

Rural Adventure

By Cameron Dockery CHAPTER 11

In the distance a faint murmur of bartering voices came from the old French Market at one end and from the nearby piers the echoes of toots and whistles of the maritime world. But the street itself was deserted as it lay sleep-

self in the decayed remnants of its shady past. The taxi stopped abruptly before an impressive mahogany door set into the faintly pink plaster of what was an obviously ancient house. Lotus' bags were deposited

hastily. The driver seemed anxious to be off and accepted with a quick nod her generous tip.

Lotus examined the carved door with its voluptuous cupids holding a wreath on a level with her eyes, and pulled the bell. There was no immediate answer and she was staring curiously at the ornate figures when to her surprise the panel behind the wreath slid aside and she found herself gazing into the clear depth of a calculating brown eye. Then the door swung open and revealed the owner, a young mulatto girl who smirked shyly.

Lotus stepped over a high sill into a long cool hall whose waxy marquetry gleamed from years of polishing. She followed the slender gingham clad girl into a small salon furnished with charming French antiques and delicate bric-a-brac.

She extended the note from Valette Pondeau. "Give this to Mademoiselle Duval - I think she'll see me."

While she was examining a small snuff box with a cameo profile of Madame Pompadour on the lid, a tortoise-shell cat stalked in and studied her gravely with large bright-green eyes. Having satisfied his feline curiosity he stalked out again his plumed tail raised arrogantly. A moment later the mulatto girl entered.

She bobbed her head jerkily. "Monsieur, say she see you in the courtyard, Miss." Making a queer lazy motion with her long fingers she beckoned and, shuffling, led Lotus along a hall to arched doors opening onto a flagged patio.

A small circular pool with a tinkling fountain occupied the center of the court and three cats sat on its plaster rim gazing at the gold fish darting beneath the lily pads. Flickering sunlight danced on the water and on the gleaming leaves of the potted plants tucked into every available nook.

Lotus started suddenly as a harsh voice let out a raucous scream. "Caramba! Caramba! Vous êtes un imbécille! Imbécille, le diable!"

The sentence was followed by a shrill stream of French and Spanish invectives then a gently modulated voice of bell-like quality. "Do not mind Pedro, M'ss Kirkman he is a very badly behaved bird."

Lotus turned to face Chloe Duval.

Chloe was a woman of generous proportions; fortunately, the proportions were in the right places and the outlines of what had once been a beautiful figure were still discernible. She waved a heavily ringed hand at Lotus and with the other pushed a cat off a nearby chair.

"Sit down here, ma cher'e. So you know my friend, Valette Pondeau?"

Lotus nodded. "Yes, I met her in New York."

Monsieur, as the maid had called her, flashed a brilliant smile and her dark eyes twinkled with pleasure. "Ah, dear old Va-

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lette - How is she? What is she doing now?"

"Oh, she's fine. She runs a small restaurant in Washington."

"A restaurant! Mon Dieu! Well, I am not surprised. What a cook! She is a real gourmet, many times I have enjoyed her, Crepes Suzette."

She rattled on breathlessly about the merits of her old friend's culinary ability, but Lotus saw the bright eyes skimming over her face and knew she was the object of a close scrutiny.

Then the pater ceased abruptly. Chloe Duval sat up and looked directly at the younger woman. "So you would like a position in my cafe now?"

"Yes very much. You see the night club where I sang before - Lotus paused, making sure to gather the facts of her little lie but Chloe waved her explanation aside as matters of no importance.

"Never mind, those things will happen. The prying police are always poking their long noses into someone's affairs." She raised her eyebrows appreciatively. "Eet your voice is one-half as attractive as your appearance, I have a place for you."

"Oh, that is wonderful. Would you like me to sing for you now?" Chloe laughed delightedly, but shook her head. "Non, that can wait. I will take Valette's word."

Besides, I need a new singer - I lost one last week. Ah, the poor girl!" She shook her head sadly. "Uneasily, Lotus watched her. "You mean she - she died?"

"Died! No, worse than that!" Chloe made an expression of disgust. "Bah, the girl got married! And to a sailor!" And then she burst into a trill of laughter.

Chloe eyed her speculatively. "I can offer you only twenty dollars a week to begeth weeth, but that weel include your meals, and of course you will live here, too. I have several extra rooms," she waved her pump arm in the direction of the upper story. "Of course you have the costume, cherie?"

"Costume? Oh, you mean to sing in. Well, I have two evening dresses with me."

The older woman gave her a friendly glance. "I am going to like you, I think, sooo I shall call you Rosa and you will call me Chloe, eh, leech, one?"

(To be continued)

DOIRON'S CREEK SCHOOL

The following is the report for the months of August and September:

Grade IX: 1. Marie Hagen; 2. William Gallant. Grade VIII: 1. Faustina Pineau. Grade VII: 1. Margaret Hagen; 2. Yvonne Pineau; 3. Lillian Pineau.

Grade VI: 1. Frances Gallant; 2. Louise Pineau. Grade V: 1. Patricia Gallant; 2. Joan Gallant; 3. Leo Pineau. Grade II: 1. Laurina Pineau; 2. Vincent Doucette; 3. Kilmer Hagen.

Grade II: 1. Noel Gallant. The highest average in higher grades was Margaret Hagen, 92. Highest average in lower grades was Frances Gallant, 86. Georgina Doiron, Teacher

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