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ISALINE AND I.

I.

"Well, Mademoiselle Isaline," I said, strolling out into the garden, "and who is the young *cavalier* with the black moustache?"

"What, monsieur," answered Isaline; "you have seen him? You have been watching from your window? We did not know you had returned from the Aiguille."

"Oh, yes, I've been back for more than an hour," I replied; "the snow was so deep on the Col that I gave it up at last, and made up my mind not to try it without a guide."

"I am so glad," Isaline said demurely. "I had such fears for monsieur. The Aiguille is dangerous, though it isn't very high, and I had been very distractedly anxious till monsieur returned."

"Thanks, mademoiselle," I answered, with a little bow. "Your solicitude for my safety flatters me immensely. But you haven't told me yet who is the gentleman with the black moustache."

Isaline smiled. "His name is M. Claude," she said; "M. Claude Tirard, you know; but we don't use surnames much among ourselves in the Pays de Vaud. He is the schoolmaster of the commune."

"M. Claude is a very happy man, then," I put in. "I envy his good fortune."

Isaline blushed a pretty blush. "On the contrary," she answered, "he has just been declaring himself the most miserable of all mankind. He says his life is not worth having."

"They always say that under those peculiar circumstances," I said. "Believe me, mademoiselle, there are a great many men who would be glad to exchange their own indifferently tolerable lot for M. Claude's unendurable misery."

Isaline said nothing, but she looked at me with a peculiar inquiring look, as if she would very much like to know exactly what I meant by it, and how much I meant it.

And what *did* I mean by it? Not very much after all, I imagine; for when it comes to retrospect, which one of us is any good at analyzing his own motives? The fact is, Isaline was a very pretty little girl, and I had nothing else to do, and I might just as well make myself agreeable to her as gain the reputation of being a bear of an Englishman. Besides, if there was the safeguard of M. Claude, a real indigenous suitor, in the background, there wasn't much danger of my polite attentions being misunderstood.

However, I haven't yet told you how I came to find myself on the farm at Les Pentes at all. This, then, is how it all came about. I was sick of the Temple; I had spent four or five briefless years in lounging about Brick Court and dropping in casually at important cases, just to let the world see I was the proud possessor of a well-curved wig; but even a wig (which suits my complexion admirably) palls after five years, and I said to myself that I would really cut London altogether, and live upon my means somewhere on the Continent. Very small means, to be sure, but still enough to pull through upon in Switzerland or the Black Forest. So, just by way of experiment as to how I liked it, I packed up my fishing-rod and my portmanteau (the first the most important), took the 7.18 express from the Gare de Lyon for Geneva, and found myself next afternoon comfortably seated on the verandah of my favourite hotel at Vevay. The lake is delightful, that we all know; but I wanted to get somewhere where there was a little fishing; so I struck back at once into the mountain country round Château d'Oex and Les Avants, and came soon upon the exact thing I wanted at Les Pentes.

Picture to yourself a great amphitheatre of open alp or mountain pasture in the foreground, with peaks covered by vivid green pines in the middle distance, and a background of pretty aiguilles, naked at their base, but clad near the summit with frozen masses of sparkling ice. Put into the midst of the amphitheatre a clear green-and-white torrent, with a church surrounded by a few wooden farmhouses on its slope, and there you have the commune of Les Pentes. But what was most delightful of all was this, that there was no hotel, no *pension*, not even a regular lodging-house. I was the first stranger to discover the capabilities of the village, and I was free to exploit them for my own private advantage. By a stroke of luck, it so happened that M. Clairon, the richest farmer of the place, with a pretty old-fashioned Vaudois farmhouse, and a pretty, dainty little Vaudoise daughter, was actually willing to take me in for a mere song per week. I jumped at the chance; and the same day saw me duly installed in a pretty little room, under the eaves of the pretty little farmhouse, and

with the pretty little daughter politely attending to all my wants.

Do you know those old-fashioned Vaudois houses, with their big gable-ends, their deep-thatched roofs, their cobs of maize, and smoked hams, and other rural wealth, hanging out ostentatiously under the protecting ledges? If you don't, you can't imagine what a delightful time I had of it at Les Pentes. The farm was a large one for the Pays de Vaud, and M. Clairon actually kept two servants; but madame would have been scandalized at the idea of letting "that Sara" or "that Lisette" wait upon the English voyager; and the consequence was that Mademoiselle Isaline herself always came to answer my little tinkling handbell. It was a trifle awkward, for Mademoiselle Isaline was too much of a young lady not to be treated with deferential politeness; and yet there is a certain difficulty in being deferentially polite to the person who lays your table for dinner. However, I made the best of it, and I'm bound to say I managed to get along very comfortably.

Isaline was one of those pretty, plump, laughing-eyed, dimple-cheeked, dark little girls that you hardly ever see anywhere outside the Pays de Vaud. It was almost impossible to look at her without smiling; I'm sure it was quite impossible for her to look at any one else and not smile at them. She wore the prettiest little Vaudois caps you ever saw in your life; and she looked so coquettish in them that you must have been very hard-hearted indeed if you did not straightway fall head over ears in love with her at first sight. Besides, she had been to school at Lausanne, and spoke such pretty, delicate, musical French. Now, my good mother thought badly of my French accent; and when I told her I meant to spend a summer month or two in western Switzerland, she said to me, "I *do* hope, Charlie dear, you will miss no opportunity of conversing with the people, and improving yourself in colloquial French a little." I am certainly the most dutiful of sons, and I solemnly assure you that whenever I was not fishing or climbing I missed no opportunity whatsoever of conversing with pretty little Isaline.

"Mademoiselle Isaline," I said on this particular afternoon, "I should much like a cup of tea; can Sara bring me one out here in the garden?"

"Perfectly, monsieur; I will bring you out the little table on to the grass plot," said Isaline. "That will arrange things for you much more pleasantly."

"Not for worlds," I said, running in to get it myself; but Isaline had darted into the house before me, and brought it out with her own white little hands on to the tiny lawn. Then she went in again, and soon reappeared with a Japanese tray—bought at Montreux specially in my honour—and a set of the funniest little old China tea-things ever beheld in a London bric-à-brac cabinet.

"Won't you sit and take a cup with me, mademoiselle?" I asked.

"*Ma foi*, monsieur," answered Isaline, blushing again, "I have never tasted any except as *pthisane*. But you other English drink it so, don't you? I will try it, for the rest: one learns always."

I poured her out a cup, and creamed it with some of that delicious Vaudois cream (no cream in the world so good as what you get in the Pays de Vaud—you see I am an enthusiast for my adopted country—but that is anticipating matters), and handed it over to her for her approval. She tasted it with a little *moue*. English-women don't make the *moue*, so, though I like sticking to my mother tongue, I confess my inability to translate the word. "Brrrr," she said. "Do you English like that stuff! Well, one must accommodate one's self to it, I suppose;" and to do her justice, she proceeded to accommodate herself to it with such distinguished success that she asked me soon for another cup, and drank it off without even a murmur.

"And this M. Claude, then," I asked; "he is a friend of yours? Eh?"

"Passably," she answered, colouring slightly. "You see, we have not much society at Les Pentes. He comes from the Normal School at Geneva. He is instructed, a man of education. We see few such here. What would you have?" She said it apologetically, as though she thought she was bound to excuse herself for having made M. Claude's acquaintance.

"But you like him very much?"

"Like him? Well, yes; I liked him always well enough. But he is too haughty. He gives himself airs. To-day he is angry with me. He has no right to be angry with me."

"Mademoiselle," I said, "have you ever read our Shakespeare?"

"Oh, yes, in English I have read him. I can read English well enough, though I speak but a little."

"And have you read the 'Tempest'?"

"How? Ariel, Ferdinand, Miranda, Caliban? Oh, yes. It is beautiful."

"Well, mademoiselle," I said, "do you remember how Miranda first saw Ferdinand?"

She smiled and blushed again—she was such a little blusher. "I know what you would say," she said. "You English are blunt. You talk to young ladies so strangely."

"Well, Mademoiselle Isaline, it seems to me that you at Les Pentes are like Miranda on the island. You see nobody, and there is nobody here to see you. You must not go and fall in love, like Miranda, with the very first man you happen to meet with, because he comes from the Normal School at Geneva. There are plenty of men in the world, believe me, beside M. Claude."

"Ah, but Miranda and Ferdinand both loved one another," said Isaline archly; "and they were married, and both lived happily ever afterward." I saw at once she was trying to pique me.

"How do you know that?" I asked. "It doesn't say so in the play. For all I know, Ferdinand lost the crown of Naples through a revolution, and went and settled down at a country school in Savoy or somewhere, and took to drinking, and became brutally unsociable, and made Miranda's life a toil and a burden to her. At any rate, I'm sure of one thing; he wasn't worthy of her."

What made me go on in this stupid way? I'm sure I don't know. I certainly didn't mean to marry Isaline myself: . . . at least, not definitely: and yet when you are sitting down at tea on a rustic garden seat, with a pretty girl in a charming white crimped cap beside you, and you get a chance of insinuating that other fellows don't think quite as much of her as you do, it isn't human nature to let slip the opportunity of insinuating it.

"But you don't know M. Claude," said Isaline practically, "and so you can't tell whether *he* is worthy of *me* or not."

"I'm perfectly certain," I answered, "that he can't be, even though he were a very paragon of virtue, learning, and manly beauty."

"If monsieur talks in that way," said Isaline, "I shall have to go back at once to mamma."

"Wait a moment," I said, "and I will talk however you wish me. You know, you agree to give me instruction in conversational French. That naturally includes lessons in conversation with ladies of exceptional personal attractions. I must practise for every possible circumstance of life. . . . So you have read Shakespeare, then. And any other English books?"

"Oh, many. Scott, and Dickens, and all, except Byron. My papa says a young lady must not read Byron. But I have read what he has said of our lake, in a book of extracts. It is a great pleasure to me to look down among the vines and chestnuts, there, and to think that our lake, which gleams so blue and beautiful below, is the most famous in poetry of all lakes. You know, Jean Jacques says, 'Mon lac est le premier,' and so it is."

"Then you have read Jean Jacques too?"

"Oh, mon Dieu, no. My papa says a young lady must especially not read Jean Jacques. But I know something about him—so much as is *convenable*. Hold here! do you see that clump of trees down there by the lake, just above Clarens? That is Julie's grove—'le bosquet de Julie' we call it. There isn't a spot along the lake that is not thus famous, that has not its memories and its associations. It is for that that I could not choose ever to leave the dear old Pays de Vaud."

"You would not like to live in England, then?" I asked. (What a fool I was, to be sure.)

"Oh, ma foi, no. That would make one too much shiver, with your chills, and your fogs, and your winters. I could not stand it. It is cold here, but at any rate it is sunny. . . . Well, at least, it would not be pleasant. . . . But, after all, that depends. . . . You have the sun, too, sometimes, don't you?"

"Isaline!" cried madame from the window. "I want you to come and help me pick over the gooseberries!" And, to say the truth, I thought it quite time she should go.

II.

A week later, I met M. Claude again. He was a very nice young fellow, there was not a doubt of that. He was intelligent, well educated, manly, with all the honest, sturdy, independent Swiss nature clearly visible in his frank, bright, open face. I have seldom met a man whom I liked better at first sight than M. Claude, and after he had gone away I felt more than a little ashamed of myself to think I had been half trying to steal away Isaline's heart from this good fellow, without really having any deliberate design upon it myself. It began to strike me that I had been doing a very dirty, shabby thing.

"Charlie, my boy," I said to myself, as I sat fishing with bottom bait and dangling my legs over the edge of a pool, "you've been flirting with this pretty little Swiss girl; and what's worse, you've been flirting in a very bad sort of way. She's got a lover of her own; and you've been trying to make her feel dissatisfied with him, for no earthly reason. You've taken advantage of your position and your fancied London airs and graces to run down by implication a good fellow who really loves her and would probably make her an excellent husband. Don't let this occur again, sir." And having thus virtuously resolved, of course I went away and flirted with Isaline next morning as vigorously as ever.

During the following fortnight, M. Claude came often, and I could not disguise from myself the fact that M. Claude did not quite like me. This was odd, for I liked him very much. I suppose he took me for a potential rival: men are so jealous when they are in love. Besides, I observed that Isaline tried not to be thrown too much with him alone; tried to include me in the party wherever she went with him. Also, I will freely confess that I felt myself every day more fond of Isaline's society, and I half fancied I caught myself trepidating a little inwardly now and then when she happened to come up to me. Absurd to be so susceptible; but such is man.

One lovely day about this time I set out once more to try my hand (or rather my feet) alone upon the Aiguille. Isaline put me up a nice little light lunch in my knapsack, and insisted upon seeing that my alpenstock was firmly shod, and my pedestrian boots in due climbing order. In fact, she loudly lamented my perversity in attempting to make the ascent without a guide; and she must even needs walk with me as far as the little bridge over the torrent beside the snow line, to point me out the road the guides generally took to the platform at the summit. For myself, I was a practised mountaineer, and felt no fear for the result. As I left her for the ice, she stood a long time looking and waving me the right road with her little pocket-handkerchief; while as long as I could hear her voice she kept on exhorting me to be very careful. "Ah, if monsieur would only have taken a guide! You don't know how dangerous that little Aiguille really is."

The sun was shining brightly on the snow; the view across the valley of the Rhone towards the snowy Alps beyond was exquisite; and the giants of the Bernese Oberland stood out in gloriously brilliant outline on the other side against the clear blue summer sky. I went on alone, enjoying myself hugely in my own quiet fashion, and watching Isaline as she made her way slowly along the green path, looking round often and again, till she disappeared in the shadow of the pinewood that girt round the tiny village. On, farther still, up and up and up, over soft snow for the most part, with very little ice, till at last, after three hours' hard climbing, I stood on the very summit of the pretty Aiguille. It was not very high, but it commanded a magnificent view over either side—the Alps on one hand, the counterchain of the Oberland on the other, and the blue lake gleaming and glowing through all its length in its green valley between them. There I sat down on the pure snow in the glittering sunlight, and ate the lunch that Isaline had provided for me, with much gusto. Unfortunately, I also drank the pint of white wine from the head of the lake—Yvorne, we call it, and I grow it now in my own vineyard at Pic de la Baume—but that is anticipating again: as good a light wine as you will get anywhere in Europe in these depressing days of blight and phylloxera. Now, a pint of *vin du pays* is not too much under ordinary circumstances for a strong young man in vigorous health, doing a hard day's muscular work with legs, arms, and sinews: but mountain air is thin and exhilarating in itself, and it lends a point to a half-bottle of Yvorne which the wine's own body does not by any means usually possess. I don't mean to say so much light wine does one any positive harm; but it makes one more careless and easy-going; gives one a false sense of security, and entices one into paying less heed to one's footsteps or to suspicious-looking bits of doubtful ice.

Well, after lunch I took a good look at the view with my field-glass; and when I turned it towards Les Pentes I could make out our farmhouse distinctly, and even saw Isaline standing on the balcony looking towards the Aiguille. My heart jumped a little when I thought that she was probably looking for me. Then I wound my way down again, not by retracing my steps, but by trying a new path, which seemed to me a more practicable one. It was not the one Isaline had pointed out, but it appeared to go more directly, and to avoid one or two of the very worst rough-and-tumble pieces.

I was making my way back, merrily enough, when suddenly I happened to step on a little bit of loose ice, which slid beneath my feet in a very uncomfortable manner. Before I knew where I was, I felt myself sliding rapidly on, with the ice

clinging to my heel; and while I was vainly trying to dig my alpenstock into a firm snowbank, I became conscious for a moment of a sort of dim indefinite blank. It was followed by a sensation of empty space; and then I knew I was falling over the edge of something.

Whrrr, whrrr, whrrr, went the air at my ear for a moment; and the next thing I knew was a jar of pain, and a consciousness of being enveloped in something very soft. The jar took away all other feeling for a few seconds; I only knew I was stunned and badly hurt. After a time, I began to be capable of trying to realize the position; and when I opened my eyes and looked around me, I recognized that I was lying on my back, and that there was a pervading sensation of whiteness everywhere about. In point of fact, I was buried in snow. I tried to move, and to get on my legs again, but two things very effectually prevented me. In the first place, I could not stir my legs without giving myself the most intense pain in my spine; and in the second place, when I did stir them I brought them into contact on the one hand with a solid wall of rock, and on the other hand with vacant space, or at least with very soft snow unsupported by a rocky bottom. Gradually, by feeling about with my arms, I began exactly to realize the gravity of the position. I had fallen over a precipice, and had lighted on a snow-covered ledge half-way down. My back was very badly hurt, and I dared not struggle up on to my legs for fear of falling off the ledge again on the other side. Besides, I was half smothered in the snow, and even if anybody ever came to look for me (which they would not probably do till to-morrow) they would not be able to see me, because of the deep-covering drifts. If I was not extricated that night, I should probably freeze to death before morning, especially after my pint of wine. "Confound that Yvorne!" I said to myself savagely. "If ever I get out of this scrape I'll never touch a drop of the stuff again as long as I live." I regret to say that I have since broken that solemn promise twice daily for the past three years.

My one hope was that Isaline might possibly be surprised at my delay in returning, and might send out one of the guides to find me.

So there I lay a long time, unable even to get out of the snow, and with every movement causing me a horrid pain in my injured back. Still, I kept on moving my legs every now and then to make the pain shoot, and so prevent myself from feeling drowsy. The snow half suffocated me, and I could only breathe with difficulty. At last, slowly, I began to lose consciousness, and presently I suppose I fell asleep. To fall asleep in the snow is the first stage of freezing to death.

III.

Noises above me, I think, on the edge of the precipice. Something coming down, oh, how slowly. Something comes, and fumbles about a yard or so away. Then I cry out feebly, and the something approaches. M. Claude's hearty voice calls out cheerily, "Enfin, le voilà!" and I am saved.

They let down ropes and pulled me up to the top of the little crag, clumsily, so as to cause me great pain: and then three men carried me home to the farmhouse on a stretcher. M. Claude was one of the three, the others were labourers from the village.

"How did you know I was lost, M. Claude?" I asked feebly, as they carried me along on the level.

He did not answer for a moment; then he said, rather gloomily, in German, "The Fräulein was watching you with a telescope from Les Pentes." He did not say Fräulein Isaline, and I knew why at once: he did not wish the other carriers to know what he was talking about.

"And she told you?" I said, in German too.

"She sent me. I did not come of my own accord. I came under orders." He spoke sternly, hissing out his gutturals in an angry voice.

"M. Claude," I said, "I have done very wrong, and I ask your forgiveness. You have saved my life, and I owe you a debt of gratitude for it. I will leave Les Pentes and the Fräulein to-morrow, or at least as soon as I can safely be moved."

He shook his head bitterly. "It is no use now," he answered, with a sigh; "the Fräulein does not wish for me. I have asked her, and she has refused me. And she has been watching you up and down the Aiguille the whole day with a telescope. When she saw you had fallen, she rushed out like one distracted, and came to tell me at the school in the village. It is no use, you have beaten me."

"M. Claude," I said, "I will plead for you. I have done you wrong, and I ask your forgiveness."

"I owe you no ill-will," he replied, in his honest, straightforward, Swiss manner. "It is not your fault if you too have fallen in love with her. How could any man help it? Living in the same house with her, too! Allons," he went on in French, resuming his alternative tongue (for he spoke both equally), "we must get on quick and send for the doctor from Gliion to see you."

By the time we reached the farmhouse, I had satisfied myself that there was nothing very serious the matter with me after all. The soft snow had broken the force of the concussion. I had strained my spine a good deal, and hurt the tendons of the thighs and back, but had not broken any bones, nor injured any vital organ. So when they laid me on the old-fashioned sofa in my little sitting-room, lighted a fire in the wide hearth, and covered me over with a few rugs, I felt comparatively happy and comfortable under the circumstances. The doctor was sent for in hot haste; but on his arrival, he confirmed my own view of the case, and declared I only needed rest and quiet and a little arnica.

I was rather distressed, however, when madame came up to see me an hour later, and assured me that she and monsieur thought I ought to be moved down as soon as possible into more comfortable apartments at Lausanne, where I could secure better attendance. I saw in a moment what that meant: they wanted to get me away from Isaline. "There are no more comfortable quarters in all Switzerland, I am sure, madame," I said: but madame was inflexible. There was an English doctor at Lausanne, and to Lausanne accordingly I must go. Evidently, it had just begun to strike those two good simple people that Isaline and I could just conceivably manage to fall in love with one another.

Might I ask for Mademoiselle Isaline to bring me up a cup of tea? Yes, Isaline would bring it in a minute. And when she came in, those usually laughing black eyes obviously red with crying, I felt my heart sink within me when I thought of my promise to M. Claude; while I began to be vaguely conscious that I was really and truly very much in love with pretty little Isaline on my own account.

She laid the tray on the small table by the sofa, and was going to leave the room immediately. "Mademoiselle Isaline," I said, trying to raise myself, and falling back again in pain, "won't you sit with me a little while? I want to talk with you."

"My mamma said I must come away at once," Isaline replied demurely. "She is without doubt busy and wants my aid." And she turned to go towards the door.

"Oh, do come back, mademoiselle," I cried, raising myself again, and giving myself, oh, such a wrench in the spine:

"don't you see how much it hurts me to sit up?"

She turned back, indecisively, and sat down in the big chair just beyond the table, handing me the cup, and helping me to cream and sugar. I plunged at once *in medias res*.

"You have been crying, mademoiselle," I said, "and I think I can guess the reason. M. Claude has told me something about it. He has asked you for your hand, and you have refused him. Is it not so?" This was a little bit of hypocrisy on my part, I confess, for I knew what she had been crying about perfectly: but I wished to be loyal to M. Claude.

Isaline blushed and laughed. "I do not cry for M. Claude," she said. "I may have other matters of my own to cry about. But M. Claude is very free with his confidences, if he tells such things to a stranger."

"Listen to me, Mademoiselle Isaline," I said. "Your father and mother have asked me to leave here to-morrow and go down to Lausanne. I shall probably never see you again. But before I go, I want to plead with you for M. Claude. He has saved my life, and I owe him much gratitude. He loves you; he is a brave man, a good man, a true and earnest man; why will you not marry him? I feel sure he is a noble fellow, and he will make you a tender husband. Will you not think better of your decision? I cannot bear to leave Les Pentes till I know that you have made him happy."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"And you go away to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Oh, monsieur!"

There isn't much in those two words; but they may be pronounced with a good deal of difference in the intonation; and Isaline's intonation did not leave one in much doubt as to how she used them. Her eyes filled again with tears, and she half started up to go. Ingrate and wretch that I was, forgetful of my promise to M. Claude, my eyes filled responsively, and I jumped to catch her and keep her from going, of course at the expense of another dreadful wrench to my poor back. "Isaline," I cried, unconsciously dropping the mademoiselle, and letting her see my brimming eyelids far too obviously, "Isaline, do wait awhile, I implore you, I beseech you! I have something to say to you."

She seated herself once more in the big chair. "Well, mon pauvre monsieur," she cried, "what is it?"

"Isaline," I began, trying it over again; "why won't you marry M. Claude?"

"Oh, that again. Well," answered Isaline boldly, "because I do not love him, and I love somebody else. You should not ask a young lady about these matters. In Switzerland, we do not think it *comme il faut*."

"But," I went on, "why do you not love M. Claude? He has every good quality, and——"

"Every good quality, and—he bores me," answered Isaline. "Monsieur," she went on archly, "you were asking me the other day what books I had read in English. Well, I have read Longfellow. Do you remember Miles Standish?"

I saw what she was driving at, and laughed in spite of myself. "Yes," I said, "I know what you mean. When John Alden is pleading with Priscilla on behalf of Miles Standish, Priscilla cuts him short by saying——"

Isaline finished the quotation herself in her own pretty clipped English, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

I laughed. She laughed. We both looked at one another; and the next thing I remember was that I had drawn down Isaline's plump little face close to mine, and was kissing it vigorously, in spite of an acute darting pain at each kiss all along my spine and into my marrow-bones. Poor M. Claude was utterly forgotten.

In twenty minutes I had explained my whole position to Isaline: and in twenty minutes more, I had monsieur and madame up to explain it all to them in their turn. Monsieur listened carefully while I told him that I was an English advocate in no practice to speak of; that I had a few hundreds a year of my own, partly dependent upon my mother; that I had thoughts of settling down permanently in Switzerland; and that Isaline was willing, with her parents' consent, to share my modest competence. Monsieur replied with true Swiss caution that he would inquire into my statements, and that if they proved to be as represented, and if I obtained in turn my mother's consent, he would be happy to hand me over Isaline.

"Toutefois," he added quietly, "it will be perhaps better to rescind your journey to Lausanne. The Glion doctor is, after all, a sufficiently skilful one." So I waited on in peace at Les Pentes.

Madame had insisted upon telegraphing the news of my accident to my mother, lest it should reach her first in the papers ("Je suis mère moi-même, monsieur," she said, in justification of her conduct). And next morning we got a telegram in reply from my mother, who evidently imagined she must hurry over at once if she wished to see her son alive, or at least must nurse him through a long and dangerous illness. Considering the injuries were a matter of about three days' sofa, in all probability, this haste was a little overdone. However, she would arrive by the very first *rapide* from Paris; and on the whole I was not sorry, for I was half afraid she might set her face against my marrying "a foreigner," but I felt quite sure any one who once saw Isaline could never resist her.

That afternoon, when school was over, M. Claude dropped in to see how I was getting on. I felt more like a thief at that moment than I ever felt in my whole life before or since. I knew I must tell him the simple truth; but I didn't know how to face it. However, as soon as I began, he saved me the trouble by saying, "You need not mind explaining. Mademoiselle Isaline has told me all. You did your best for me, I feel sure; but she loves you, and she does not love me. We cannot help these things; they come and go without our being able to govern them. I am sorry, more than sorry; but I thank you for your kind offices. Mademoiselle Isaline tells me you said all you could on my behalf, and nothing on your own. Accept my congratulations on having secured the love of the sweetest girl in all Switzerland." And he shook my hand with an honest heartiness that cost me several more twinges both in the spine and the half-guilty conscience. Yet, after all, it was not my fault.

"Monsieur Claude," I said, "you are an honest fellow, and a noble fellow, and I trust you will still let me be your friend."

"Naturally," answered M. Claude, in his frank way. "I have only done my duty. You have been the lucky one, but I must not bear you a grudge for that; though it has cost my heart a hard struggle;" and, as he spoke, the tears came for a moment in his honest blue eyes, though he tried to brush them away unseen.

"Monsieur Claude," I said, "you are too generous to me. I can never forgive myself for this."

Before many days my mother came to hand duly; and though her social prejudices were just a trifle shocked, at first, by the farmhouse, with its hams and maize, which I had found so picturesque, I judged rightly that Isaline would soon make an easy conquest of her. My mother readily admitted that my accent had improved audibly to the naked ear; that Isaline's manners were simply perfect; that she was a dear, pretty, captivating little thing; and that on the whole she saw no objections, save one possible one, to my marriage. "Of course, Charlie," she said, "the Clairons are Protestants; because, otherwise, I could never think of giving my consent."

This was a poser in its way; for though I knew the village lay just on the borderland, and some of the people were Catholics while others were Reformed, I had not the remotest notion to which of the two churches Isaline belonged. "Upon my soul, mother dear," I said, "it has never struck me to inquire into Isaline's private abstract opinion on the subject of the Pope's infallibility or the Geneva Confession. You see, after all, it could hardly be regarded as an important or authoritative one. However, I'll go at once and find out."

Happily, as it turned out, the Clairons were Reformed, and so my mother's one objection fell to the ground immediately. M. Clairon's inquiries were also satisfactory; and the final result was that Isaline and I were to be quietly married before the end of the summer. The good father had a nice little vineyard estate at Pic de la Baume, which he proposed I should undertake to cultivate; and my mother waited to see us installed in one of the prettiest little toy châteaux to be seen anywhere at the Villeneuve end of the lovely lake. A happier or sweeter bride than Isaline I defy the whole world, now or ever, to produce.

From the day of our wedding, almost, Isaline made it the business of her life to discover a fitting wife for good M. Claude; and in the end she succeeded in discovering, I will freely admit (since Isaline is not jealous), the second prettiest and second nicest girl in the whole Pays de Vaud. And what is more, she succeeded also in getting M. Claude to fall head over ears in love with her at first sight; to propose to her at the end of a week; and to be accepted with effusion by Annette herself, and with coldness by her papa, who thought the question of means a trifle unsatisfactory. But Isaline and I arranged that Claude should come into partnership in our vineyard business on easy terms, and give up schoolmastering for ever; and the consequence is that he and his wife have now got the companion châteaux to ours, and between our two local connections, in Switzerland and England, we are doing one of the best trades in the new export wine traffic of any firm along the lake. Of course we have given up growing Yvorne, except for our own use, confining ourselves entirely to a high-priced vintage-wine, with very careful culture, for our English business: and I take this opportunity of recommending our famous phylloxera-proof white Pic de la Baume, London Agents——. But Isaline says that looks too much like an advertisement, so I leave off. Still, I can't help saying that a dearer little wife than Isaline, or a better partner than Claude, never yet fell to any man's lot. They certainly are an excellent people, these Vaudois, and I

think you would say so too if only you knew them as well as I do.

[The end of *The Beckoning Hand: Isaline and I* by Grant Allen]