he added with provoking *sang froid*.

"You have established your case, Monsieur du Trémgon," I answered defiantly. "You understand, of course, that I am no common thief or highwayman. I am an American naval officer. Serving under Cunningham on a privateer, I was captured, thrown into prison, escaped. Being penniless in the enemy's country, I determined to take the purse of the first traveller who came along. I was told that you were an Englishman. When I discovered you were French, it was too late. I can only say

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

that I will give you another I. O. U. for all that I have despoiled you of, and so soon as I can communicate with America you shall have the money with interest."

At this long speech the Marquis showed his white teeth in a grimace—how I loathed him!—waving his hands as he did so.

"As to that, we will discuss it presently. Meanwhile, what did you do with the papers you robbed me of in England?"

"Tore them to pieces and scattered them in the first river I crossed."

"*Sacré bleu!*" cried the man,

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

touched on the quick. "I could stand the loss of the money, but the loss of those papers well-nigh ruined me!"

"How so?"

"I was carrying some secret despatches to the British Government, in spite of the war, and your blundering made me fail in my mission."

"Blundering!" I cried, menacingly.

"Pray be calm, Monsieur," he exclaimed; "the word may have been ill-advised, but you will recognize that some consideration is due me."

He looked meaningly at the little pile of notes. I followed

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

his glance, snatched up another piece of paper, scribbled a line on it, and added it to the heap.

“That covers your pecuniary loss, including the ring,” I said sullenly; “the other is past my mending.”

“Monsieur Burnham,” said the Marquis, adroitly shifting the ground of his attack, as it were, “are you aware of the exceedingly difficult position into which you have got yourself?”

“I should say I am! Being absolutely without funds, I am forced to ask total strangers to accept my bare word that I

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

will discharge my obligations so soon as I hear from America. This, with the seas swarming with British ships, may be a matter of many months." Meantime—

"There is your Ambassador. He knows you, doubtless?" asked the Marquis with what I thought quite natural interest under the circumstances.

"Dr. Franklin doesn't know me from Adam," I replied. "He's a Philadelphia Quaker, and I am from North Carolina. He has never seen me, nor I him. He knows my father and family, though. If there were any of our officers in the

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

city, if Commodore Jones or Dick Dale had only returned from the Texel, I should be all right, but as it is, I am completely at your mercy."

I hated to say that word, but there was no help for it. The Marquis bowed gracefully.

"Your remark is singularly accurate, Monsieur. At my mercy!"

He opened his mouth and tapped his white teeth with two of his white fingers. I wanted to choke him. Why I could not say, for he had been considerate, and I owed him a lot of money. I had robbed him in England, and,

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

beside, it appeared that I had put him to serious inconvenience by destroying his papers.

“At my mercy,” he repeated, nodding.

“I have admitted that fact,” I said sharply. “I do not see that it is necessary to remind me of it again.”

“Oh, pardon me. You Americans are so impetuous. Cultivate calmness, my friend—English phlegm, if you will. ’Tis a most valuable asset in any game of hazard.”

“That’s as may be, Marquis,” I returned, wondering the while what he would be at, “but I play no more games

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

with you or any man in Paris here."

"Pardon me again," he returned coolly; "we play yet one more hand, Monsieur, and I have the deal."

"What are you driving at?"

"I told you there was a way by which you could discharge all your obligations without delay."

"Declare it then, and let us close this transaction!"

"You are doubtless unaware, Monsieur Burnham," he began, and I almost hated my good honest American name on his lips, "and I speak to you in confidence, that my large estates

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

are greatly encumbered. I have a passion for play. I do not always enjoy the fortune I have had with you, and——” he laughed as he spoke. “In short, I find myself in very straitened circumstances.”

“I suppose you want your money and want it quick?” I burst out. “I can understand that easily enough, and I promise you——”

“There you go again, Monsieur, in your hasty American way,” he interrupted, checking me with another gesture of his hands. “I want money, it is true. I was born wanting money, I have lived wanting

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

money, and I suppose I shall die wanting money."

"You won't have any use for it after that," I thought, but all I said was: "Proceed, Monsieur."

"You are doubtless unaware, also, that Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Rivau, Comtesse de Villars in her own right, granddaughter of the Duc de Rivau-Huet, is my cousin?" he questioned.

"I have never heard of the young lady, but I recognize the honor in her relationship to you," I answered indifferently, yet with meaning apparent enough, after all.

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

The Marquis was not devoid of wit or understanding. His eye flashed at this evidence of the slight regard in which I held him, but he proceeded deliberately :

“Quite so, Monsieur. Her grandfather is my grandfather also. She is one of the richest women in France. Our respective parents arranged a marriage between us when we were children. The carrying out of that contract depends entirely on three people, the young lady, the Duc de Rivau-Huet and myself. It was stipulated that no constraint was to be used, and that, when she

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

reached her twentieth year, she was to give her consent without pressure, freely and willingly. If she did so, and her grandfather interposed no objection, and I desired it, we were to be married. If not"—he shrugged his shoulders once more—"I lose."

"Lose what?"

"The lady and, incidentally, her fortune."

I confessed to a very languid interest in the family history or the love affairs of the Marquis and the lady, but for politeness' sake I asked him another question.

"Permit me, since you have

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

broached the subject, does the lady consent or refuse ?”

“She consents, but the Duc refuses.”

“Ah !”

“But I hope that his refusal is not irrevocable.”

“For your sake I trust so,” I replied. “Yet I fail to see how this concerns me.”

“You shall learn directly. Mademoiselle de Villars is one of the Queen’s maids of honor. She usually resides at the Court at Versailles. For this week, however, she is on leave of absence, I have learned, and is in residence at the Hôtel de Rivau-Huet in Paris.”

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

“Yes?” I said interrogatively. I was beginning to feel some curiosity as to whither all this tended.

“As I said, Monsieur, the Duc seems insensible to the advantage of an alliance with me, strange to say.”

No wonder, I thought, reflecting that the Duc must be a man of nice discernment; but I took good care not to voice my thoughts.

“I have decided to compel him to consent,” went on the Marquis.

“And Mademoiselle de Villars?” I questioned suspiciously.

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

“She also wishes it. I may say”—he simpered disgustedly—“she is more anxious than I.”

“Monsieur du Trémigon,” I said sternly, repressing with difficulty an inclination to kick him, “do you assure me of the truth of what you have said?”

“Certainly.”

“On your word of honor as a gentleman?”

“As a gentleman and as a noble of France, Monsieur.”

I ought to have known he was lying, but I did not, and there seemed to be nothing for me to do but accept his statement, besides why should I

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

not? and what was the reason for my questioning him, anyway? Yet I continued my interrogation—why I could not explain.

“How do you propose to get the Duc’s consent?” I asked.

“There is a way to apply pressure to him, Monsieur, which will . . . let us say . . . induce his consent.”

“You wish to compromise her in her grandfather’s eyes?” I said, fathoming his meaning at last.

“Exactly.”

“But with her consent . . .”

“Your intuition does you credit.”

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

“That’s more than your intention does you,” I burst out scornfully.

“I can afford to indulge you in these little pleasantries, my friend,” he returned, with an evil look, “because”

“Why?” I cried.

“Because I intend that you shall be my agent in the little process.”

“You are reckoning without your host, Monsieur,” I said quickly. I was boiling with disgust and resentment.

“But not without my servant, Monsieur,” he retorted sharply. He could speak briefly and to the point on occasion it seemed.

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

“Servant?” I raged.

“Yes. Do you realize that I have only to place these things”—lifting the coin and ring—“in the hands of the authorities and lay a charge against you to have you clapped into prison?”

“I have been in prison before and got out, Monsieur du Trémigon,” I retorted defiantly, in spite of a certain uneasy feeling which I would not have discovered to him for worlds. “I can stand it again—for the sake of a woman.”

“You will doubtless get out of the prison into which I shall

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

put you, Monsieur, but it will be to go to the hangman, or mayhap to the headsman if you can prove your gentle blood."

"What!"

"You forget that little transaction in England. You are a highway robber! I have evidence enough to convict you beyond doubt."

"The French Government would never . . ."

"The French Government is angry enough over the loss of those papers, and the punishment for highway robbery is death," he sneered.

"My God!" I cried.

"'Tis useless to appeal to

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

Him," mocked du Trémigon. "Rather do you fall back on your mother-wit—if you have any—to help you."

"What do you wish me to do?" I asked desperately.

"Ah, now we hear reason. I thought——"

"Spare me your thoughts," I interrupted, "and give me your plan."

"'Tis very simple. We are about the same height and build. We do not look unlike——"

"You flatter me!"

"'Tis the fact that does that," he replied, bowing deeply. "In the dusk you



The Slipper is Sought

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

can easily pass for me, especially if you wear a familiar suit of my clothes. I will get you into the grounds of the Hôtel de Rivau-Huet below Mademoiselle's apartment. The building is vine-covered. Being a sailor, you can easily scale the wall and enter her chamber. You are to bring me thence some article of personal wearing apparel—say a slipper, or a ring, or——”

“Is that all?”

“That's all.”

“Why don't you do it yourself?” I asked him.

“It is hardly necessary to enter upon that, Monsieur.”

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

“If I am to do the thing,” I replied hotly, seeing that he did not wish to tell me, “I must know everything.”

“Well, then,” he admitted reluctantly enough, “the Duc de Rivau-Huet has threatened me with imprisonment if he catches me in his Hôtel again.”

“And you wish me to take that risk?”

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

“I am to do this at the peril of my life?” I persisted with deep scorn at his cowardice.

“It seems to me,” said the Marquis, striving to sustain my unconcealed contempt equably,

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

“that your life is forfeit if you don't do it, and——”

“Enough!” I answered. “I am in your power. When I made the first serious mistake of taking you for a gentleman I began my ruin. All the rest follows logically. I'm sorry I didn't kill you in England. I suppose there's no help for it now. I must do the work. When do you wish this precious adventure undertaken?”

“To-night. If you will come to my rooms, I will fit you out, give you the plan of the hôtel and make all other arrangements.”

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

“And those obligations of mine?”

“They shall be returned to you when you place what you secure from the room in my hands.”

“What assurance have I as to that?”

“The word of a gentleman.”

“In your case I prefer something else.”

The Marquis flushed angrily. Why he controlled himself under all my insults I do not know, unless it was because he was so desperately anxious to carry out his plan and I was his only instrument. I was in his power, of course, but I was

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

determined to let him see that I did not fear him ; indeed, I am sure the man realized that from my bearing.

“What do you propose ?” he asked, with an evil look at me.

“To go before a notary and draw up an agreement, leaving the papers in his hands, including the ring and the coin, and a signed statement, acquitting me of all complication in the robbery. These papers he is to give to me in the morning, if I succeed. Furthermore, I won't go into the matter without the assistance of an old sailor with whom I cruised.”

“Take as many assistants as

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

you please, Monsieur," said the Marquis, malevolently; "and now we will go to my apartments. Will you honor me?"

He rose and offered me his arm.

"I have to do your dirty work," I replied, declining it, "and that obliges me to walk by your side, I suppose, but it doesn't compel me to take your arm, Monsieur."

My soul revolted against carrying out my part of the plot, even though by so doing I was in a certain sense obliging a lady. True, she might be—and if his words were true, she was—in love with

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

du Trémigon, but I was sure she could not know him as I knew him. Besides, what were the love affairs of the Marquis and his cousin to me? I had no personal interest in either of them. My only desire was to extricate myself from my sorry predicament. I was in the Marquis' power completely. The case was desperate, life and liberty depended upon my action. I must do what he said unless I freed myself by killing him out of hand. I had thought of challenging him, of course, but I knew that he would decline to fight me and hand me over to the police.

THE SLIPPER IS SOUGHT

There was no help for it ; in the hands of a knave even an honest man is helpless. All I had to do was to fetch him a slipper or some personal belonging from her chamber. She herself desired it ; I took some comfort in that.

Well, the long and short of it was that I resolved to do it. I had to ! And yet it was a mean, knavish thing to do, and I fully realized it. I loathed the task, but there was no help for it.

CHAPTER II



THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

FROM some servant in the Duc de Rivau-Huet's hotel, whom he had suborned, du Trémigon had learned that the Comtesse de Villars was to be from home that night. He arranged to have me passed through the gate. After that I was to look out for myself. The Duc's hotel, which was surrounded by ample grounds, was just outside the city walls. The Marquis

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

told me that, dressed in his clothes and with a cloak he was accustomed to wear, I should very well pass for him, and that in all probability no one would molest me unless I fell in with Éspiau, the Duc's body-servant, or some of the upper officers of the household. He swore that the domestics were as well affected toward him as the lady, and as all the world loves a lover, they would be disposed rather to encourage than to hinder.

Du Trémigon, with singular parsimony, I thought, had designated a rather shabby suit for my use. I insisted upon seeing

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

his wardrobe and deliberately selected the handsomest garments he possessed, choosing a color that well became my face and figure. He protested, but vainly, for I said that I must be dressed like a gentleman. He complained that I would probably tear and certainly soil his court suit in climbing. I returned that if I carried out his enterprise and won him a rich wife he could well afford to lose a suit, whereas if I were caught and shot it would be some consolation to me to know that I was well dressed for dying, and there the matter terminated. I had my way, as I

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

usually do. He could make me do the thing he wanted, but I would stand no haggling over costs or hectoring as to details, I let him know pretty quickly.

I also took a handsome sword from the rare collection of weapons which he had in his apartments. I may not be much of a card player, but I pride myself that I know a weapon, and I chose a blade that I could depend upon. I got two pistols for myself and two for worthy Master Bucknall. Bucknall was an old shipmate of mine. I knew I could rely upon him. We had fought side by side on several cruises,

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

and although he had not been with me when I was captured, he had lately appeared in Paris after a shipwreck in which he had been picked up by a French frigate. I found him penniless, and, of course, looked after him, intending to take him with me when I saw Dr. Franklin and arranged to go back to America. The Marquis had him fetched from his lodgings, and I explained the whole situation to the worthy seaman.

Bucknall was to remain concealed in the grounds beneath Mademoiselle's room while I was within. I didn't care to be taken in the rear, and I knew

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

if an alarm were given, that the faithful boatswain's mate would keep a way of escape open for me as long as he could. To him I gave my own sword and the extra brace of pistols.

I had studied a plan of the château which du Trémigon gave me and I knew the lay of the land and the position of the chambers perfectly. A bath, a rest and a meal completed my preparations. No, I forget one thing. I knew that many a door that will not open to iron and steel is facile to a golden key, and I made du Trémigon provide me with a rouleau of Louis. He did it with a very



THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

ill grace, it must be admitted. In the first place, he had none too many, and, in the second, I suppose, he thought he had laid out enough in the adventure. I insisted, however, giving him in lieu thereof another signed paper to add to his already rather complete collection. I saw the humor of it, if he did not. These matters and the visit to the notary, where I had things made secure from my point of view, filled the day.

At eight o'clock, being thus well equipped, we sallied forth. Du Trémigon had furnished us with a couple of horses. We

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

had no difficulty passing the gates—he had provided us with the password—and finding the Duc's mansion. The Marquis did not accompany us. He intended to give out that he had paid a visit to the Countess in her chamber, and in proof of it was to exhibit her slipper. The Countess being at the masked ball, where no one could recognize her for hours, no one could disprove his statement, especially as she, so he affirmed, would be only to glad to corroborate it. Of course, if anybody saw him elsewhere his plan would fail, so he was to lie close and await our return.

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

When we came near the place I left the horses in care of an innkeeper to whom du Trémigon had recommended me. I gave instructions to have them ready for instant service at any hour. I expected that we would return for them before midnight. Then Bucknall and I walked boldly down the road toward the gate of the mansion. Du Trémigon had told us that his servant was one-eyed, so Bucknall was disguised by a patch over one eye, which gave him great inconvenience, by the way, and at which, sailor-like, the old sea dog growled mightily.

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

I drew the Marquis' cloak well up around my neck, pulled my hat down, and assumed as near as I could his mincing gait and manner. In the dark we might well pass for du Tremigon and his servant. The porter at the gate was evidently expecting us. At least, he made no difficulty about passing us through. Then we were left to shift for ourselves.

The night was dark and chill. There were no dogs in the yard. The Duc kept his hounds in the country. No one disturbed us as we made our way cautiously along the wall under the trees to the window of the



THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

Countess' apartment in the second story. A few lights showed here and there through the different openings on this side of the house. Among them a faint illumination came from the window beneath which we stood. I looked up at it with interest. It seemed that no one could be in the room. The light was probably a single candle, left burning in case of need. This agreed with our information.

Making sure that no one saw us, we crossed the grass and stopped under the window. The house was an old one. There were buttresses against

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

the wall, and the one nearest the Countess' window was in a dilapidated condition. A vine ran all over this side of the building. I was always active and I had not dissipated in Paris long enough to have lost my nerve. I glanced upward. It would not be difficult. If the vine held—and its stem was as thick as my wrist—the ascent would be easy. Wrapping my cloak around me so as to protect du Trémigon's clothes as much as possible, and with a word of caution to Bucknall, whom I saw secreted comfortably in the black recess between the buttress and the

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

wall, I quickly made my way up. So long as I had the assistance of the buttress it was nearly as easy as walking up a stair, as simple as climbing the battens on the side of a ship. The last fathom was more difficult, but I managed it with a few scratches and with a minimum of noise.

I had no foothold to give me an opportunity to peer into the room or see what was before me. Immediately I reached the sill, I threw my leg over it and stepped quietly within. I stood by the window listening. Neither from outside nor inside was there any sound. By the

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

favor of Fortune, I had been unobserved so far.

Satisfying myself on this point, I stepped back from the window to avoid the line of light, so as not to be seen by any chance passer-by in the park, and looked about me. The room appeared to be a woman's sitting-room. There was an air of refinement, of grace and culture about it that made me sure. There were books on the table, pictures on the walls, a piece of some sort of needlework thrown carelessly on a chair. Several doors opened from the room. According to the plan, that on the right

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

should be the Countess' boudoir, and beyond that should lie her bedchamber. I stepped softly across to this door. I listened. There was no one in the other room apparently. I turned the handle carefully and entered.

Just beyond me was the door of the bedchamber. Repeating my performance, I walked over to it and listened before it also. No one was there. I opened the door and peered in. Like the others, this room was lighted by a single candle. Like the others, it was unoccupied.

It was quite evident that du Trémigon's informant was cor-

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

rect. The Countess was out. Her maid, who should have been on guard, had taken advantage of her mistress' absence to go off on a little jaunt of her own, I surmised. I closed the door of the bed-chamber softly and began a hasty examination of the boudoir. A dress lay across a chair. A magnificent costume, it seemed to me.

A pair of shoes—a ravishing pair of tiny shoes—stood on the floor before the gown. These might do. But no, a brief examination showed me that they had not been worn; they were entirely new. Du

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

Tremigon had insisted upon something personal and familiar. I walked over to the dressing-table, which was covered with a mass of silver and porcelain toilet contrivances; mirrors, brushes, jars, powder boxes, and other things I had never seen and knew not the use of, being unfamiliar with woman's gear, having neither mother nor sisters of my own. They bore the de Villars crest, but so did a number of things in du Tremigon's own Hôtel. None of them would answer.

I remembered the room contained a closet. Nerving myself further, I opened the near-

THE SLIPPER IS FOUND

est door. On the floor, confronting me, lay a pair of small, worn, blue satin slippers with red heels. They were slightly shaped to the feet of their wearer from long usage. There were no other feet in the world that would fit those slippers, in all probability. They would serve admirably.

I stooped and picked one up. A blue satin slipper, with a red heel! There were thousands of such slippers in Paris doubtless, yet—it could not be, I said to myself, as I thrilled to the touch of it.

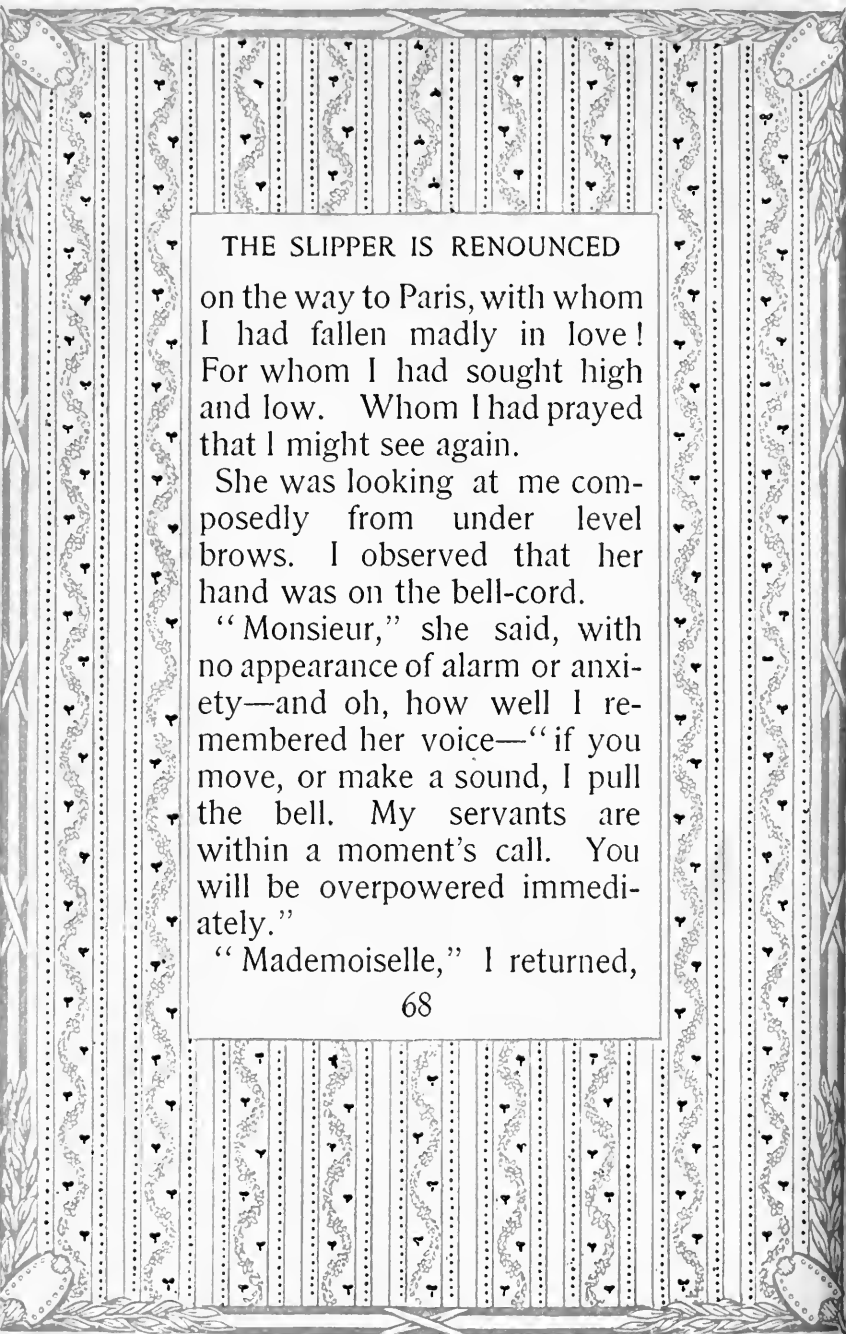
CHAPTER III



THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

WITH the slipper still in my hand, I turned to find myself confronting a woman !

She was standing at the door leading to the antechamber. How long she had been there I knew not. Indeed, after the first start of surprise, I had room but for one thought. For, with a great leap of my heart, I had recognized her. The woman was she whom I had rescued



THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

on the way to Paris, with whom I had fallen madly in love! For whom I had sought high and low. Whom I had prayed that I might see again.

She was looking at me composedly from under level brows. I observed that her hand was on the bell-cord.

“Monsieur,” she said, with no appearance of alarm or anxiety—and oh, how well I remembered her voice—“if you move, or make a sound, I pull the bell. My servants are within a moment’s call. You will be overpowered immediately.”

“Mademoiselle,” I returned,

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

bowing low to cover my dismay and disguising my natural voice as well as I could, thanking the Lord the while that my French was perfect, and that in the dim light she did not recognize me apparently—how could she in that guise and in such a situation? “I am at your service.”

“I wish,” she continued gravely, “to talk with you. The situation amuses me.”

She spoke as she might in the presence of some newspectacle. Her manner assured me that her interest in me was entirely impersonal. She was tired and bored. This was a novel ex-

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

perience apparently which she wished to make the most of. Reluctantly I admit that I could think of nothing adequate to say—I am usually rather quick at repartee, and have been thought to possess a ready tongue, but this situation completely nonplussed me—so I bowed more profoundly than before.

“What is your name and what are you doing here?” she continued.

“My name, Mademoiselle, matters nothing.” In my agitation I forgot my rôle for the moment, and spoke in my natural voice. She started, then

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

lifted the candle and looked keenly at me.

“Why!” she exclaimed, in great surprise, “’tis my knight of the highway, the gallant sailor!”

I do not know whether I was glad or sorry to hear her say those words. At first I thought to deny it, but somehow it was impossible.

“You have discovered me, Mademoiselle,” I said boldly, wondering where this would lead me.”

“Then you were masquerading as a common sailor. Now——”

She paused and looked me

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

over from head to heel, and I have been told since that I made a brave appearance. Du Trémigon had displayed excellent taste in clothing, and by my forethought and determination I was wearing his handsomest suit. I stood proudly erect, putting a bold face on the situation, with one hand upon my sword, my hat in the other, which also held the slipper, as if I were about to be presented to the King, although my cheeks burned scarlet under her scrutiny.

“Now,” she said at last, “you are masquerading as a gentleman.”

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“Pardon, Mademoiselle,” I returned, “I am a gentleman”—she put up her hand, but I would not be denied—“masquerading as a thief.”

“Is it because you have stolen the Marquis du Trémigon’s clothes?—for I believe, if I am not mistaken, they are his.”

“Your observation does you infinite credit, Mademoiselle.”

“I thought so. Is it for that reason you are masquerading as a . . . thief?”

I blessed her in my heart for her hesitation over that word.

“Because I have come here without regard to clothes to—” I protested.

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“To take my jewels?” she interrupted.

“Mademoiselle!” I cried, starting back, the blood flaming in my face again. “You think——”

“I think nothing, Monsieur. I discover a strange man in my apartment at night. He says that he is masquerading as a thief—the word is your own, sir. What else am I to infer?”

I was dumb before her merciless logic.

“Mademoiselle,” I began desperately, constrained by her silence to some kind of a reply, “I deeply regret——”

“So, too, do I. Monsieur,”

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

she retorted promptly. "I knew—at least I thought I knew, on that day, the day you did me such brave service—that you were a gentleman, in spite of what you wore, yet—well, I see I was deceived."

"Don't say that!" I protested again.

"Why not, Monsieur?"

"Mademoiselle, I am here in defiance of every rule of propriety, I will admit. You may well think me a thief," I began, with passionate haste, a useful idea occurring to me at that instant, "but I am only following your example."

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“How, sir?” she exclaimed.
“You, too, are not guiltless
of robbery.”

“What do you mean?” she
asked, indignantly drawing her-
self up.

Jove! how magnificent she
looked! I wanted to throw
myself at her feet and confess
everything, but I dared not—
then. When a woman gets
you in a tight place, make love
to her—that was my idea, as it
had ever been my practice.
You can imagine how congenial
was the attempt in this instance
when I already adored this
young lady.

“You have stolen my heart,

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

Mademoiselle," I continued with growing courage.

"And you came to look for it in my jewel-case?" she laughed somewhat contemptuously.

"I have come for yours in exchange," said I; although I had a neat opening for a biting retort to her question, I judged it best to let it pass.

"Monsieur!"

"I am a poor sailor, Mademoiselle, but I have sought you throughout the land. I babbled everywhere as I ran of blue eyes, dark hair, a witching face. I found you—nowhere!"

There was a ring of truth in

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

these words—although of course it did not explain my presence there—that I believe influenced her.

“’Tis impossible, Monsieur—” she began at last.

“Look into the glass, Mademoiselle, and see how believable it is,” I broke in.

“That you should have come here on such an errand and—”

“I would go to the end of the world if I might find you there, Mademoiselle,” I boldly said, taking a step nearer to her.

“Monsieur!” she cried, clutching the bell-rope once more. “Pray keep your distance.”

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“I am content merely to look at you,” I said, stopping short instantly.

“Monsieur, on your word of honor as a—” She paused.

“As a thief?” I questioned.

“As a gentleman,” she said softly, and I could have kissed her feet for that. “Did you come here for me?”

“Mademoiselle,” I said, “it is a long story. You have honored me by your conversation. You found something gentle in me on the road and in spite of appearances—that are so grievously against me now—you have reposed a certain degree of confidence in me.

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

Will you allow me to tell you briefly who and what I am?"

"I am anxious to learn it."

"Will you not be seated?"

You may release the bell-rope, on my word, without danger. I would rather die than harm you. Indeed, my greatest ambition is to devote my life to your service."

"Fine words, Monsieur, and such as I have often heard from other cavaliers."

"I doubt it not, Mademoiselle. Such beauty of person and grace of mind as yours cannot remain unchallenged. This shall be my excuse."

"No more of this, if you

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

please, but of yourself." It was ineffable condescension, and you may imagine how I appreciated the honor.

"My name is Francis Burnham. My family on the distaff side is French-Huguenot. The blood, I believe, is noble. My great-grandfather was an English gentleman. My father met my mother in North Carolina. The acreage my father owns is equal to a French county."

"You are an American, then?"

"I have that honor. I am also an officer in the American Navy. My country is ill provided with warships. Many naval officers have been forced

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

to accept positions in privateers. I was a lieutenant in Captain Gustavus Cunningham's privateer ship, *Revenge*. We were captured by a British frigate and taken to a British prison-ship. I escaped thence and was on my way to Paris, to see Dr. Franklin, when I had the good fortune to be of some slight service to you. That gold piece you gave me, I have it here." I saw her hand involuntarily move to her breast and my heart leaped as it assured me that she also had retained and cherished the coin I had forced upon her. "I have loved you ever since I saw you

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

that day, Mademoiselle. I have sought you everywhere in vain until to-night."

"That, Monsieur," she said quietly, "does not yet explain your presence here."

I was dumb again. She was a rare woman indeed and quite able to stick to a point.

"How did you discover my abode?" she persisted. I racked my brains, but I could make no reply.

"How did you learn my name?" she continued, pressing me mercilessly.

Unthinkingly, I answered:

"I do not know your name at this moment."

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

"I am Gabrielle de Rivau, Comtesse de Villars."

"Great Heavens!" I exclaimed.

Would you believe it? It had not occurred to me for a moment that this was she! I had jumped to the conclusion that she was perhaps some friend of the Countess'. I had never dreamed that fate could play me so sorry a trick as to involve me in such a part against the woman I adored.

"You are surprised, Monsieur?" she asked, curious to know why her name so affected me, apparently.

"Are you the Comtesse de

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

Villars ?" I asked, hoping against hope that I had not heard aright.

"I am."

"But how could I know ?" I faltered lamely, able to think of nothing but that this woman I loved so passionately was devoted to du Trémigon.

"Monsieur Burnham, you are full of mystery," she said impatiently.

"I have told you nothing but the truth, Mademoiselle."

"Yes ; but not all of it. Is it not so ?"

I was silent again.

"Monsieur," she resumed at last, "you doubtless realize that

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

I have committed a great imprudence in allowing you to converse with me here alone, under such circumstances? That my duty should be to pull the bell and hand you over to the Duc's retainers for punishment? That you owe much to my forbearance?"

"I realize all that you say, Mademoiselle, and I am filled with gratitude and shame."

"Why, then, are you here? What are you doing in the Marquis du Trémigon's clothing? What is that you hold?"

I thoughtlessly lifted my hand.

"My slipper!" she exclaimed indignantly, flushing in her

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

turn. "You have been in my closet yonder. What does it mean? I demand an answer."

"And you shall have it!" I replied desperately, resolved to make a clean breast of the whole affair. "I am in the power of the Marquis du Trémigon. I owe him money."

"Heaven help you!"

"I am surprised to hear you say that!" I exclaimed in amazement. This sounded not like a loving woman.

"Monsieur," she said quickly, disregarding my remark, "my purse is on the table. Let me discharge my obligation. Take what you will."

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“Mademoiselle, for God’s sake, think not so unkindly of me! He threatened me with imprisonment for debt. That is nothing, a mere bagatelle. I could have borne that without hesitation. I have broke prison before.”

“Well, sir?”

“There is more. When I escaped from the British prisonship I was penniless; alone in England. I halted the first traveller I met, thinking to despoil the enemy for my needs as an act of war. That traveller happened to be the Marquis du Trémigon. I met him afterward at—at places where they

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

play in Paris," I went on. "He won all my money, a ring I had taken from him and a coin which bore certain markings. These things were proofs positive. He threatened to charge me with highway robbery. The punishment is death. I pleaded with him, promising to repay him if he would give me time. Our minister is absent, Commodore Paul Jones not in Paris. I was desperate. I loved life, Mademoiselle, for it held you as a possibility."

"But that you should come here, Monsieur? How does that——?"

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“Hear me, Mademoiselle. The Marquis du Trémigon has informed me of the nature of the agreement regarding your proposed marriage.”

“And what did Monsieur du Trémigon say as to that?”

“That by the terms of the contract three people must consent willingly before the marriage can take place.”

“Three, Monsieur?”

“He so informed me, Mademoiselle.”

“And those are?”

“Yourself, the Duc, your grandfather, and himself.”

Her lip curled.

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“Proceed, Monsieur. This is most interesting.”

“He said further that you were—forgive me—anxious to marry him.”

I could see Mademoiselle clench her hand, I could mark the flash of her eye, and I took hope and courage from these manifestations of her feelings.

“That he was anxious to marry you, but that your grandfather refused his consent,” I went on, my heart beating with regained hope.

“And that, with your approval, he had arranged to”—it was a deeply humiliating thing to have to say with her standing

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

before me like an outraged goddess, but I had to go on—"to compromise you with him so that your grandfather would no longer withhold his consent."

"And you were to be the means whereby this plan was to be carried out?"

"To my shame I admit it. I agreed to come here and steal some article belonging to you of a personal character."

"My slipper?"

"That or whatever else I could secure. I wore his clothes because he wished the servants to recognize them, and thus be prepared to swear that he was with you."

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

"'Tis a pretty plot for a gentleman!" she cried with withering scorn in her voice, and yet a tinge of sadness and disappointment, too.

"Mademoiselle, to my sorrow and regret, I acknowledge it," I admitted humbly. "Yet I beg to assure you that not even the fear of imprisonment or death would have made me consent, had I not believed that I was doing a lady a service."

"Do you think you do any lady a service by forcing her into the arms of the Marquis du Trémigon?" asked Mademoiselle emphatically.

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“But if she love him?” I urged.

“Monsieur,” she said hotly,
“she hates him!”

“Is it possible?” I cried, striving to control my agitation, yet I could not conceal my joy, nor did I desire so to do.

“You have been grossly deceived, Monsieur,” she said swiftly. “The only consent necessary to the marriage is my own. My grandfather has neither given nor withheld his consent. He has left it entirely to me.”

“To you, Mademoiselle?” I exclaimed, my heart leaping at the thought that she did not love that villain.

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“To me, sir,” she answered proudly.

“And — forgive me — your answer, Mademoiselle?”

“I have refused and shall refuse. The whole base plot is an attempt to compromise me, to force my consent.”

Into what dastardly scheme had I been betrayed! The sweat rose to my forehead.

“Mademoiselle,” I cried, “for God’s sake acquit me of any such dishonor!”

“I do, Monsieur, freely.”

She was as kind as she was beautiful. She believed me and forgave me. Judge how I loved her after that.

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

“I shall go back to du Tremignon and explain my appearance to him immediately,” I began, turning away. “I shall compel him to give me satisfaction for this insult ; an insult to you as well as to me. Your quarrel with him shall be mine. He will trouble you no more,” I added significantly.

“Stay, Monsieur, your plan is vain,” she interposed.

“I know the Marquis du Trémigon. You will find him surrounded by such a force as will paralyze your efforts. He will refuse to fight with you.”

“At least I shall have the satisfaction of telling him what

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

I think, and I shall go to prison if necessary.”

“I would not have you suffer on my account, Monsieur.”

“Mademoiselle, you are kindness itself. I deserve nothing whatever at your hands. If you could only believe in me, in my love for you, a little before I go——”

“Monsieur, the circumstances are very unusual. That day you so bravely rescued me from those scoundrels and treated me with such chivalry, I knew you were not of the common people. Your dress indicated that you

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

were, but my heart—my mind, that is—told me otherwise.”

Her voice faltered, but she looked at me clearly with those glorious eyes of hers, the brighter now for the color in her cheeks.

“But when I found you here,” she resumed presently, “and thought you meant to degrade me, to force me into the arms of that villain——”

“Mademoiselle !” I protested, taking a step toward the door, “you cannot accuse me as I do myself. At least I can make amends now.”

“But is there nothing I can

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

do for you?" she asked, as if loath to let me go.

"Nothing. The papers, the obligations, the evidence against me, are in the hands of a notary. If he does not hear from the Marquis and myself jointly to-morrow, according to our arrangement he has orders to hand the packet to the Chief of Police."

"What then do you propose to do, sir?"

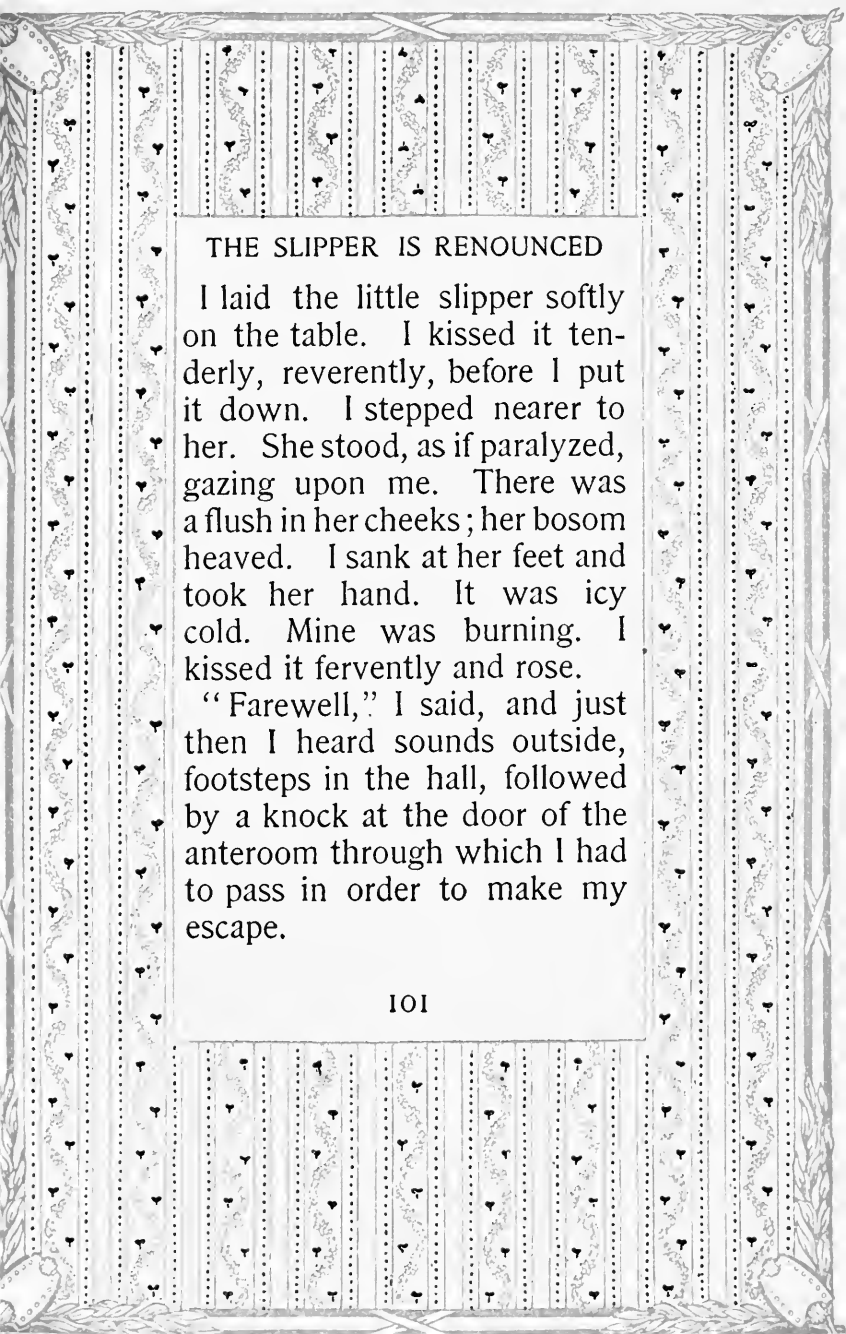
"First of all to warn you. Beware of du Trémigon. This episode will tell you something of his despicable villainy, but not all. Although he has failed in this instance, he will surely

THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

strive again to compromise your honor. There will be one ray of comfort in my soul when I leave you, that I have again been able to render some slight assistance to you. And I cherish the hope, if you think of me at all, that you will bear in mind that I love you."

"But, Monsieur——"

"Mademoiselle, if I had met you under happier circumstances, I should have made it my prayer to live for you. Now at least I can die for you, and I trust that my death will redeem this disgrace upon my name."



THE SLIPPER IS RENOUNCED

I laid the little slipper softly on the table. I kissed it tenderly, reverently, before I put it down. I stepped nearer to her. She stood, as if paralyzed, gazing upon me. There was a flush in her cheeks; her bosom heaved. I sank at her feet and took her hand. It was icy cold. Mine was burning. I kissed it fervently and rose.

“Farewell,” I said, and just then I heard sounds outside, footsteps in the hall, followed by a knock at the door of the anteroom through which I had to pass in order to make my escape.

CHAPTER IV



THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

I MADE a swift movement toward the door, intending to rush to the window, no matter who barred the way. I reached for my sword as I did so. Quick as I was Mademoiselle was quicker. Although her face had gone white at the noise, she had instantly begun to sing. Strange action, for which I could then see no excuse. Still lilting lightly a charming little air,

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

she stood between me and the door.

“Not that way!” she whispered in the breaks of the song.

“It would be death. In there.”

She pointed toward her bed-chamber. The knocking was resumed, this time more loudly.

A voice cried :

“Countess . . . Gabrielle !”

Her check of me had spoiled my chance. There was nothing but obedience. I slipped into the chamber and closed the door. The song broke off suddenly. I could hear distinctly all that was said. Mademoiselle raised her voice, crying :

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“Who is there?”

“I, your grandfather,” was the answer.

“Enter, Monsieur.”

“The door is locked.”

How I blessed that lock! So, I doubt not, did Mademoiselle. I heard her go slowly into the antechamber, where she seemed to be fumbling at the lock a few moments before she opened the door. Then I heard two people enter.

“Wait, Messieurs!” cried Mademoiselle as she caught sight of the second visitor, “I was preparing to retire.” With marvelous quickness, as I

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

afterward learned, she had taken off her bodice, with what tearing of laces and hooks you can readily guess, after I had entered the chamber, and was now bare as to neck and arms before her grandfather. She hastily slipped on a loose dressing-robe and once more turned to him.

“ ’Tis only my good Éspiau, Mademoiselle,” said the Duc quickly.

“ I am very glad indeed,” said Mademoiselle, with a gay little laugh, which bespoke her power of self control marvellously well besides ringing beautifully in my listen-

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

ing ear, "for you caught me quite unaware."

"I thought," continued the old Duc as he entered the boudoir, "that I heard voices." He looked around suspiciously.

"You did, Monsieur," answered the Countess.

Was I mistaken, or was there a tremble in her voice? Her situation was grave. Did the Duc discover me, he would kill me out of hand, unless I inflicted a like penalty upon him, which, under the circumstances, never entered my mind.

"Great Heavens!" thought I, "are you about to betray me?"

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

"Whose?" went on the old man again.

"Mine, sir; I was singing."

She began again that little song, the words of which I recall so well and even, the music of which I shall never forget, although I am no great hand at carrying a tune. A song is one of the few things I can't master, by the way.

"Humph!" said the old man. "You did not go to the masked ball?"

"No, Monsieur, I was tired. I had been reading in the library and have but recently come here."

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

"There was no one in the anteroom when you entered?"

"No one, sir."

"Have you been in the room beyond since you came up?"

"Not yet."

"Éspiau!"

"Monsieur le Duc!"

"Examine yonder chamber. It may be some thief has concealed himself there."

The Duc turned his head away to survey the room and Mademoiselle shot one glance, pregnant with agony and entreaty, at the old servant. He had been as a father to her from childhood—indeed, he had been her father's foster-brother.

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“Very well, Monsieur le Duc,” answered the servant.

I heard him crossing the room. What should I do? There was no place of concealment. The window happened to be barred, else I should have thrown myself from it. Should I fall upon him and run my sword through him? I drew the weapon, without making a sound, and waited. The door opened slowly and only partially. Éspiau saw me at once. He put his finger to his lips and closed his eyes.

“I see no one, Monsieur le Duc,” he said, turning his head.

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“Examine thoroughly,” returned the old man.

Éspiau thereupon stepped into the room, looked under the bed, shook the curtains, making a deal of noise as he moved about, and managing to say to me softly :

“Silence, as you value your life !”

Presently he returned to the others. I breathed a long sigh of relief. I remember wiping the sweat from my brow.

“Monsieur le Duc was doubtless mistaken,” said the old man quietly.

“Yes,” said the Duc, “I’m glad of it. Times are in such

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

disorder. There are many masterless men about, and your apartment is easy of access from the garden. I must change it, Countess."

"At your pleasure, grandfather," said Mademoiselle, and then she actually began to sing that little love song a third time. The courage of that girl was superb! It made me love her more madly than before, if that were possible. Being a fearless man myself, I was naturally attracted by such qualities in a woman. She was the mate above all others for me, and I determined she should be mine, if wit, assur-

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

ance and a bold heart could bring it about.

“I am glad to find you here,” said the Duc, “for I have brought you some papers which require your signature. I intended to leave them until morning, but unless you feel inclined to retire——”

“No, Monsieur, I never felt so wide awake in my life,” answered Mademoiselle.

“Good! I will leave them with you. Éspiau will explain them to you, and we can finish the discussion in the morning. I am tired and feel the need of rest. Good night.”

“Good night, grandfather,”

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

said Mademoiselle ; “ may you rest well.”

“ Good night, my child,” said the old man, relaxing for the moment the formality of his address as he took her hand, drew her toward him, pressed a kiss upon her forehead, bowed to her as to a queen and walked away.

The two left within the boudoir moved not until the echo of the Duc’s footsteps died away in the distance of the corridor.

“ Mademoiselle,” at last began Éspiau in a voice in which sorrow and affection strove for the mastery.

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“Judge me not,” said Made-moiselle quickly.

“Who is that man?”

I thought now it was time for me to make my entrance. I opened the door, therefore, and presented myself.

“My name is Francis Burnham, my good fellow. I am an officer in the American Navy.”

“How came you here and what would you do?”

“That scoundrel du Trémigon sent him here to compromise me,” the Countess interposed.

“The dastard!” exclaimed the servant.

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“But Monsieur did not think it was I,” continued Made-moiselle, who looked even more beautiful in the negligee she had assumed which gave me delicious glimpses of neck and arms sweeter than the wildest dream. “You remember when I went on that errand for Her Majesty the Queen?” I started at this. Éspiau nodded. “This gentleman had the good fortune to save me from capture then. I should have been robbed of those papers. I found him here this evening. He had abjured his errand and was on the point of departure when——”

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“My friend,” I interrupted, “what Mademoiselle said is absolutely true, and I believed, furthermore, that I was doing her a service.”

“I need not your assurance for that, Monsieur,” said the old man proudly; “the noble house of de Rivau does not lie.”

“I wish the same might be said of the house of du Trémigon,” I retorted lightly; “but be that as it may, I am not anxious to forfeit any man’s good-will.”

“Not even that of a servant, Monsieur?” he interrupted.

“Not even that. It was a

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

case of life or death for me. I am in du Trémigon's power. Not knowing that it was Mademoiselle—for I did not learn until this evening that she was the Comtesse de Villars—I came. I am sorry. I am going back to give myself up to the Marquis. You may guess what that will mean." He shrugged his shoulders. "Before I go, allow me to express my gratitude for your forbearance. You have saved my life. The Duc would have killed me, for I should have made no resistance."

"It was death for me to see you there—to suspect—but

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

Mademoiselle will forgive me——” said the old man.

“There is no need, my good Éspiau,” said Mademoiselle, extending her hand.

The worthy servitor kissed it like a gentleman. Indeed, I dare say, compared to du Trémigon, and others I had met in Paris, he was as fine a gentleman as any of them.

“I should like to shake you by the hand,” I said.

“Monsieur honors me,” said Éspiau.

I didn't know whether there was sarcasm in his voice or not, but we shook hands vigorously.

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“Mademoiselle,” I continued, turning to her, “there is but one thing for me to do.”

“What is that?”

“To wish you farewell and to go as I came.”

“Wait,” said Mademoiselle, her hand on her breast. “I have something to say to you.”

“At your service, Mademoiselle.”

“Éspiau, can you trust me further?”

“In everything, Mademoiselle,” said the old man.

He was a well-trained fellow, with as much tact as discretion.

He bowed to me, and I swear I couldn't help it, I returned his

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

bow as if he had been an equal, and he marched out of the room as stately as a grenadier.

“Is there no way,” began Mademoiselle hastily, “for you to escape du Trémigon?”

“None.”

“I have money.”

“Mademoiselle,” I cried, “I shall take nothing from this room but the recollection of your kindness, the consciousness of your worth, the sense of your beauty.”

“But you will be imprisoned!”

“I have had this hour of freedom. The rest is nothing.”

“They will put you to death.”

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“Without you, I do not care to live.”

“Mon Dieu, what shall I do?”

“If you could say—if you could let me believe—it will be but for a short time—that, were the circumstances other than they are, you might perhaps have cared for me, it will lighten the hours and give me something sweet to dwell upon. It will make me indifferent to any fate.”

“Monsieur—I—I—” she faltered, her face aflame. She buried it in her hands.

I sank on my knee again and seized the hem of her gown.

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

Then I felt her hands lightly upon my head. I rose to my feet. I don't know how or why, but I swept her unresisting to my breast in a passionate embrace. Her lips met mine. Her arms went round my neck. It was sweet, it was heavenly sweet. I had won her. She loved me.

"No more," she said finally, gently thrusting me away at last. "I have gone too far. You must not, can not, go to him now."

"I am in heaven already, Mademoiselle, and death cannot alter the fact that you return my love."

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

“But you will not go to him?”

“I must.”

“No!”

I shook my head.

“Well, then you shall not go empty handed,” she whispered, on fire with a sudden splendid resolution.

She stooped, and before I knew what she was about, she took off one of her dainty slippers—warm from her little foot—and placed it in my hand.

“Give that to him,” she said; “you will be free and I shall know how to protect myself.”

“Mademoiselle!”

“In pity, leave me! If you

THE SLIPPER IS RESTORED

are a gentleman, try me no further. Go!"

I could not resist that. Besides, after a warning cough Éspiau thrust his head through the door and said quickly :

"Someone comes! You must hasten!"

I swept her to my heart again. I kissed her once more, and then with one backward glance, I reluctantly tore myself away.

CHAPTER V



THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

TO scramble down the ivy was the work of a few seconds. The faithful Bucknall was waiting. Without a word we bounded across the park and the bribed turnkey let us out. As for me, I was treading on air. I had never been so happy since I was a boy. Never would she have allowed me to kiss her, to hold her in my arms ; above all, never would she have given

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

me that little slipper, against which my heart throbbed so madly, if she had been indifferent to me. If she had not loved me as I loved her. Did I intend to give it to du Trémigon? Never! I should let him do his worst. Something would happen. I should get out of it in some way.

When we reached the inn we found our horses ready. After we were safely mounted old Bucknall broke the silence.

"Did ye git it, yer honor?" asked the old sailor.

"Get it, Bucknall? Do you remember my telling you of the lady whom I saved from

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

highwaymen on the road to Paris?"

I had to tell someone. It would have killed me not to have been able to confide in a soul, and the boatswain's mate was faithful and devoted beyond the ordinary, I very well knew.

"I remembers it well, sir."

"She was the lady in the house yonder."

"You don't say so, sir!"

"I love her, Bucknall!"

"Then ye didn't git it?" persisted the old salt, coolly.

"Get it? Of course, I got it." I replied. "It's in my waistcoat, over my heart."

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

“You’ll give it to the Markis?”

“Never! I’ll keep it until the day of my death.”

“That’s likely to be pretty soon, your honor, if what ye say is true.”

“I can’t help that. I wouldn’t give it to that lying hound to purchase my life. When I die I wish it buried with me.”

And then I told him squarely what a scoundrel the Marquis was and how he had befooled me about Mademoiselle’s desires.

“Wot are ye goin’ to do, ef I might ax yer honor?”

“I’m going to du Tremigon

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

and tell him I refuse to do his bidding and let him do his worst."

"Wot'll he do?"

"Clap me into prison, I suppose."

"Hadn't we better cut an' run fer it right now?"

I can't. He has my word of honor that I would report the success or failure of my mission."

"I guess he ain't troublin' hissself about honor, is he?"

"I suppose not."

"W'y should you, sir?"

"That's the disadvantage a gentleman labors under in dealing with a scoundrel."

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

"I see. Hev ye thought that ye'll be sarched by the police an'——"

"By Jove!" I interrupted. "That's so."

"An' wot ye've got'll be tuk from ye?"

This was a new complication. I had no doubt in that case that the slipper would eventually fall into the hands of du Trémigon and my sacrifice would avail nothing. What was to be done? I could think of nothing. I had no friends in Paris in whom I could trust save this humble sailor. Unless I gave the slipper to him I should have to throw it

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

away. In truth I should never have taken it. It was a mad impulse that possessed the Countess to give it to me, a madder that prompted me to receive it. Yet who that loved as I, could refuse such a token.

“Bucknall,” I said at last, “you are right. I cannot keep this slipper.”

“That’s true, sir.”

“There is no one that I know in Paris to whom I can intrust it but you.”

“I guess not, yer honor.”

“Here it is,” I said. I am not ashamed to say that I kissed it before I gave it to the sailor. It was dark and he could not

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

see, but if it had been broad daylight I should not have cared.

“Wot am I to do with it, sir?”

“I want you to do it up carefully in a package. Put the best wrapping about it you can manage and tie it up shipshape. Leave it at the American minister’s for Dr. Franklin when he comes back, which should be to-morrow or next day. You can get someone there to address it to my father’s plantation.”

I gave him the address and made him repeat it many times until he had it letter-perfect.

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

“Now,” I said, “you must leave me and shift for yourself. Here”—I reached my hand in my pocket and took out the money that du Trémigon had given me. I might as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb, I reasoned, and I passed it all over to the faithful sailor. “You speak passable French,” I continued—he had picked up enough of the *Lingua Franca* of the Mediterranean on different cruises to make himself understood—“keep yourself close until you see the American minister. Tell him of my plight and perhaps he may be able to do something. At any

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

rate, see that he forwards the package. You need not say what's in it."

"What about my hoss, sir?"

"Give me the rein."

"An' I thanks God to get off'n him," returned Bucknall, sliding to the ground with great alacrity. "And, harkee, Master Burnham, ye ain't seen the last of me yet, sir. I've got a few ideas in my ol' head, sir, an' don't you git ready for death too suddint like, yer honor."

He turned in the darkness and was gone in an instant.

A short time brought me to du Trémigon's house. He was waiting for me, wellnigh con-

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

sumed with anxiety and curiosity. I do not care to go into the details of our interview that night. Suffice it to say, I felt entirely free to express my opinion of him and that I did so without let or hindrance. Of course, he carried out his part of the program, and at day-break I found myself in prison facing charges of highway robbery and debts amounting to many thousand francs.

But I was happy. I had assurance of the love of Made-moiselle and I didn't care a rap for anything else. I felt that somehow, in some way, I should manage to get out. I

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

was the most cheerful prisoner under such a heavy indictment that ever occupied a cell.

Confinement, I will admit, was a little wearing upon me. The first day passed, and then a second, without a sign from anybody, and I was greatly relieved to learn that my examination had been set for the morrow. The turnkey who brought me my supper and gave me this welcome news also slipped me a note. I was hungry enough—for the prison fare was scanty—but the note claimed my attention. It was in a woman's hand, of course, and could only come from her,

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

although it bore no crest and was not signed. This is what it said :

The turnkey and the under-governor of the jail are bribed. To-night, after supper, you will be removed to another cell. This overlooks the street. The bars of the window have been arranged that they will come out at a touch. When the clock in the nearby church strikes twelve, a messenger and a horse will await you in the alley.

The note stopped there, and then a few words had been added apparently as an afterthought :

These presents from one who cares much what happens to you.

If you had been in a like situ-

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

ation you can guess what happened when I finished reading it. When I was calmer I put the note carefully in my breast pocket and fell to my supper. I knew that I should need all my strength, and I was of a practical turn of mind even in the midst of my most romantic dreams. I had scarcely finished the poor provender when the turnkey re-entered. He was followed by a couple of other officials. The turnkey in a harsh manner, as if to impress the others, although he winked knowingly at me, said :

“By the order of the com-

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

mandant you are to be transferred to another cell."

"I do not wish to be transferred," I exclaimed hotly, to keep up the deception; "this cell suits me very well, and I am satisfied to remain here."

"Your wishes are not consulted in this matter," he returned roughly.

"You villain!" I cried, menacing him.

"Have a care, Monsieur," he threatened. "If you don't go peaceably we'll have to take you by force. Here, men!"

His two assistants stepped forward. I concluded that I had done enough, so grumbling

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

mightily, and giving evidence of my displeasure, I suffered them to lead me to the other cell, where I was soon locked in for the night. With what impatience I waited for the appointed hour!

At the first stroke of the bell I was at the window, which, of course, I had previously examined. The bars came out in my hand. Some one had chiselled out the mortar and replaced it with putty. I gained the sill, scrambled through and dropped to the ground below the window. It was a long fall, but I alighted safely upon a truss of hay, which had evi-

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

dently been thrown at the foot of the wall to receive me. I got to my feet and looked about. A man approached me. He had a weapon. I was without arms, and although I stood ready to spring, I had no doubt he was a messenger.

“Monsieur Burnham?” he asked.

“The same.”

“Come with me.”

I followed him down the narrow street on tiptoe. So far as I could see it was entirely deserted. The street opened upon a little park or square. Under the trees I made out horses. There were three of

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

them. A figure sat upon one. My heart leaped into my mouth as I discerned it to be a woman. However, I was allowed absolutely no time for greetings. One of the horses was turned over to me. My conductor took the third, first handing me a hat and cloak. Then he mounted his own hack and, indicating that we should follow, made his way rapidly into the adjoining street. On account of the lateness of the hour, and the fact that the jail was in a remote and unfrequented portion of the town, the street was dark and empty. We passed a swinging lantern

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

presently and its flickering rays fell upon the woman who had persistently avoided conversation with me. Even under this faint light, although she wore a mask and was shrouded in a cloak, I knew that it was the Countess. Nothing could stop me then. I swung my horse in toward hers and laid my hand on her arm as we cantered along the deserted street.

“Mademoiselle,” I said, “it is to you that I owe my freedom.”

“Not yet,” she replied, but she did not shake off my hand, and we rode side by side, the

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

horses going at a good pace.

“First, you gave me something to live for—” I said.

“That was?”

“Yourself. Now you give me life to enjoy you.”

“Monsieur,” she said, dodging the issue, “we have but little time to converse. I learned of your plight——”

“How, Mademoiselle?”

“From your servant, an ancient sailor. He followed you, discovered where you were imprisoned, and immediately sought me.”

“How did he get access to you?”

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

“He had a—talisman, Monsieur,” she answered after a moment of hesitation, “that insured him an immediate hearing.” I was completely puzzled, but now Mademoiselle gave me no time for reflection. She went on hurriedly, as if to stop further questioning: “I bribed the commandant and turnkey. I provided these horses. The man ahead of us is——”

“Éspiau!” I exclaimed.

“Yes. He will conduct you out of France.”

“And you came, Mademoiselle——?”

“To say farewell.”

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

"Never!" I cried. "I will leave France, Mademoiselle, but not alone."

"You mean?"

"I take you with me."

"Impossible!"

"But do you not love me?" She was silent. "Would you have done all this for me if you had not?" I persisted.

"Gratitude, Monsieur, for services rendered, and——"

"Nonsense!" I said, laughing, "you know that you care. Why, I have lived in the prison upon the memory of that——"

"You are cruel, Monsieur."

"Is it cruel for a man who loves a woman to take the

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

woman, if she loves him, away with him?"

I was young and reckless. I didn't care what happened. I urged my horse closer to hers and slipped my arm around her. She struggled, but not very hard, and despite her endeavors I kissed her. Then she gave up, for her head sank on my shoulder.

"Don't!" she whispered. "You are so strong. I cannot let you go——"

That was a wise pair of horses, for they stopped while I poured out my soul to her there and then. What her answer might have been I know not. Yet I

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

solemnly vow that I was quite prepared to take her away by force when we were suddenly alarmed by Éspiau. He had most discreetly ridden ahead a few paces ; now he came back at a gallop.

“Soldiers !” he exclaimed hurriedly. “The King’s Guard ! We must flee !”

“Monsieur,” said Made-moiselle, quickly releasing herself and thrusting a little parcel into my hand, “here is that talisman. Go ! unless you wish to disgrace me. Éspiau and I will remain here.”

She had right on her side. For her sake we must not be

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

found together. To assist in the escape of a prisoner charged with a capital offence, was a serious matter. I swerved my horse and started away. But I had not gone ten paces before a heavy hand seized the bridle and a stern voice bade me stand in the King's name. Lights appeared on the instant and I saw that I was surrounded. I cast one glance backward toward Mademoiselle and Éspiau. They, too, had been arrested. It was a trap! The whole party had been taken. Back of the men who had stopped me I noticed a single horseman staring hard at me.

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

“Have you got him?” he asked as he drew nearer.

“Yes, Monsieur le Duc.”

I recognized his voice. It was Mademoiselle’s grandfather, and this was my most unpromising introduction to him!

“Take him to my house,” said the old man shortly.

The next moment du Trémigon spurred through the throng. It was he who, with the remainder of the King’s Guard, had apprehended Mademoiselle and Espiau. He shot one venomous glance at me, in which triumph was mingled with hate, and approached the Duc, whispering

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

a few words. I saw the old man start violently ; a look of anger and dismay crossed his face—the Marquis spoke earnestly for a moment or two. The Duc nodded—rather unwillingly, I thought. The next moment he left us and rode forward with du Trémigon to the side of his granddaughter. I stared after them in despair, until my horse was turned about in preparation for our departure.

“Where am I to be taken?” I asked one of the officers commanding the escort that had seized me.

“Back to prison.”

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

“And not to the Duc’s house?”

“An oubliette will doubtless be safer and more comfortable quarters for Monsieur,” said the captain politely, giving the order to march.

Fortune had been both kind and unkind to me once more. Yet on the whole I judged, as I lay in the darkness of the damp, wretched dungeon, from which no escape seemed possible, that the balance was on the side of kindness. I had enjoyed a breath of fresh air. I had been vouchsafed further evidence that the woman I

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

loved returned my feeling. I had come near to freedom with her. And I had the talisman which Bucknall had shrewdly used to gain access to her. I could feel it in the thick darkness, for I had unwrapped it so soon as I was alone. It was the slipper—my lady's slipper that had caused all the trouble! As I pressed it passionately to my lips I felt the crackle of paper inside. A letter! What would I have given for a light by which to read it!

Ah, yes, things looked black for me, but I blessed fortune, nevertheless—on my own ac-



THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

count, that is. I was filled with anxiety as to what would happen to Mademoiselle between her grandfather and du Trémigon. There was one other matter which gave me grave concern. When du Trémigon rode up to the Duc he had been followed by a servant on horseback, a particularly vicious-looking man with one eye. The light was not clear and I was not able to see distinctly. Yet I recognized him. Where I had met him, under what circumstances, I could not at first decide, but in the darkness of that dungeon it all came back to me. He

THE SLIPPER IS RETURNED

was the man whose wrist I had broken with my cudgel when Mademoiselle had been attacked. He was evidently the leader of that assault upon her. She had spoken of the Queen's despatch. Could it be that du Trémigon had instigated the attack? It must have been the case. I decided that the fact itself was of great importance, and that possibly I might use it in case of necessity.

CHAPTER VI



THE SLIPPER AT COURT

I GOT through the night somehow. The next morning—I knew it was morning, because some faint light had filtered through a slit near the roof—the most eventful day in my life, which had not been without its full share of surprising incidents, was ushered in by a visit from the commandant of the prison. Why he honored me with his personal attention was not ob-

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

vious, though I learned later that it was on account of an order from the Queen. Curtly enough he bade me follow him, which I did, nothing loth. Anything was better than that cursed oubliette.

I fancy that I must have presented rather a sorry countenance, for he was good enough to show me into a small room where there were some passable toilet conveniences, and I made myself as presentable as possible. Fortunately, my clothes—I had resumed my own when I returned to du Trémigon—were of good material and a perfect fit, and I

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

think I have already declared that I was rather proud of my figure, too. While there I took occasion to read the note in the slipper. It was small, like the thing that held it, but very sweet was its message to me.

“Monsieur, to see you again I come with Éspiau to-night. I bid you an eternal farewell and write what I dare not speak—I love you!”

An eternal farewell, eh? I would have something to say about that, I was resolved.

My hat and cloak—those Mademoiselle’s consideration had provided for me the night before—were fetched, and after

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

a good breakfast, which seemed to have been brought from his own table, the commandant conducted me to a closed carriage, in which I was driven a long distance through the country, arriving at last at a place that I afterward found to be Versailles.

I had tried several times to converse with my guards, but neither would talk to me. I resigned myself to whatever was coming, therefore, and busied myself with thoughts of Mademoiselle. I had been to Versailles seeking Dr. Franklin, but had never seen the royal palace. Consequently I did

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

not recognize it when the carriage stopped and I was led forth. I supposed that it might be one of the residences of the great Duc de Rivau-Huet.

Before I had time to speculate, however, I was blindfolded and led through numberless corridors, up and down flights of stairs, in rooms and out in bewildering succession. I made no resistance. It would have been useless, and the officers who brought me thither informed me that no harm was intended. Finally we stopped, hands fumbled at the bandage, and I opened my

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

eyes to find myself in a magnificent apartment—an ante-chamber of some sort, evidently. It was void of people, save ourselves and a sentry in the uniform of the Swiss Guards at the door at the farther end.

Running my hand through my hair with the natural instinct of a young man, and shaking myself as if to free my person by the motion, at a gesture from my guide I stepped boldly to the door. The Swiss presented arms, the official tapped on the door and stepped back, a voice I recognized bade me enter, and in

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

another moment I was in the presence of Mademoiselle. She was standing near the door. I took one step toward her and fell on my knees, when a scandalized voice exclaimed in my ear :

“Monsieur, do you not see the Queen?”

“I do,” I answered, without taking my eyes off Mademoiselle, “and I kneel to her with all the homage of my heart.”

Mademoiselle blushed vividly and stepped aside.

“She means the Queen of France, Monsieur,” she said softly.

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

As I knelt there, my eyes fell upon a young woman—she was only twenty-four—seated farther off at the opposite side of the room, a beautiful woman with a fresh, sweet, innocent face, with nothing especially regal about her, that I could see. I knew in a moment that this was Marie Antoinette. Such was my astonishment, however, that I remained kneeling, my mouth open, in great surprise. Her Majesty was pleased to laugh. She laughed as merrily as a girl.

“Make your homage to the Queen of France, Monsieur,” exclaimed the elderly woman

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

who had spoken to me first, evidently one of the great ladies of the Court.

“Your Majesty,” I replied, finding my wits at last, “I knelt as every gentleman should, to the queen of his heart, and when she stepped aside and revealed to me the queen of all hearts, I was so overcome as to be unable to rise.”

“Perhaps, Monsieur, you have sufficiently recovered now to approach more nearly the throne,” she said, obviously pleased at my compliment.

She extended her hand to me. I got to my feet, knelt again

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

before her and kissed it. Queens are always beautiful, and it was a great privilege to be permitted, but I swear I would rather have kissed Mademoiselle's hand at any hour. However, I reflected that the honor of America was in a measure committed to me, and I think I bore myself worthily.

"Rise, Monsieur," said the Queen graciously; "the Comtesse de Villars——"

I suppose it is bad manners to look at one woman when another woman is speaking to you, especially if that other woman be of royal blood, but

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

I could not help turning my head at her words.

There stood Mademoiselle more beautiful than ever. Indeed, I have observed that she always looks the better the more beautiful the background against which she is seen; and Marie Antoinette might be Queen of France, but in my eyes she was only a background to Mademoiselle that morning—or any other morning for that matter!

“Mademoiselle de Villars tells me that you have rendered me a great service.”

“If to love Mademoiselle de Villars,” I began, “with all my

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

heart and soul, be to render Your Majesty a service——”

“Nay, nay, not that way. I fear you would fain rob me of my fairest maid of honor.”

“It ill becomes a gentleman to contradict a lady,” I replied quickly.

Again the Queen laughed. I was lucky evidently.

“What I meant, Monsieur, was that Mademoiselle de Villars tells me that you saved her from assault, capture, I know not what, on the high-road some ten days ago.”

“Your Majesty,” I bowed, “I had that good fortune.”

“Mademoiselle de Villars was

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

on my errand that evening. There were papers I did not care to intrust to any save the most intimate hand, which she was bringing back to me.”

“I perfectly understand, Your Majesty.”

“I will not disguise the fact that had these papers fallen into the possession of an enemy——”

“The Marquis du Trémigon ?” I interrupted.

“Du Trémigon ?” exclaimed Mademoiselle.

“Why he, Monsieur ?” asked the Queen.

“It was he who instigated the

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

assault upon Mademoiselle, I am convinced."

"How know you this?"

"One of the ruffians who menaced the lady was one-eyed. He wore a patch over his face. I was lucky enough to break his wrist with my cudgel."

"A strange weapon for a gentleman," said Her Majesty.

"'Tis honored above my sword, in that it served Mademoiselle," I answered.

"You have a French twist to your tongue, Monsieur," said the Queen, approvingly. "Proceed."

"I recognized the man in the

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

Marquis du Trémigon's following last night, Your Majesty."

"I know whom he means, Madame; I saw him, too," said Mademoiselle. "I heard Monsieur du Trémigon call him Babin. Strange to say, I did not recognize him before."

"That agrees perfectly with my recollection, Madame," I asserted confidently. "I remember that the man who ran away that day on the road called him by that name."

"And you think the Marquis du Trémigon wanted these papers?" continued the Queen.

"I am sure of it, Madame."

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

“But why?”

“Your Majesty knows that he is a suitor for the hand of Mademoiselle de Villars. He hoped doubtless that if he could get the papers he might—” I hesitated. It was an ugly word to say, yet the Marquis du Trémigon had shown himself to me in his true colors, and I knew there was no knavery he would stop at. “He hoped to influence you, and, through you, Mademoiselle. By the terms of her father’s will she must consent willingly to the marriage, else the contract is void.”

“You seem to know a great

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

deal about the affairs of Mademoiselle, Monsieur."

"I intend, with your permission, Madame, to know everything about them in the future."

The Queen smiled.

"He is droll, this cavalier. He speaks like a Frenchman, and woos like an American."

"Have I your permission, Madame?" asked Mademoiselle.

"Certainly, my dear."

"It was the Marquis du Trémigon who betrayed us last night," she said, turning to me.

"Another score to be settled

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

between us," I said under my breath.

"He has a creature in his pay in my grandfather's house, and through him he learned my plan," explained Mademoiselle. "He laid a very clever trap. Although he could have stopped me at any time, he allowed us to go on, that we might be caught in the act. Now he hopes to win my grandfather's consent to this marriage, and perhaps by that means force it upon me."

"You shall never marry him," I protested, utterly oblivious of everything, everybody, except Mademoiselle and that fact.

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

“And why not, pray, Monsieur?” asked the Queen.

“Because, Your Majesty, I shall marry her myself.”

“Indeed!”

“The word of a gentleman, Madame,” I said.

“But are you a gentleman?” asked Marie Antoinette. There was an accent of raillery in her voice that robbed the question of its sting. “One day you masquerade as a sailor. The next day you enter Mademoiselle’s apartments”—she knew all, then!—“as a thief. To-day you stand before me as a criminal.”

“I plead guilty to every

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

charge, Madame. I am a sailor, I am a thief. Last night I would have stolen——”

“What, Monsieur?”

“Mademoiselle.”

“From her grandfather?”

“From the throne itself, Your Majesty,” I replied fervently.

Again the Queen smiled pleasantly at me.

“Enough, Monsieur,” she said, rising; “I have exerted myself in your favor. I had an order from the King to bring you here. I have requested the Duc de Rivau-Huet to consign Mademoiselle to my care. I wished to thank you for the service you have done me—

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

to ask you to wear this in memory of my gratitude."

She drew a rarely beautiful diamond ring from her finger and extended it to me. I kissed the hand and slipped the ring upon my little finger.

"Your Majesty overwhelms me," I said.

"The reward scarcely equals your merit, Monsieur, and it does not even approach your assurance."

"Mademoiselle would make a craven bold, Madame."

"Doubtless," said the Queen. "And now we have the honor to wish you a safe return to America."

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

I looked at Mademoiselle. She had turned deathly pale. Her eyes were filled with tears. Before my glance she lowered her head. My resolution was taken at once.

“But, Your Majesty, I am not going back to America.”

“How, Monsieur! You contradict the Queen?”

“At least, I am not going back alone,” I added respectfully.

“Monsieur, believe me,” the Queen rejoined earnestly, “it is impossible. The Duc de Rivau-Huet would never consent. He is one of the great nobles of France. You——”

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

“I am a criminal, Madame, and respect no conventions save those dictated by my own heart.”

I could swear that Mademoiselle gave me one grateful glance.

“Is that the custom of America?” asked the Queen, frowning.

“Of the world, Madame. When one loves as I, there is but one custom.”

“That is?”

“To give one’s self to the chosen one and to take her for his own.”

The situation was becoming impossible. It was fortunately

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

saved for me by the entrance of an equerry.

“Your Majesty”—he stopped and bowed low—“Monsieur le Marquis du Trémigon would like the honor of an audience.”

“Monsieur,” said the Queen, turning to me, “you still persist in this mad resolution?”

“Madame, I am determined in it. There is but one voice that can send me to America—alone.”

“And that voice?”

“Is Mademoiselle’s.”

“Speak to him, Gabrielle,” said the Queen.

Mademoiselle turned and looked at me. Her lips formed

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

a word ; she drew her breath sharply in, but no sound came.

“With reverence to Your Majesty, that word Mademoiselle cannot say.”

“Why not, Monsieur ?”

“Because she loves me,” I answered confidently.

The Queen looked from one to the other of us. I only looked at Mademoiselle. She could not sustain the concentrated force of two such stares as ours. She hid her face in her hands.

“*Ma foi,*” said Marie Antoinette, with one of those quick changes of mood which made

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

her so fascinating, "it is even so. Before two such lovers, I may be pardoned if I forget that I am a queen and remember only that I am a woman."

"May God bless Your Majesty for those words!" I cried enthusiastically. "Does that mean——?"

"That I am on your side, Monsieur. Satisfy me of what has been told me of yourself this morning and we shall see."

The look that she gave me spoke volumes. I was speechless with happiness. To satisfy her, every one, of my position would be easy. If only I could get word to Dr. Franklin. He

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

had been a friend of my father in the colonies. He knew many people I knew, and if that mad little Scotsman, Paul Jones, were here he, too, would be on my side. The Queen gave me no time for reply, for she turned to the equerry and said :

“ I will see Monsieur du Trémigon. But wait one moment. Before he is admitted, I wish you to go into that room, Monsieur Burnham. Leave the door open and stand behind the arras. You ”—she turned to the elderly lady, who had discreetly withdrawn to the embrasure, and had been carefully studying the landscape during

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

the interview between the Queen, Mademoiselle and myself—"Madame, will you ask the Duc de Rivau-Huet to come into the small room where Monsieur Burnham goes and wait there until I call him forth? Tell him I beg him on no account to give note of his presence until he is summoned. Now"—she turned to the equerry again—"bring hither the Marquis du Trémigon."

I bowed low to Her Majesty and lower to Mademoiselle, and entered the apartment the Queen had indicated. The Duc de Rivau-Huet had evidently been waiting, for a mo-

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

ment later he entered under the guidance of the messenger and stood by my side. He did not recognize me, of course, but we bowed to each other courteously and then waited quietly for whatever was to happen.

A moment later we heard the Queen speaking.

“Monsieur du Trémigon,” she began, “you wish to see me?”

“Madame, it is the constant wish of every gentleman in France.”

“Prettily said, Monsieur, and, as it happens, I also wish to see you.”

“Your Majesty honors me.”

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

“You come at an opportune time, therefore.”

“Any time that I can be of service to Your Majesty is opportune,” he answered—the clever villain had a glib tongue, as he had a fine taste in clothes, I could but admit. “I wish that Your Majesty,” he continued, “could give me a return wish for my remark.”

“And what would that be, Monsieur?”

“That every woman in France might desire to see me, Madame.”

“That would be an embarrassment of riches,” she returned lightly.

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

“I should be satisfied if the one nearest Your Majesty cherished that desire,” was his quick rejoinder.

He shot one glance at Mademoiselle. I could see them by moving the hangings slightly, and I did not scruple to look. The old Duc stood like a stone, wondering why he had been brought there, and as yet unable to comprehend the situation.

“You said that you wished to see me, Monsieur?” asked the Queen, disregarding his last remark.

“My desire gives place to Your Majesty’s.”

“And my will claims prece-



The Slipper at Court

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

dence of yours, Monsieur," she remarked with a touch of impatience. "Proffer your petition."

"Your Majesty, I love devotedly the Comtesse de Villars. We were betrothed in childhood. The time for the carrying out of the contract our fathers made has arrived. I crave Your Majesty's influence to persuade Mademoiselle de Villars to honor me."

There was a certain amount of truth in the rascal's words. I wondered if he really loved her a little bit, or whether it was only for her money he sought her.

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

“But Mademoiselle de Villars does not love you, Monsieur.”

“With Your Majesty’s aid I trust I shall be able to teach her to do so.”

“I fear that task is beyond you or me, Monsieur du Trémigon.”

“Permit me in Your Majesty’s own interest to dispute that assertion.”

“How now, Gabrielle?” said the Queen, turning to Mademoiselle.

“I hate him!” she cried. I could see du Trémigon wince.

“You hear, Monsieur?”

“I hear, Madame, but”—he tore off the disguise now and

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

spoke with savage firmness—
“Mademoiselle must marry me.”

“Must, sir! These are strange words to use to your Queen.”

“I speak to a woman now,” answered the Marquis.

“Explain yourself.”

“Mademoiselle is seriously compromised.”

I could see Mademoiselle start and clench her hands. The Queen motioned her to remain silent.

“How is that, Monsieur?” she asked quietly.

“She received me alone in her apartments the night before last.”

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

“You coward!” cried Made-
moiselle.

“Patience, Gabrielle,” said
Marie Antoinette quickly.
“You have proofs of that as-
sertion, sir?”

From where I stood with a
backward glance I could see
the old Duc. He had his hand
on his sword, his face was as
white as death. He was per-
fectly rigid. He had been told
to remain where he was, how-
ever, until he was summoned,
and he would not move.

“You have witnesses?” con-
tinued the Queen.

“Madame, I have. I was
seen to go through the gate

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

after ten o'clock. I climbed to Mademoiselle's window by the ivy. I remained in her apartment over an hour—till midnight. It was this suit that I now wear in which I presented myself to Mademoiselle." He turned swiftly to the Comtesse. "Does not Mademoiselle recognize the habit?" he queried, with a triumphant leer.

She shuddered away from him. And indeed he had on the clothes I had worn!

"You do recognize it, Gabrielle?" asked the Queen.

Mademoiselle said nothing, but it was quite evident that she did. What the Duc

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

thought of all this I could not tell.

“Your story,” said the Queen composedly, turning to the Marquis, “is most interesting, Monsieur, if it could be believed.”

“Out of consideration for one of your maids of honor”—I could have killed him at the hateful emphasis he laid on that last word—“I hope I may be spared the pain of public testimony, Madame,” he replied.

“You give me your word of honor that three nights ago you were in Mademoiselle’s apartments?” asked her Majesty.

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

"I do."

"Your word of honor as a gentleman?"

"Your Majesty has said it."

"Oh, this is infamous—infamous!" cried Mademoiselle.

"And you, Comtesse, what do you say?" continued the Queen.

"It is a falsehood, a dastardly falsehood!"

A look of relief swept over the old Duc's face then. His apprehension gave place to a growing anger. I could realize how hard it was for him to remain quiet beyond that curtain. As for me I would have given everything on earth ex-

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

cept Mademoiselle for leave to go out and kill du Trémigon.

“You do not wish to marry this man—pardon, this gentleman—Gabrielle?” asked Marie Antoinette.

“I would rather kill myself!”

“Monsieur du Trémigon,” said the Queen, gently, “have mercy!”

“Madame, love has no mercy. I am passionately devoted to Mademoiselle.”

“And is that why,” asked Marie Antoinette, with a swift change of manner, “that you set your man, Babin, and two

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

other ruffians to attack Mademoiselle on the road to Paris ten days ago?"

She drove her query home with the directness of a sword-thrust. The Marquis gasped, fell back, utterly dismayed. He moistened his lips and strove to speak.

"I—I do not know what Your Majesty means—" he faltered. "I once had a servant called Babin in my employ, but I have discharged him."

"You did not know," continued the Queen pitilessly, "that Mademoiselle was carrying papers of infinite concern to me? Relying on your

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

sense of honor"—she smiled mockingly—"I tell you the truth. They were letters that I had written years ago—silly, foolish letters, which yet might have given me trouble. Mademoiselle volunteered to get them from their owner—who was willing to part with them for a price—and bring them to me. And you, Monsieur du Trémigon, having learned this in some way—oh, I have fathomed the whole procedure," she went on, rising and confronting him with outraged dignity in royal mien—"you thought to get me in your power and force a consent

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

from Mademoiselle through her love for me !”

“Madame, I am innocent,” he protested vainly. “I know no more about this than you have told me. Babin has not been in my service for months. I know nothing about the letters.”

“Do you swear it ?”

“I swear it !”

The Queen struck a bell on the table at her side. The equerry presented himself.

“Is Monsieur Éspiau there ?” she asked.

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Admit him.”

In another moment the old

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

servant of the Duc entered and fell on his knees before the Queen.

“Rise, my friend,” she said, with that gentle grace, that benignity, that ought to have endeared her to the whole of France, high and low, rich and poor ; “were you at the Hôtel de Rivau-Huet on last Wednesday night ?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Were you in the apartments of the Comtesse de Villars ?”

“I was, Your Majesty.”

“Between the hours of eleven and twelve ?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

“Was the Marquis du Trémigon there?”

“No, Your Majesty.”

“And you would believe a servant’s word before mine?” said du Trémigon furiously.

“We shall see. Call Monsieur Burnham,” she said to the attendant.

I did not wait to be called. I was through the door in an instant. Du Trémigon started with additional surprise when he saw me.

“What do you know of this charge of the Marquis du Trémigon?” asked the Queen after I had saluted her.

“Your Majesty, I know that

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

the Marquis du Trémigon was in his hotel between the hours of eight in the evening and one in the morning. By no possibility could he have been in the apartment of Mademoiselle de Villars. Furthermore, the man Babin was in his employ yesterday.”

“You hound !” cried du Trémigon, and then I stepped toward him. He shrank back. I stepped nearer. The Queen might have interfered, but I rather think she enjoyed it.

“You know,” I said, frowning at him, “that you were not in the apartment of the Comtesse de Villars on that

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

evening or any other evening.” He opened his mouth as if to speak. “Not a word, sir, or I’ll kill you where you stand !” I continued sternly.

“Your Majesty,” he cried, dexterously avoiding me, “will you condemn me on the testimony of a lackey and a criminal ?”

I started toward him again, but the Queen raised her hand. She looked at the equerry once more, he was an old and trusted attendant, upon whom she could rely.

“The Duc de Rivau-Huet”—she pointed to the door—“bring him here.”

The Duc was almost as quick

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

as I. The curtain was torn aside and he came in erect, with his hand on his sword.

"Your Majesty," he bowed low before her, a graceful and gallant old gentleman.

"Monsieur le Duc," said the Queen, extending her hand to be kissed, "you are ever welcome. As the head of the house to which the Marquis du Trémigon belongs, I wish you to hear his charges and his denials, that you may judge him accordingly."

"I have heard, Your Majesty," said the Duc, "and give me leave to say I need neither the evidence of Éspiau nor of

THE SLIPPER AT COURT

this gentleman—whoever he may be—to convince me that the Marquis du Trémigon has lied.”

“And I tell you,” burst out the Marquis, desperately, “that this man is a common thief, a highway robber and—” He pointed to me.

“Have a care, Monsieur,” said Marie Antoinette quickly; “highway robbery is a grave accusation. Was it on the road to Paris that he committed this highway robbery? This is a most serious indictment. Look again. Think! Do you press the charge? Do you really mean it?”

CHAPTER VII



THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

“**H**IS Majesty the King!” cried an usher at the great door, throwing it open. “His Excellency, the Minister of the United States, Dr. Benjamin Franklin, Commodore John Paul Jones, Monsieur Bucknall, sailor,” he added.

Into the room came the King of France, a stout, heavy-set, rather stupid-looking young man. Following him I saw

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

the familiar figure—I had seen many portraits of him in public prints—of Dr. Benjamin Franklin. By his side—and it was a good sight for any eyes—walked the handsome little daredevil of a Scotsman in his naval uniform, looking as cocky as if he had been strutting on his own quarter-deck. And then—did my eyes deceive me?—came the rolling form of worthy Master Bucknall. I blessed that honest seaman in my heart. He had brought Mademoiselle to my assistance in the prison and now he had completed his work by looking up Dr. Franklin and the rest.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

Where he had found the Com-
modore I did not know.

I had heard he had recently
arrived at L'Orient, but not
that he had come to Paris.

"Madame," said the King,
approaching the Queen, who
courtesied deeply before him,
"I wish you good morning.
Ah, Duc, I am always glad to
see you. Mademoiselle de
Villars, you are fit to stand
before Her Majesty, and I could
pay you no higher compli-
ment."

I was amazed to hear this fat,
commonplace, prosy-looking
man speak so pleasantly, but
in sooth Mademoiselle, with

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

her cheeks flushed, a little sparkle of tears in her eyes, her head thrown back—well, any man of taste would have recognized which was Queen of Love and Beauty in that room. The King bowed shortly and coldly to du Trémigon and looked with some interest at me.

“Monsieur,” said the Queen to her husband, “will you allow me to present to you Monsieur Burnham, an American naval officer?”

I bowed low before the King. France was our ally and we hoped much from her, and although we in America had cut

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

kings and queens out of our books, I felt it necessary for me to be politic.

“Dr. Franklin, you are always welcome,” continued the Queen, “even though you do come garbed in sober gray to our gay Court.”

“Your Majesty,” returned the old Quaker gallantly, “I wear gray that it may contrast the better with the high color of my admiration for the Queen of France.”

“And this is our old friend, the Commodore. We are glad to have you back at Versailles after your splendid fighting, Monsieur,” said the Queen,

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

dimpling with pleasure at Dr. Franklin's compliment and giving her hand to Paul Jones, who had waited with ill-concealed impatience for this recognition of his rank and station.

"To see you again, Your Majesty," began the doughty little Captain, with a shade too much fervor, I thought, "is better fortune than to capture a ship like the *Serapis*."

"You must tell me about that action, Monsieur."

"I shall be pleased to attend upon Your Majesty at any time for that or any other purpose," he replied. "And if it were

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

necessary to secure entrance to your levee, I would cheerfully engage to capture another British frigate."

The Queen laughed kindly at the little Captain, and then she stared toward Bucknall, who stood shifting from one foot to another, twisting his hat in his hand. She was a good-hearted woman and would fain neglect no one—not even the humblest.

"And who is this?" she asked.

"Madame, give me leave," I interposed. "He is a sailor to whom I owe life, liberty and—love!"

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

"Looks he not like a cupid's messenger?" queried Her Majesty, smiling, and then the King broke in.

"Have you sent for the prisoner, Madame?"

"Your Majesty, he is here!"

"What, this gentleman?"

The Queen bowed.

"What have you to say for yourself, sir?" the King asked me.

"Much, Your Majesty. I am an American naval officer, as Commodore Paul Jones can bear witness."

"Ay that I can, Frank. 'Tis true, Your Majesty. He sailed with me on the *Alfred*, and a

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

better officer I did not have, and I say it who have a right to testify."

"Good," said the King. "Proceed, Monsieur."

"I was captured with Captain Cunningham in the *Revenge*."

"Give me a fleet, Your Majesty," interrupted Commodore Jones, "and we'll stop all that."

The King smiled and nodded to me.

"I escaped from a British prison-ship, robbed a gentleman in England, got money from him, came to France hoping to find Dr. Franklin or Commodore Jones. Neither

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

was in Paris. I lost my money, fell into the hands of an enemy, and was lodged in jail, whence I have been this morning brought here by Her Majesty's gracious interference."

"How did you lose your money?" asked the King, quite as a father might have spoken to his son. There was something pleasant about the plain, homely man. I hesitated not a moment.

"I am sorry to say, Sire, that I gambled it away."

The King shook his head.

"I can make good your loss," he said; "but play is the curse of the young nobles of my

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

Court, and of all strangers who come to Paris, as well."

"Your Majesty is most kind. When I can hear from America I shall be able to discharge all my obligations, and I wish to say to Your Majesty and before you all"—all meant Mademoiselle—"that I shall eschew play in the future."

"*Bien!*" said the King, with a pleased look. "There were charges against you of highway robbery, I believe?"

"On information laid by me, Your Majesty," broke in du Trémigon.

"But Monsieur du Trémigon withdraws the charges now.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

Highway robbery! It hath an ugly sound," said the Queen. "How is that, Monsieur du Trémigon?"

I never saw such a look of baffled rage and hatred as that on the Marquis du Trémigon's face. He was completely powerless. The evidence against him was too strong. He tried to speak, but there was no help for it. He bowed at last with a bad grace.

"I am too much of a gentleman"—I have always been suspicious of a man who protests his quality overmuch, by the way—"to contradict the Queen of France," he said.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

“Good,” said the King. “But there were some papers?”

“Monsieur du Trémigon lost them, unfortunately,” again interposed the Queen.

“Very careless, I’m sure,” commented the King severely.

“I,” volunteered Dr. Franklin, “will be surety for Monsieur Burnham’s debts to the Marquis du Trémigon, or any others.”

“The word of a gentleman so vouched for is sufficient,” said the Marquis, raging in his heart, but helpless.

“I’d rather pay him the money, doctor, and owe it to you,” I said softly to Dr. Franklin.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

"Is it a great sum, lad?" whispered the Quaker aside. "Our exchequer is running low. And, hark ye, that highway robbery in England—'tis hardly a crime of which you could be convicted in France."

Now, why had neither I nor any one else thought of that? I am usually quick to see all sides of a case, and this failure annoyed me for a moment.

"We will attend to the debt," said the King, after a momentary consultation with the Queen. "Now, gentlemen, no more of this."

Of course when he put on his

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

royal look and said that, there was nothing left for me to do but acquiesce.

“Pardon, Your Majesty,” said the Duc de Rivau-Huet, who had noted all that had occurred with ill-concealed impatience, not to say indignation, “Monsieur du Trémigon has another announcement to make, I believe.”

“What is that, Duc?” asked the King.

“Your Majesty is doubtless aware that my son and the father of the Marquis du Trémigon entered into a contract that their children should be married at a suitable age, pro-

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

vided they were both willing to carry out the agreement?"

"I have heard so," answered the King.

"The Marquis du Trémigon wishes, in the presence of these witnesses, to renounce all pretension to the hand of Mademoiselle de Villars."

"Your Majesty," protested the Marquis in one last desperate attempt to gain his end, "Monsieur le Duc mis——"

"I believe I am not mistaken, Monsieur," said the Duc, very stately and magnificent, with his hand on his sword—my heart went out to him—looking hard at the Marquis.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

"I am sure," added the Queen in her silvery voice—and you would have thought she was conferring the greatest favor in her power upon the wretched du Trémigon—"that the Duc is right. Monsieur du Trémigon," she went on, with a woman's spitefulness—for which indeed I could not blame her, "is no more desirous of marrying Mademoiselle de Villars than he is of pressing the charge of highway robbery against Monsieur Burnham."

Du Trémigon could not trust himself to speak again. He clenched his hands and bowed low before the Queen.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

I declare that, though I hated him, and despised him as well, for one moment I was almost sorry for him. His humiliation was so great, his agony so keen.

“Furthermore,” continued the Duc impertubably, “Monsieur du Trémigon wishes Your Majesty’s permission to withdraw from Paris and retire to his estates.”

“As the Marquis pleases,” said the King indifferently.

Had I been King I should have been consumed with curiosity to know what this was all about, but His Majesty cared little concerning it, apparently, for after turning his

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

back on du Trémigon, who backed out of the room, he said to Dr. Franklin :

“ Now that we have settled this affair, doctor, I want you to look at a lock in my cabinet that interests me greatly. Gamain brought it to-day. Its mechanism is curious and complex. It will interest a scientific man like yourself, I am sure.”

“ I shall be glad to attend Your Majesty.”

“ Give me leave, Sire,” again said the Duc de Rivau-Huet. “ Your Majesty,” continued the old man, standing very erect, “ the Marquis du Tré-

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

mignon averred that he was in my granddaughter's apartments until a late hour the other night."

"It is false," said the Queen.

"Madame, I know that. What I wish to know is, who was there?"

"Monsieur! Before them all!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, startled beyond measure by this surprising development. This unlucky speech in itself was a confession.

"The King is the fountain of nobility in the land," continued the Duc, striving to regain his composure. "You are a maid of honor to the Queen, Made-

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

moiselle. That gentleman"—he pointed to me—"heard the accusation and denied it. These are his friends. Here is some mystery. I wish an explanation."

"But, Duc—" began the King, with a puzzled look.

"I crave Your Majesty's pardon. Even royalty may give place to the feelings of a grandparent. Will you allow me to conduct this affair in my own way, Sire?"

"Go on," said the King.

"I am satisfied that the Marquis du Trémigon, whom I shall interrogate later, with the King's permission——"

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

"I will give you a *lettre-de-cachet* to the Bastile for him, if you like," said Louis with a truly royal carelessness.

"I thank your Majesty. Monsieur du Trémigon was not there, but I insist some one was, and I demand to know who."

No one spoke for a moment.

"Éspiau, you know?"

"I have nothing to say, Monsieur le Duc," replied the old servant, turning pale.

"Will no one tell me?" cried the old man, grief in his heart, appeal in his tones, shame in his bearing.

"I will," I said boldly; "I was there."

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

“You, sir!”

“Even I, Monsieur.”

“How dared you? What do you mean?” He put his hand to his heart. I was nearest him. I stretched out my arm to help him, but he thrust me away. “Answer!” he cried, imperiously forgetful of the King, the Queen, everybody.

“It is very simple,” I replied quietly. “On my approach to Paris I had the good fortune to be of assistance to Mademoiselle.”

“In what capacity?”

“She was set upon by three ruffians. I drove them off.”



The Slipper's Wearer

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

“Whereabouts?”

I was ignorant of the road, but Mademoiselle came to my rescue.

“Near Paris, on the Versailles road, Monsieur,” she said.

“Where was your escort?” queried the Duc, turning to his granddaughter in amazement.

“I was alone, sir.”

“Alone on the Versailles road?”

“In my service, Duc,” interposed the Queen softly.

“Pardon, Your Majesty. That is sufficient. Proceed, Monsieur.”

“I thereupon fell in love with your granddaughter, sir.”

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

“How dared you, sir ; a beggarly——”

“Monsieur Burnham's patrimony includes rich land enough to make a county in France,” deftly put in Dr. Franklin at this juncture.

“But in America——” said the Duc scornfully.

“The finest land the sun ever set on, Monsieur,” broke in Commodore Jones hotly.

The King waved his hand for silence, and the Duc turned to me again.

“I sought your granddaughter far and wide, and at last found her at the Hôtel de Rivau-Huet,” I resumed.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

I had a hard task to keep to the truth and yet make a satisfactory story.

"And was it at her invitation you entered her apartment?"

"Monsieur le Duc!" exclaimed the King hastily in warning.

"Grandfather!" cried the girl, recoiling from the outrageous accusation.

"Sir!" I replied, with spirit, "the question is an insult to your blood! I came unexpectedly, unknown, unwelcome—like a thief in the night."

"You dared——?"

"It was a prank, a foolish

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

trick ; I have no excuse but my passion.”

“And you were alone in her apartment with my granddaughter, Monsieur ?”

“Pardon, I was there, Monsieur le Duc,” said Éspiau.

“Then tell me the truth now, unless you forget your ancient fidelity,” exclaimed the Duc, turning to the unhappy servant. “You saw this gentleman there ?”

I shook my head at him, but he was looking at Mademoiselle. Disregarding my warning glance, she nodded. The seal upon the servant's lips was broken.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

“Yes, Monsieur le Duc,” he answered.

“And where was he?”

“In Mademoiselle’s—” he hesitated.

“Speak!” thundered the old man.

“Bedchamber, Monsieur.”

“*Mon Dieu!*” cried the Duc, his composure giving way at last. He put his face in his hands with a movement singularly like that of Mademoiselle a short time before.

Is it that Master Shakespeare in great crises voices the universal cry of the human heart? For like the father of Hero in “*Much Ado About Nothing*”—

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

and indeed the whole affair was somewhat similar in my mind—the Duc finally broke forth :

“ ‘Hath no man here a sword for me ?’ ”

I have not the sentence exactly, but I give the sense of it, and I pitied him from the bottom of my heart. But the love of the young is often cruel to the old.

“ My grandfather ! my grandfather ! ” cried Mademoiselle, sinking to his feet, “ think not bitterly of me ! This gentleman has told the truth. I had but spoken a few words to him when you came. He did me

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

a great service. I concealed him."

"Why?" groaned the Duc.

"I was afraid that you would kill him."

"Afraid? What is he to you?"

It was a dreadful situation for a young girl. She had never told me in so many words, although I was sure of it in my own mind, and for her to be compelled to declare it before all these men was indeed hard. Yet with a heroism for which I can never be sufficiently grateful she spoke her reason undauntedly.

"I love him!"

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

"You love him!" exclaimed her grandfather in amazement.

"Monsieur le Duc de Rivau-Huet," I cried in my turn, springing to her side, lifting her up, and slipping my arm about her waist, "I have the honor to ask you to give me the hand of your granddaughter in marriage."

"She is a countess of France," replied the Duc. "The best blood in the land flows in her veins, Monsieur."

"I have some indifferent good in my own veins, Monsieur le Duc," I asserted proudly, naming some of my mother's people.

"Is this true, Monsieur?"

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

"I vouch for it," said Paul Jones, who really knew little or nothing about my ancestry, but who, as he said afterward, would have sworn to anything on my bare statement to help me out.

"Your Majesty," said the Duc, turning to the King, but he got no help there.

"If you will give your consent, Duc," said Louis, "I shall not withhold mine. Indeed, under the circumstances—" he paused significantly.

The Duc groaned and the gracious Queen came to our rescue again.

"Monsieur le Duc," she said,

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

stepping near him and laying her hand on his arm, "think! Monsieur Burnham is a gallant gentleman. As good blood as any in France flows in his veins. In America they have no kings, but they are all princes. His Majesty in his kindness consents. This will cement the union between the two countries against England, which is so dear to think of. Will you sacrifice your pride if I ask you, and bless the pair who love each other?"

"Madame, it is as you will," he faltered. "I had cherished other dreams. Still, there can be no higher degree than that

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

of gentleman, after all. No, though he sit upon a throne."

"The royalty of virtue, the royalty of honor, the royalty of courage," said Dr. Franklin kindly, "make this marriage not an unequal one."

"I am an old man," continued the Duc; "this has been hard for me. But let the young love have its way."

"And you will forgive me?" pleaded Mademoiselle, approaching him nearer.

"Your Majesty will permit me?" asked the Duc. He took her in his arms and pressed a kiss upon her forehead and blessed her.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

"Sir," he said, turning to me and bowing, "I hope to know more of you before I commit this child to your keeping."

"I shall strive to merit your kindness, Monsieur le Duc," I answered, overwhelmed by this happy turn to my fortunes.

"Now that all is settled for the second time," said the King, greatly relieved, "Dr. Franklin, Commodore, and you, Duc, will you all come with me?"

"We attend Your Majesty."

The four gentlemen bowed low before the Queen. The King bowed to me, Dr. Franklin and Commodore Jones

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

shook my hand. Our kindly minister made an appointment to meet me later in the palace.

“You were lucky,” he said.

Indeed I realized that, for I replied :

“Thanks to you and the Commodore.”

“Nay,” said the Quaker, smiling, “thanks to Mademoiselle herself, and to your own ready wit.”

Then they left us alone with the Queen and Bucknall.

“It strikes me,” said her Majesty, looking at the old sailor, “that nobody has said anything about the part you have played in this affair.”

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

"Aye, aye, mum," began the sailor in great confusion, "w'ich I means Yer Honor—"

"'Mum' is delightful," laughed Marie Antoinette.

"I was at me wit's end wot course to lay this mornin', an' w'en as luck would hev it I run into Commodore Jones in the street, jist in from L'Orient—he never forgits a shipmate, ma'am, no matter how humble—an' I ups an' told him about Mr. Burnham. He fetched me to Dr. Franklin, an' you knows the rest, Yer Ladyship."

"I shall not forget you," said the Queen, lifting a well-filled purse from the table and put-

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

ting it in Bucknall's hand. The old sailor was not without a streak of gallantry.

"It's the hand wot gives it, lady," he said, "wot makes me wally it more'n the gold pieces."

"You will await Monsieur Burnham without the door," she said, dismissing him graciously.

"Monsieur Burnham," she began as we three were alone, "you are a thief after all. You have stolen the fairest jewel of my Court. I ought to be angry with you, but—I am not."

"I thank Your Majesty."

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

“You will be very good to this daughter of France in your own land?”

“Madame, I will cherish her as the King his crown. Nay,” I added quickly, “as I would cherish Your Majesty were I the King.”

“You pay me in pretty speeches.”

“They come, Madame, from my heart of hearts. After my country and my wife, my sword is yours.”

She was gone. Of course I took Mademoiselle in my arms, and this time there was no hesitation on her part in returning my ardent caresses.

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

I do not know what we said or what happened. After a space—how long or how short I cannot tell, for I took no notice of time or place—I said that while we each had the gold pieces I regretted that I had no ring to slip on her finger, nothing of my own to give her to bind the engagement. Of course I could not give her the Queen's diamond—yet. She was very close to me, and doubtless could feel what was in my breast-pocket.

“You have one thing,” she replied demurely, “that you could slip on.”

“What is that?”

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

“Have you forgotten the talisman ?”

“The talisman ?” I cried.

I am stupid sometimes, not often, and I was thinking so hard of her that I did not catch her meaning at first.

“That which Master Bucknall brought me—that I gave back to you.”

“Oh !” said I ; “the slipper that saved my life ; that gave me hope.”

“And hope gave you assurance ?”

“And assurance won me you.”

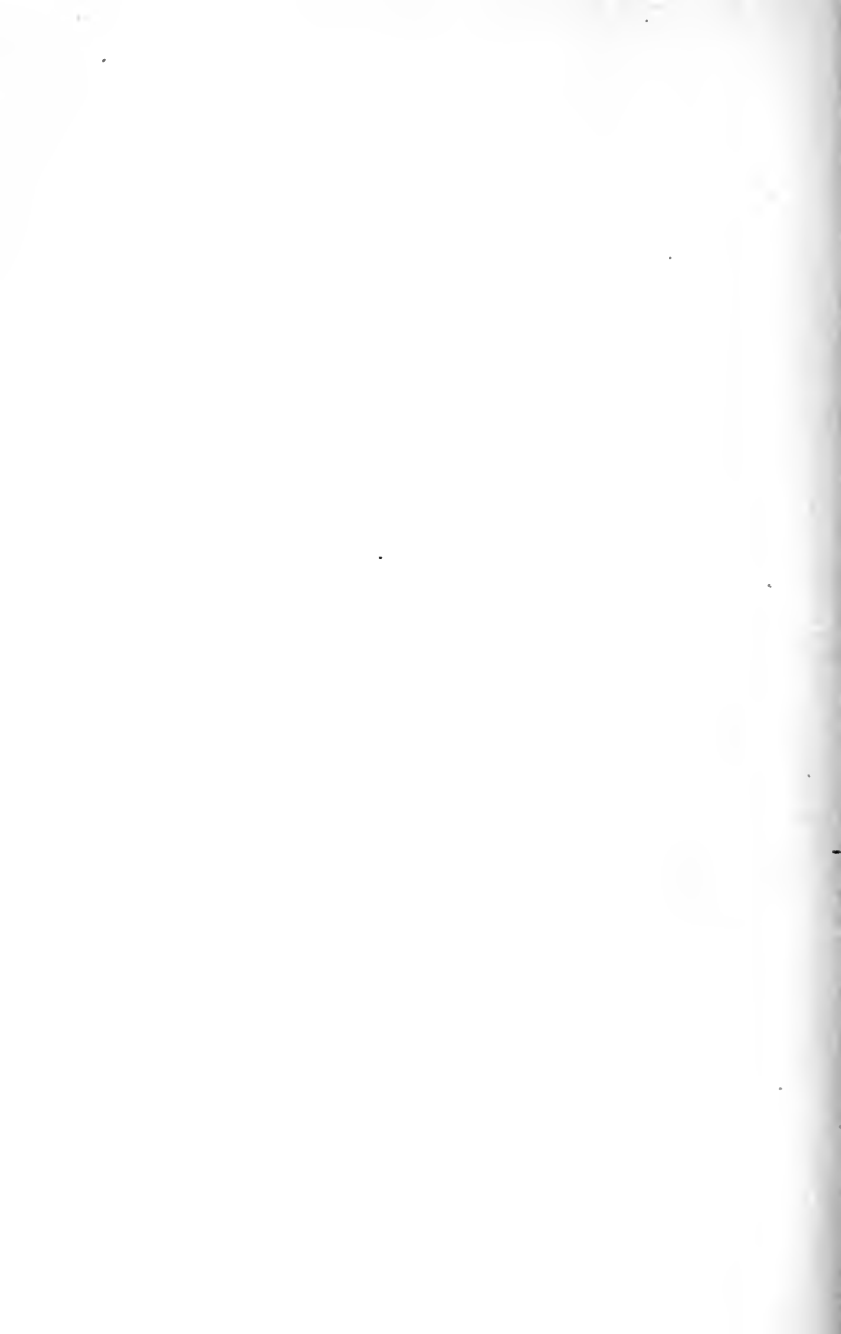
She drew herself away and sat down in the Queen's chair,

THE SLIPPER'S WEARER

and no royal person ever became it so well as she. Then she fumbled at her shoe a moment, and thrust out one dainty stockinged little foot at me.

“You might put it on,” she whispered, blushing vividly.

I am not ashamed to say that I kissed that foot before I covered it with my lady's slipper.





UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 001 384 283 6

