

## CHAPTER V

### MADAME RIENNES

About 11 o'clock on the day following this conversation, Godfrey found himself standing on the platform in the big station of Lucerne.

"How are you going to get to Kleindorf?" Miss Ogilvy asked of him.

"It's five miles away by the road. I think you had better come to my house and have some déjeuner. Afterwards I will send you there in the carriage."

As she spoke a tall gaunt man in ultra-clerical attire, with a very large hooked nose and wearing a pair of blue spectacles, came shuffling towards them.

"Madame is Engleesh?" he said, peering at her through the blue glasses. "Oh! it is easy to know it, though I am so blind. Has Madame by chance seen a leetle, leetle Engleesh boy, who should arrive out of this train? I look everywhere and I cannot find him, and the conducteur, he says he not there. No leetle boy in the second class. His name it is Godfrey, the son of an English pasteur, a man who fear God in the right way."

There was something so absurd in the old gentleman's appearance and method of address, that Miss Ogilvy, who had a sense of humour, was

obliged to turn away to hide her mirth. Recovering, she answered:

"I think this is your little boy, Monsieur le Pasteur," and she indicated the tall and handsome Godfrey, who stood gazing at his future instructor open-mouthed. Whoever he had met in his visions, the Pasteur Boiset was not one of them. Never, asleep or waking, had he seen anyone in the least like him.

The clergyman peered at Godfrey, studying him from head to foot.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed, "I understood he was quite, quite leetle, not a big young man who will eat much and want many things. Well, he will be bon compagnon for Juliette, and Madame too, she like the big better than the leetle. Il est beau et il a l'air intelligent, n'est ce pas, Madame?" he added confidentially.

"Bien beau et très intelligent," she replied, observing that Godfrey was engaged in retrieving his overcoat which he had left in the carriage. Then she explained that she had become friendly with this young gentleman, and hoped that he would be allowed to visit her whenever he wished. Also she gave her name and address.

"Oh! yes, Mademoiselle Ogilvee, the rich English lady who live in the fine house. I have heard of her. Mais voyons! Mademoiselle is not Catholic, is she, for I promise to protect this lad from that red wolf?"

"No, Monsieur, fear nothing. Whatever I am, I am not Catholic,"  
(though, perhaps, if you knew all, you would think me something much  
more dangerous, she added to herself.)

Then they said goodbye.

"I say, Miss Ogilvy," exclaimed Godfrey, blushing, "you've been awfully  
kind to me. If it hadn't been for you I should have missed that train  
and never heard the last of it. Also, I should have had to go hungry  
from London here, since I promised my father not to buy anything on the  
journey, and you know I forgot the basket." (By the way, being  
addressed, it arrived three days afterwards, a mass of corruption, with  
six francs to pay on it, and many papers to be signed.)

"Not at all, Godfrey, it was delightful to have you as a companion--and  
a friend," she added meaningly. "You will come and see me, won't you?"

"Yes, of course, if I can. But meanwhile, please wait a minute," and he  
pulled out his purse.

"What on earth are you going to do, Godfrey? I don't want your card."

"Card! I haven't got a card. I am going to make you a present."

"Make me a present?" gasped Miss Ogilvy, a vague vision of half-crowns  
flashing before her mind.

"Yes, it is rather a curious thing. It was found round the neck-bone of an old knight, whose remains they threw out of the Abbey Church when they put in the heating apparatus. I saw it there, and the sexton gave it to me when he discovered that it was only stone. You will see it has a hole in it, so he must have worn it as an ornament. The grave he lay in was that of a Crusader, for the legs are crossed upon his brass, although his name has gone. Oh! here it is," and he produced an oblong piece of black graphite or some such stone, covered with mystical engravings.

She seized the object, and examined it eagerly.

"Why, it is a talisman," she said, "Gnostic, I should think, for there is the cock upon it, and a lot that I can't read, probably a magic formula. No doubt the old Crusader got it in the East, perhaps as a gift from some Saracen in whose family it had descended. Oh! my dear boy, I do thank you. You could not have made me a present that I should value more."

"I am so glad," said Godfrey.

"Yes, but I am ashamed to take it from you. Well, I'll leave it back to you one day."

"Leave it back! Then you must die before me, and why should you do

that? You are quite young."

"Because I shall," she answered with a sad little smile. "I look stronger than I am. Meanwhile you will come and tell me all about this talisman."

"I have told you all I know, Miss Ogilvy."

"Do you think so? I don't. But look, your old pasteur is calling that the diligence is coming. Good-bye. I'll send the carriage for you next Sunday in time for déjeuner."

A few minutes later Godfrey found himself packed in a rumbling old diligence amidst a number of peasant women with baskets. Also there was a Roman Catholic priest who sat opposite to the Pasteur. For a while these two eyed each other with evident animosity, just like a pair of rival dogs, Godfrey thought to himself.

At the outskirts of the town they passed a shrine, in which was the image of some saint. The priest crossed himself and bowed so low that he struck the knee of the Pasteur, who remonstrated in an elaborate and sarcastic fashion. Then the fight began, and those two holy men belaboured each other, with words, not fists, for the rest of the journey. Godfrey's French was sadly to seek, still before it was done, he did wonder whether all their language was strictly Christian, for such words as Sapristi, and Nom de Dieu, accompanied by snapping of

the fingers, and angry stares, struck him as showing a contentious and even a hostile spirit. Moreover, that was not the end of it, since of the occupants of the diligence, about one half seemed to belong to the party of the priest, and the other half to the party of the Pasteur.

By degrees all of these were drawn into the conflict. They shouted and screamed at each other, they waved their arms, and incidentally their baskets, one of which struck Godfrey on the nose, and indeed nearly came to actual fisticuffs.

Apparently the driver was accustomed to such scenes, for after a glance through his little window he took no further notice. So it went on until at last he pulled up and shouted:

"Voyageurs pour Kleindorf, descendez. Vite, s'il vous plait."

"Here we do get down, young Monsieur," said the Pasteur, suddenly relapsing into a kind of unnatural calm. Indeed, at the door he turned and bowed politely to his adversary, wishing him bon voyage, to which the priest replied with a solemn benediction in the most Catholic form.

"He is not bad of heart, that priest," said the Pasteur, as he led the way to the gate of a little shrubbery, "but he do try to steal my sheep, and I protect them from him, the blood-toothed wolf. Jean, Jean!"

A brawny Swiss appeared and seized the baggage. Then they advanced

across the belt of shrubbery to a lawn, through which ran a path. Lo! in the centre of that lawn grew such a fruit-tree, covered with large cherries or small plums, as Godfrey had described to Miss Ogilvy, and beyond it stood the long white house, old, and big, and peaceful looking. What he had not described, because of them his subliminal sense had given him no inkling, were the two ladies, who sat expectant on the verandah, that commanded a beautiful view of the lake and the mountains beyond.

By a kind of instinct distilled from his experience of clergymen's belongings, Godfrey had expected to see a dowdy female, with a red, fat face, and watery eyes, perhaps wearing an apron and a black dress hooked awry, accompanied by a snub-nosed little girl with straight hair, and a cold in the head. In place of these he saw a fashionably-dressed, Parisian-looking lady, who still seemed quite young, very pleasant to behold, with her dark eyes and graceful movements, and a girl, apparently about his own age, who was equally attractive.

She was brown-eyed, with a quick, mobile face, and a lithe and shapely, if as yet somewhat unformed figure. The long thick plait in which her chestnut hair was arranged could not hide its plenitude and beauty, while the smallness of her hands and feet showed breeding, as did her manners and presence. The observant Godfrey, at his first sight of Juliette, for such was her name, marvelled how it was possible that she should be the daughter of that plain and ungainly old pasteur. On this

point it is enough to say that others had experienced the same wonder, and remained with their curiosity unsatisfied. But then he might as well have inquired how he, Godfrey, came to be his father's son, since in the whole universe no two creatures could have been more diverse.

Monsieur Boiset waddled forward, with a gait like to that of a superannuated duck, followed at some distance by Godfrey and the stalwart Jean with the luggage.

"My dears," he called out in his high voice, "I have found our new little friend; the train brought him safely. Here he is."

Madame and Juliette looked about them.

"I see him not," said Madame.

"Where is he?" asked Juliette, in a pleasant girlish voice. "Still at the gate? And say then, my father," this in low tones meant not to be overheard, "who is this monsieur?"

"He is the little boy," exclaimed the Pasteur, chuckling at his joke, "but you see he has grown in the train."

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Madame, "I wonder if his bed will be long enough?"



"It is very amusing," remarked Juliette.

Then they both descended from the verandah, to greet him with foreign cordiality which, as they spoke rapidly in French, was somewhat lost on Godfrey. Recognizing their kind intentions, however, he took off his hat and bowed to each in turn, remarking as he did so:

"Bonjour, oui. Oui, bonjour," the only words in the Gallic tongue that occurred to him at the moment.

"I speak Engleesh," said Juliette, with solemn grandeur.

"I'm jolly glad to hear it," replied Godfrey, "and I parle Français, or soon shall, I hope."

Such was Godfrey's introduction to his new home at Kleindorf, where very soon he was happy enough. Notwithstanding his strange appearance and his awkwardness, Monsieur Boiset proved himself to be what is called "a dear old gentleman"; moreover, really learned, and this in sundry different directions. Thus, he was an excellent astronomer, and the possessor of a first-rate telescope, mounted in a little observatory, on a rocky peak of ground which rose up a hundred feet or more in the immediate neighbourhood of the house, that itself stood high. This instrument, which its owner had acquired secondhand at some sale, of course was not of the largest size. Still, it was powerful enough for all ordinary observations, and to show many hundreds of the

heavenly bodies that are invisible to the naked eye, even in the clear air of Switzerland.

To Godfrey, who had, it will be remembered, a strong liking for astronomy, it was a source of constant delight. What is more, it provided a link of common interest that soon ripened into friendship between himself and his odd old tutor, who had been obliged hitherto to pursue his astral researches in solitude, since to Madame and to Juliette these did not appeal. Night by night, especially after the winter snows began to fall, they would sit by the stove in the little observatory, gazing at the stars, making calculations, in which, notwithstanding his dislike of mathematics, Godfrey soon became expert, and setting down the results of what they learned.

In was in course of these studies that the whole wonder of the universe came home to him for the first time. He looked upon the marvel of the heavens, the mighty procession of the planets, the rising and setting of the vast suns that burn beyond them in the depths of space, weighing their bulk and measuring their differences, and trembled with mingled joy and awe. Were these the heritage of man? Would he ever visit them in some unknown state and age? Or must they remain eternally far and alien? This is what he longed to learn, and to him astronomy was a gateway to knowledge, if only he could discover how to pass the gate.

Godfrey had not the true scientific spirit, or a yearning for information, even about the stars, for its own sake. He wanted to

ascertain how these affected him and the human race of which he was a member. In short, he sought an answer to the old question: Are we merely the spawn of our little earth, destined to perish, as the earth itself must do one day, or, through whatever changes we must pass, are we as immortal as the universe and the Might that made it, whatever that may be? That was his problem, the same which perplexes every high and thinking soul, and at this impressionable period of his life it scarcely ever left him. There he would sit with brooding eyes and bent brow seeking the answer, but as yet finding none.

Once Juliette discovered him thus, having come to the observatory to tell him that his dinner had been waiting for half an hour, and for a while watched him unnoted with the little shaded lamp shining on his face. Instantly, in her quick fashion, she christened him, Hibou, and Hibou or Owl, became his nickname in that establishment. Indeed, with his dark eyes and strongly marked features, wrapped in a contemplative calm such as the study of the stars engenders, in that gloom he did look something like an owl, however different may have been his appearance on other occasions.

"What are you thinking of, Monsieur Godfrey?" she asked.

He came back to earth with a start.

"The stars and Man," he answered, colouring.

"Mon Dieu!" she exclaimed, "I think man is enough to study without the stars, which we shall never visit."

"How do you know that, Mademoiselle?"

"I know it because we are here and they are there, far, far away. Also we die and they go on for ever."

"What is space, and what are death and time?" queried Godfrey, with solemnity.

"Mon Dieu!" said Juliette again. "Come to dinner, the chicken it grows cold," but to herself she added, "He is an odd bird, this English hibou, but attractive--when he is not so grave."

Meanwhile Godfrey continued to ponder his mighty problem. When he had mastered enough French in which Madame and Juliette proved efficient instructors, he propounded it to the old Pasteur, who clapped his hand upon a Bible, and said:

"There is the answer, young friend."

"I know," replied Godfrey, "but it does not quite satisfy; I feel that I must find that answer for myself."

Monsieur Boiset removed his blue spectacles and looked at him.

"Such searches are dangerous," he said. "Believe me, Godfrey, it is better to accept."

"Then why do you find fault with the Roman Catholics, Monsieur?"

The question was like a match applied to a haystack. At once the Pasteur took fire:

"Because they accept error, not truth," he began. "What foundation have they for much of their belief? It is not here," and again he slapped the Bible.

Then followed a long tirade, for the one thing this good and tolerant old man could not endure was the Roman Catholic branch of the Christian Faith.

Godfrey listened with patience, till at last the Pasteur, having burnt himself out, asked him if he were not convinced.

"I do not know," he replied. "These quarrels of the Churches and of the different faiths puzzle and tire me. I, too, Monsieur, believe in God and a future life, but I do not think it matters much by what road one travels to them, I mean so long as it is a road."

The Pasteur looked at him alarmed, and exclaimed:

"Surely you will not be a fish caught in the net which already I have observed that cunning and plausible curé trying to throw about you! Oh! what then should I answer to your father?"

"Do not be frightened, Monsieur. I shall never become a Roman Catholic. But all the same I think the Roman Catholics very good people, and that their faith is as well as another, at any rate for those who believe it."

Then he made an excuse to slip away, leaving the Pasteur puzzled.

"He is wrong," he said to himself, "most wrong, but all the same, let it be admitted that the boy has a big mind, and intelligent--yes, intelligent."

It is certain that those who search with sufficient earnestness end in finding something, though the discovered path may run in the wrong direction, or prove impassable, or wind through caverns, or along the edge of precipices, down which sooner or later the traveller falls, or lead at length to some cul-de-sac. The axiom was not varied in Godfrey's case, and the path he found was named--Miss Ogilvy.

On the first Sunday after his arrival at Kleindorf a fine carriage and pair drew up at the shrubbery gate, just as the family were returning from the morning service in the little church where the Pasteur

ministered. Madame sighed when she saw it, for she would have loved dearly to possess such an equipage, as indeed, she had done at one period in her career, before an obscure series of circumstances led to her strange union with Monsieur Boiset.

"What beautiful horses," exclaimed Juliette, her hazel eyes sparkling. "Oh! that tenth Commandment, who can keep it? And why should some people have fine horses and others not even a pony? Ma mère, why were you not able to keep that carriage of which you have spoken to me so often?"

Madame bit her lip, and with a whispered "hold your tongue," plunged into conversation about Miss Ogilvy. Then Godfrey entered the carriage and was whirled away in style, looking like the prince in a fairy book, as Juliette remarked, while the Pasteur tried to explain to her how much happier she was without the temptation of such earthly vanities.

Miss Ogilvy's house was a beautiful dwelling of its sort, standing in gardens of its own that ran down to the lake, and commanding fine views of all the glorious scenery which surrounds Lucerne. The rooms were large and lofty, with parquet floors, and in some of them were really good pictures that their owner had inherited, also collections of beautiful old French furniture. In short, it was a stately and refined abode, such as is sometimes to be found abroad in the possession of Americans or English people of wealth, who for their health's sake or other reasons, make their homes upon the Continent.

On hearing the carriage arrive, Miss Ogilvy, who was dressed in a simple, but charming grey gown and, as Godfrey noticed at once, wore round her neck the old Gnostic talisman which he had given her, came from a saloon to meet him in the large, square hall.

"I am glad to see you, Godfrey," she said in her soft, cultivated voice.

"So am I, Miss Ogilvy," he answered, with heartiness, "I mean to see you. But," he added, studying her, "you do not look very well."

She smiled rather pathetically, and said in a quick voice:

"No, I took a cold on that journey. You see I am rather an invalid, which is why I live here--while I do live--what they call *poitrinaire*."

Godfrey shook his head, the word was beyond him.

"Anglicé consumptive," she explained. "There are lots of us in Switzerland, you know, and on the whole, we are a merry set. It is characteristic of our complaint. But never mind about me. There are two or three people here. I daresay you will think them odd, but they are clever in their way, and you ought to have something in common. Come in."



He followed her into the beautiful cool saloon, with its large, double French windows designed to keep out the bitter winds of winter, but opened now upon the brilliant garden. Never before had he been in so lovely a room, that is of a modern house, and it impressed him with sensations that at the moment he did not try to analyse. All he knew was that they were mingled with some spiritual quality, such as once or twice he had felt in ancient churches, something which suggested both the Past and the Future, and a brooding influence that he could not define. Yet the place was all light and charm, gay with flowers and landscape pictures, in short, lacking any sombre note.

Gathered at its far end where the bow window overlooked the sparkling lake, were three or four people, all elderly. Instantly one of these riveted his attention. She was stout, having her grey hair drawn back from a massive forehead, beneath which shone piercing black eyes. Her rather ungainly figure was clothed in what he thought an ugly green dress, and she wore a necklet of emeralds in an old-fashioned setting, which he also thought ugly but striking. From the moment that he entered the doorway at the far end of that long saloon, he felt those black eyes fixed upon him, and was painfully aware of their owner's presence, so much so, that in a whisper, he asked her name of Miss Ogilvy.

"Oh!" she answered, "that is Madame Riennes, the noted mesmerist and medium."

"Indeed," said Godfrey in a vague voice, for he did not quite understand what was meant by this description.

Also there was a thin, elderly American gentleman to whom Godfrey was introduced, named Colonel Josiah Smith, and a big, blond Dane, who talked English with a German accent, called Professor Petersen. All of these studied Godfrey with the most unusual interest as, overwhelmed with shyness, he was led by Miss Ogilvy to make their acquaintance. He felt that their demeanour portended he knew not what, more at any rate than hope of deriving pleasure from his society; in fact, that they expected to get something out of him. Suddenly he recollected a picture that once he had seen in a pious work which he was given to read on Sundays. It represented a missionary being led by the hand by a smiling woman into the presence of some savages in a South Sea island, who were about to cook and eat him.

In the picture a large pot was already boiling over a fire in the background. Instinctively Godfrey looked for the pot, but saw none, except one of the flowers which stood on a little table in a recess, and round it half a dozen chairs, one of them large, with arms. Had he but known it, that chair was the pot.

No sooner had he made his somewhat awkward bow than luncheon was announced, and they all went into another large and beautiful room, where they were served with a perfect meal. The conversation at table

was general, and in English, but presently it drifted into a debate which Godfrey did not understand, on the increase of spirituality among the "initiated" of the earth.

Colonel Josiah Smith, who appeared to associate with remarkable persons whom he called "Masters," who dwelt in the remote places of the world, alleged that such increase was great, which Professor Petersen, who dwelt much among German intellectuals, denied. It appeared that these "intellectuals" were busy in turning their backs on every form of spirituality.

"Ah!" said Miss Ogilvy, with a sigh, "they seek the company of their kindred 'Elementals,' although they do not know it, and soon those Elementals will have the mastery of them and break them to pieces, as the lions did the maligners of Daniel."

In after years Godfrey always remembered this as a very remarkable prophecy, but at the time, not knowing what an Elemental might be, he only marvelled.

At length Madame Riennes, who, it seemed, was half French and half Russian, intervened in a slow, heavy voice:

"What does it matter, friends of my soul?" she asked. Then having paused to drink off a full glass of sparkling Moselle, she went on:

"Soon we shall be where the spirituality, or otherwise, of this little

world matters nothing to us. Who will be the first to learn the truths, I wonder?" and she stared in turn at the faces of every one of them, a process which seemed to cause general alarm, bearing, as it did, a strong resemblance to the smelling-out of savage witch-doctors.

Indeed, they all began to talk of this or that at hazard, but she was not to be put off by such interruptions. Having investigated Godfrey till he felt cold down the back, Madame turned her searchlight eyes upon Miss Ogilvy, who shrank beneath them. Then of a sudden she exclaimed with a kind of convulsive shudder:

"The Power possesses and guides me. It tells me that you will be the first, Sister Helen. I see you among the immortal Lilies with the Wine of Life flowing through your veins."

On receipt of this information the Wine of Life seemed to cease to flow in poor Miss Ogilvy's face. At any rate, she went deadly pale and rested her hand upon Godfrey's shoulder as if she were about to faint. Recovering a little, she murmured to herself:

"I thought it! Well, what does it matter though the gulf is great and terrible?"

Then with an effort she rose and suggested that they should return to the drawing-room.

They did so, and were served with Turkish coffee and cigarettes, which Madame Riennes smoked one after the other very rapidly. Presently Miss Ogilvy rang the bell, and when the butler appeared to remove the cups, whispered something in French, at which he bowed and departed.

Godfrey thought he heard him lock the door behind him, but was not sure.