

## CHAPTER IX MARY LOUISE SCENTS A MYSTERY

Colonel Hathaway instantly rose.

"I beg your pardon," said he. "I am Colonel James Hathaway, an American, and this is my granddaughter, Mary Louise Burrows. Our carriage met with an accident on the main road below and we wandered in here while waiting for repairs and chanced to meet your daughter. You are Mr. Jones, I believe?"

He nodded, still standing in his place and regarding his visitors with unconcealed suspicion. Under his arm he held several books.

"Who informed you that I was living here?" he demanded.

"I was wholly unaware of the fact," said the Colonel, stiffly. "I did not know you were in Italy. I did not know such an important person existed, strange to say, although I can remember that an artist named Jason Jones once married Antoinette Seaver, the daughter of my old friend Captain Robert Seaver."

"Oh, you remember that, do you?"

"This is the first time I have had the distinguished honor of meeting you, sir, and I trust it will be the last time."

"That's all right," said Jason Jones, more cordially. "I can't see that it's any of my affair, either way."

"We have been making the acquaintance of Tony Seaver's daughter, Miss Alora Jones, in your absence. But we will not intrude farther, Mr. Jones. Come, Mary Louise."

"Oh, don't go!" pleaded Alora, catching Mary Louise's arm. And just then Leona entered with the tea and biscuits.

"Sit down, man," said Jason Jones in a less aggressive tone. "I've no objection to your coming here, under the circumstances, and you are our first visitors in three years. That's often enough, but now that you are here, make yourself at home. What's happening over in America? Have you been there lately?"

He laid his books on a table and sat down. But after that one speech, which he perhaps considered conciliatory, he remained glum and allowed the others to do the talking.

Colonel Hathaway had stayed because he noted the leading look in Mary Louise's eyes. He was himself interested in Alora and indignant over her evident neglect. For her sake he would bear the insolence of his host, an insolence he recognized as characteristic of the man.

Alora, in her father's presence, lost her fluent speech and no longer dared mention personal matters to her guests. Both Mary Louise and her grandfather tried to lead Alora and Jason Jones to speak of themselves-- of their life and future plans--but the man evaded direct answers and the girl had suddenly become silent and reserved.

Finally, however, Mary Louise had an idea.

"We are bound for Sorrento," said she, "where we intend to stay a week at the Hotel Vittoria. Will you let Alora come to us for ever Sunday, as our guest? We will drive here and get her the day after to-morrow-- that's Saturday, you know--and fetch her home on Monday."

"No," said Jason Jones.

"Oh, why not, father?" pleaded the girl.

"You've no fit clothes. I don't want you hanging around Sorrento," he replied.

"It will be a nice change for your daughter and it will give us much pleasure to entertain her," said Mary Louise.

"It's a capital idea," declared the Colonel positively, and looking the other man straight in the eye he added: "I am sure you will withdraw your objections, Mr. Jones."

The man dropped his eyes, frowning. But presently he said to Alora:

"Go, if you want to. But keep out of the town. Don't leave the hotel grounds."

"Why not?" asked his daughter in a defiant tone.

"It's not safe. I know Sorrento, and these rascally Italians would be glad to steal you, if they had the chance, and then blackmail me a ransom."

Mary Louise laughed.

"What a fine adventure that would be!" she exclaimed. "But we will promise to guard Alora and keep her from the clutches of bandits. I didn't know there were any left in Italy."

"To get rid of them you'd have to depopulate the country," said Jason Jones. "It is no laughing matter, young woman, and--my daughter is somewhat valuable."