

CHAPTER 1

Land A hoy! Land A hoy!

S^oæurette ran to the rail of the ship, stretched to her tip toes, and leaned out to look. As the ship rose upon the swell of a wave, she saw the land. Her heart leaped for joy, for there, spread out along the horizon in a thread of yellow and green, was the coast of America.

How good it was to see land again, she thought. Thank God this voyage is over.

The wind blew her long black hair about her neck, and the soft sea spray felt good on her face. When the swell went down and she could no longer see the land, she relaxed against the railing staring thoughtfully into the water. She could see the pleasing reflections of gulls passing overhead. She raised her eyes to the clear sky, to the sea gulls floating above her and above the stern of the ship. How beautiful and free they seemed to be, the sun flashing upon their white wings as they sailed and dived after the schools of fish which followed the ship.

"If I could only be as care free as those white birds," she murmured.

The happy gleam faded from her face, and tears appeared in the corners of her eyes. She was a woman now, with a woman's problems. Questions and doubts raced through her mind. She had fears that no nineteen-year-old should have. She bit her lips in anguish; the gulls were free, but she

was not.

The sound of footsteps behind her brought her out of her moody thoughts. It was the captain.

"We'll be in New Orleans before afternoon, Miss," he said as he noticed the tears on Seurette's cheeks. "Ah, ye've been cryin. 'Tis a good thing. 'Tis a good thing indeed when ye cry for happiness. Ye are happy aren't ye?"

Seurette wiped her eyes with a handkerchief, "Yes, Monsieur Captain, I am very happy."

She looked toward the land again. Here was a new land, a new life. She had left everything behind her-- her family and friends, all that was dear to a young woman--but she had left them in a tired and worn out country full of evil and prejudice. If God were willing, she could have a new life here and a new hope for happiness.

Cool

The clanging of the ship's bell sounded assembly call for the passengers. The blood rushed to Soeurette's head as she scurried about her cabin trying to pack and to make herself presentable to her aunt and uncle.

"Oh, I wish I had a new dress," she thought as she looked at the piles of clothes scattered about her. "They will think I am just a poor relation in these rags."

The assembly bell rang again. A nervous perspiration broke out on her forehead as she held the dresses to her in front of the small cabin mirror.

"The blue dress will never do", she sighed, "and neither will the yellow. Oh, what am I going to do?" Her eyes searched around the room and stopped at the pink dress on the bed. "I guess this is better than nothing."

She walked to the bed, picked up the dress and held it to her, ~~uttering~~, "This will have to do. If I could only find something to cover the stain on the skirt." Her eyes searched the room again. That old white dress on the chair might do, she thought. It has two white bows on it and that should do perfectly.

A few minutes later the pink dress was transformed with the aid of needle and thread, and she smiled in approval as she stood in front of the mirror admiring her work. It fit perfectly and the bows were just what the dress needed. She would look like no poor relation now. But her face dropped as she looked into the mirror. She had noticed something else. She had beautiful hair; she knew this and was proud of it. But the black sheen and luster had become faded by the salty sea air. She wanted to pinch herself in disgust. Why hadn't she thought about it before? Why hadn't she done something

about ~~that~~^{it} when she had the time. She took the brush from the table in front of the mirror and feverishly began to brush her hair. The hair didn't pull; at least she had no snags. When her hair brush had reached the stroke numbers 98, 99, 100 the luster had returned to her hair and the black strands popped and crackled under the brush. With her comb she quickly parted the hair in the middle, pulled it down, rolled it and pinned it up in the back, over this she put her dainty hair net to cover any hasty imperfections. Now she looked into the mirror with pride. She was pretty enough to be presentable anywhere. Something was missing though. She thought for a moment; then she went to her trunk and started hunting around in the little drawers. ^{SAC} Soeurette pulled out a small object, then returned to the mirror. She held the thing carressingly in her hands; it was a cameo suspended from two black velvet ribbons. She raised it to her throat and secured it by the velvet strands. As she gazed into the mirror at the cameo, she struggled not to reminence. How many times had she seen it on her mother during those happy days- the happy days before trouble had descended upon her and her family. Her mother was dead now, and her cameo had become Soeurette's most prized possession. Somehow it seemed to link her more closely to her mother and the happy days of her childhood. She turned away from the mirror. The past was dead - ~~It had been~~^{had} killed by the iron ~~bonds~~^{bonds} of Napoleon.

A knocking at the door interrupted her melancholy thoughts.

"It's the porter, Miss, We will be in New Orleans in a few minutes. Would you like me to get your baggage?"

Soeurette's eyes darted about the room. The cabin was a mess. Clothes were scattered in every direction.

"If you will be kind enough to wait one minute I shall be ready," she shouted as she raced about the cabin gathering her clothes and

thrusting them into her trunk. When she could see nothing else she leaned against the trunk with all her weight to shut it. Suddenly she remembered her white gloves. All ladies wear white gloves. She threw open the lid of the trunk and began pulling the clothes out again. She found the ones she wanted in the corner of the trunk. Oh, but there was just one. She clicked her tongue in anger. Where could it be. The steward knocked on the door again.

"Miss Jordon, we must have your baggage to put on the unloading platform."

"All right, you can have it in just one minute," she puffed. "Can you not give a lady time to prepare her self."

A flash of white caught her eye. There was the other glove partially hidden under the trunk. She hurriedly picked it up.

"You may come in!"

The door opened and the steward entered with the aid of two brawny sailors lifted her baggage and carried it out into the hall. She followed them struggling to put the gloves on her nervous hands. Her tenseness grew as she walked down the hall. What would her aunt and uncle be like? Would they accept her, or were they as rough and as brutish as she had heard all Americans were. She had thought about these questions on the voyage, but now they were to confront her, and she would have to face them. The fluttering of her heart increased as trembling excitement surged forth up on her white face. She was frightened; she knew that there was no turning back now, that the chain of events which had altered her life had been forged in iron and that they were destined to link her future to the dark lowlands of Louisiana.

She watched her baggage being carried up the stairs at the end of the hall, but she stopped when she reached the steps. She could hear the deck creaking with the noisy activity above. She watched the dirt filter down in the sunlight which ^{filtered} flooded on the upper steps, then she closed her eyes and whispered a ^{short} sharp prayer.

She opened her eyes, raised her head proudly, and clenching her white gloved hands together in the excitement and ~~dreading~~ ^{gazing} ~~fear~~ of expectation, ascended to the sunlight. As she reached the deck; she was quickly ushered to where the passengers were lining up near the gang plank. She stood there ~~and gazed~~ at the confusion spread about her. The ship had been so quiet, so peaceful on the crossing. Everything about it had changed. The smoke which streamed from the towering stacks above her head rose into the air, eddied, wavered and drifted down stream. The huge side paddle wheels churned and dug into the muddy river with powerful sweeps that shook the boat with thier rumbling sounds. In the rigging above her Yankee sailors as nimble as spiders climbed precariously out into the spars and pulled in the main sails, for only steam power was used in entering the harbor. When all was ready, the sailors stood still on deck ready to unload baggage and cargo. The passengers stood still also and for a moment everything on the boat was silent under the churning of the paddle wheels. Suddenly the roar of the signal cannon shock the boat and Soeurette turned abruptly. As the ship passed the last few trees in the bend of the river, She saw the golden roof tops of the Crescent City curving around in to view. Everywhere the tangled masts of ships thrust themselves up into the afternoon sky. The ship moved slowly towards the water front, passing vessels of every description, flat-boats, keel boats, steamers, and gaudy river boats. Many of the

boats were piled to the upper decks with bales of cotton. Passing ships sounded their ~~cannon~~ as the huge French steamer drew into the harbor. With a sensation that shook the entire ship the huge engine was shifted to reverse to slow the vessel as she edged with heavy slowness toward the dock. Closer and closer she drew; finally the huge ropes were cast ashore and the ship pulled in and moored in her birth. A deep blast from the ships whistle signaled the captain's fairwell and thanks for a good crossing.

Above the chatter of talking passengers and the shouting of the sailors, ~~stange~~ chants sound~~ing~~ like nothing Soeuritte had ever heard before drifted over the ship. They sounded so strange, so sad that she tried to worm her way through the crowd of passengers to see where they came from. She twisted and turned to get through but to no avail. She could see nothing but top hats and laughing faces. Suddenly the slapping sound of the gang plank being lowered cracked above the noise of the crowd and Soeurette was pushed along in the flow of people to the wharf. She was nudged and bounced down the gang plank as she strained to see where the sad singing was coming from. The crowd of people began to thin as each was met by carriage ~~or~~ friends. The ship was still noisey with activity as the big wooden cranes hoisted the boat's cargo to the dock. It was getting dark now and no one appeared to meet her. She tried to fight the cold hand of ~~fear~~ that gripped her, for the thought of what would be come of her, of what would happen^{to} a young girl left alone and in an American city horrified her. The loud crack of a whip broke her frightened thoughts, and she turned to see a long line of sweaty slaves, their bodies glistening in the setting sun. She watched them as they sang their pathetic song under the lash

of the task master's whip. Perhaps it was true about what she had heard of the treatment of negroe slaves in America. Time passed as she ~~stood there watching the slaves.~~ ^{watched and listened to the wretched slaves, trying to forget her own problems.} When she looked around her it was almost dark and lines of torches ~~began to~~ ^{had begun to} appear up and down the wharves. Her Gallic temper began to get the better of her. ~~She didn't understand the customs of these Americans but she would be doomed if she would let herself.~~

Now was the time for her to chose her destiny. What was it going to be - the life of a lovely ingate with notheing but mere pitences to live on and certainly not to think of her bad reputation. The talk of the town she was, the scourge of the town w ould be stating it in better, more ditinative words. Or she could take her best friend's advise and go with him, to link her destiny with his, no matter what might come of them both, for she knew that bad times were upon them and even worse times were ahead of them. But did she really care what became of them both. Did she really care if they both were swept into the miasma of obscurity where their only resource would be happiness. No she would not take that. She would risk the chanches of nothingness. Afterall wasn't all live nothingness. At least her defeats would be defeats buried in nothingness and hence nothingness in themselves. In the next room my brother sits trying th find another way to his immo

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