HIS QUEEN.

CHAPTER I.

Kenneth Maybin, somewhere about the middle of the long line, found himself, suddenly drawn, dancing, into a high, arched doorway, and along a lamp-lit corridor with raftered ceiling, stone pavements and stuccoed walls.

To the stranger, fresh from his Mosaic matter-of-fact existence in a distant State, the experience was bewildering. Hurried out of the hotel dining-room half an hour earlier by his old college-chum, Gaston Lorio, he had been plunged without a moment's warning into a new and strange world.

"Yes," Gaston had remarked, steering him rapidly along the narrow street under the shadow of overhanging galleries, "this is indeed that old quarter of New Orleans about which you others are so curious. Myself, I prefer Paris. Or even New York!" he added gayly. "But you may not stop to sniff the must and mould of it now, Kenneth. Come on, old man. They are waiting for us."

"They! Who?" demanded Kenneth, pausing to stare up at the twin towers of the Cathedral outlined against a tender sky.

As he spoke, the expectant group, numbering some twenty-five or thirty young people of both sexes, stationed in the slitlike alley of St. Antoine, opened with a noisy welcome, and closed around the newcomers. Maybin's half-comprehending ears drank in eagerly the soft babble of foreign speech which assailed his guide, while he bowed right and left in response to rapid introductions. A moment later, marshalled by Lorio himself, they went sweeping down Royal Street.

"What is it, may I ask, Mademoiselle? Where are we going?" He put the question awkwardly, trying to frame the French syllables with grammatical exactness.

"My brother, Gaston, then, has not informed you?" smiled his companion. "It is the Epiphany—Twelfth Night, you know. And we go to cut a King's cake at my cousin, Miss Le Breton's." The slight twist of her Creole tongue added a piquant flavor to her English.

"Oh!" Kenneth breathed more freely, his Ollendorf slipping, like Christian's burden from his shoulders, as they sped on in the wake of the others.

And so it was that at length a high, arched door had swung open, hand had caught hand, the human line had uncoiled its swaying length, a gay chorus had burst upon the night air, and Lorio was leading the breathless farandole along the flagged corridor, across the moonlit court, up a crooked stair, and into the vast salon above.

The stranger, having been passed ceremoniously around the circle of elders, was brought at length to the orphaned chatelaine of the house.

"Miss Le Breton, Mr. Maybin, Odette, this is my old friend, Kenneth Maybin. Make him welcome."

Kenneth's eyes were still dazzled by the sudden blaze of gaslight; his mind was confused by the variety of novel impressions crowded into it. But the mere sight of the young girl before him restored him with something like a physical shock to himself. She was so different, he naively decided, from all other women in the world!

A slender, dainty figure, robed all in purest white; gray eyes with long, dark lashes, dusky hair falling over her forehead, and giving her, somehow, the innocent, startled look of the blooded colts in his father's pasture at home—this is as far as Kenneth ever got in a description of Odette Le Breton.

He guided her hand boldly when it came her turn to cut a slice from the great brown, shining, hollow ring of the King cake on the dining-table. "Here?" she questioned, with a sidelong glance at him from her luminous eyes.

"No, here," he replied, moving her white and supple wrist ever so slightly with his brown fingers. Truth to tell, his keen eyes had detected a suspicious bulge in the porous ring. His heart was beating painfully, he could not have told why, as she pressed the knife downward, catching her under lip between her white teeth and frowning portentously.

Sure enough, there was the bean! She held it in the rosy palm of her hand, letting her gaze travel slowly around the laughing circle which pressed about her. Kenneth did not understand the pretty game, but he trembled visibly, feeling that all his future depended upon some decision which a girl, barely known to him by name, was about to make.

"Come, little cousin, choose me!" shouted Gaston, darting around the table to joggle her elbow.

"Look at me, Odette. I am the man," laughed another tenth or twentieth cousin.

"Non! Non! Moi! Moi!"

"I! I!" A chorus of gay voices, young and old, caught up the cry with clapping of hands and stamping of feet.

Kenneth grew absolutely pale. His nostrils dilated; his blue eyes flashed a defiant look around and fixed themselves upon the flower-like face before him. "Choose me, Odette," he heard himself murmur with unconsious lips.

Odette flushed to the roots of her hair. She, too, glanced defiantly from one to another in the shrieking, teasing circle; then she took the trophy—a heart-shaped, wine-dark seabean—between a dainty thumb and forefinger and dropped it lightly in Kenneth's outstretched palm.

"I make you my King, Monsieur," she said with a sweeping curtsy.

When their boisterous subjects, breathless with mock compliment and circling dance, finally left them in peace, the newly made King—followed his Queen—treading on air!—down the century-old stair and into the perfumed courtyard. They sat on a stone bench there listening, ostensibly to Chicot, Odette's mocking-bird, singing in his cage upon one of the rose-wreathed balconies.

"And I am really your King?" whispered Kenneth, longing yet not daring to take into his own the little white hand on her knee.

"But you pay for your royalty, Kenneth, my boy," cried Gaston, who had stolen upon them unperceived.

"The universe itself——" began Maybin fervently.

"Oh, the price is not so costly! You simply plan for your Queen, within the month, some little fete in return for your Royal honors——"

"But, I may keep the bean?" demanded Kenneth, turning to his white-robed companion.

She nodded assent, blushing again under his direct gaze.

"I shall keep my Queen also!" he prophesied exultantly under his breath. This, indeed, seemed likely enough. His wooing, so boldly begun, proceeded thenceforward with a dash and a persistency which took his own breath away whenever he paused to think of it. The month sped like a lightning flash.

"He has the ardor of his twenty-two years, this young American," commented one of the gray-bearded uncles to Grande Cousine, the stately maiden lady who presided over Le Breton mansion. And he sighed, a little enviously.

"She has the heart of her eighteen summers," responded Grande Cousine with a soft, fluttering suspiration.

Twenty-two and eighteen were at that moment pacing the prim walks of the court below in the falling dusk.

The supreme hour had struck. They were discussing the final arrangements for the little return fete which, the same evening, was—nominally—to end the King's brief reign.

"But I shall keep the bean, you know," he said.

"Yes." She returned, faintly, the significant pressure of his hand. Both knew in their hearts that he would also keep his Queen.

Alas! the Cup and the Lip!

Chicot, facetiously known as the Queen's Fool, was singing in his cage on the rose-wreathed balcony. His song, rapturously exultant, might have been an epithalamium. It was a knell!

"I wish——" said Kenneth, pausing abruptly—"I wish Chicot would stop his noise! I cannot hear myself talk."

"But, Kenneth," murmured Odette, tenderly reproachful, "Chicot is my bird!"

"I do not care," returned Kenneth, half in fun, yet half nettled, too; "I would like to tie his head up in a towel, or choke him with one of my guitar strings!"

"Mr. Maybin! How you ought to be ashamed!" gasped Chicot's mistress, releasing her hand from her lover's clasp and moving away from him.

Needless to set down the extravagant steps by which the foolish quarrel climbed to its explosive conclusion.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mademoiselle," demanded Kenneth at length, pale with unaccustomed wrath, "that you prefer your fool of a Chicot to me?"

"I certainly do, Mr. Kenneth Maybin," retorted Odette; "and I regard you," she added deliberately, "as no better—than—an—assassin!"

"Then, Miss Odette Le Breton, let me say good-by—forever!"

His flying footsteps sounded along the tunnel-like corridor. The next moment the street door opened, and closed with a reverberating bang.

"Mon cher Chicot. Tresor de mon coeur," murmured Odette, lifting a pallid face toward the hidden cage and pressing a white hand against her slender throat.

"It is I who am the Queen's Fool," laughed Kenneth bitterly, as he sped northward in the railway train at the very hour set for the Queen's fete.

CHAPTER II.

Five years later Kenneth Maybin strolled once more down the quaint street by which he had first entered the French Quarter. This time it was in broad daylight, and this time, by reason of many journeyings about the world and much prying into strange places, his interest in the dim corridors with their glimpses of Edenlike gardens beyond, the mysterious jealousied galleries, and the many-colored peaked roofs, was somewhat abated.

A casual inquiry had put him in possession of the information that his sometime friend, Gaston Lorio, had been living for a couple of years in his beloved Paris; and that the Le Breton family had suffered financially from the failure of a local bank. Concerning his sometime sweetheart he needed no information. A newspaper received within six months after that absurd parting in the dusky Le Breton courtyard had contained the announcement of Mademoiselle Le Breton's marriage to Monsieur Henri Dansereau; and the notice of the departure of Monsieur and Madame Henri Dansereau for their new home in France.

The wound inflicted by this announcement, he assured himself, had long since healed. Nevertheless he felt a distinct pang, when, passing the fine old Le Breton mansion, he saw swinging from the wrought-iron railing of the veranda a square carboard bearing the legend:

"Chambres garnies a louer."
(Furnished Rooms to Rent.)

He hurried on with one furtive glance down the familiar corridor, for the arched door stood wide open. The greenery in the court was dusty and forlorn; a slatternly looking woman with a pan of vegetables on her knee was sitting on the stone bench where he had sat that first night with Odette. The paths where he had walked that last night with his Queen were strewn with unsightly debris.

"What an idiotic youngster I was!" he muttered smilingly, yet strangely stirred. "Dear little Odette, I hope she is happy. And I sincerely trust that Monsieur Henri Dansereau has proper respect for Chicot."

He was in search of lodgings himself having come South to study the ins and outs of a complex will case which had its roots in New Orleans. But he had no mind to lodge with the memory of a lost love—vague and shadowy though it had become; nor with some denuded, shabby genteel Le Breton—perhaps, he shuddered, Grande Cousine herself!

He found precisely the place he wanted; the topfloor of a tall house in Royal Street, a stone's throw from the Cathedral and the ancient building beside it where the court records of a century and a half are stored. There was a small court-yard below, half filled with a mossy cistern and a ramshackle bench, and a pleasant outlook upon a mass of flowering geraniums, in a dormer-window which jutted like a gray hood from the roof of a house just across the street. He took possession at once.

"I shall get on capitally here," he decided, looking over at the Cathedral towers and hearing vaguely the distant hum, like wind-stirred forest leaves, of children's voices in the convent school near by. "I shall look up data during the mornings and write my brief o' nights."

But he calculated without that unknown quantity which is said to lurk behind all human reckoning.

The same night he seated himself at a table, spread out before him the fair pages of legal cap, dipped his pen in the inkstand,—and pushed his chair back with a frown of annoyance.

A mocking-bird somewhere in the neighborhood had begun to sing.

To others listening in holiday mood, for the time was hard upon Christmas, the song was a flood of melody tender, wooing, joyous, sad—a captive's song of the green wood, and of his forgotten mate calling from her nest in the dew-scented magnolia tree; a passionate love-lilt, varied by musical and mischievous imitations, of a dog's bark, the thump of the policeman's staff on the banquette, the call of the milkman, the long-drawn cry of the praline woman.

To Maybin it was simply noise; brutal, insistent, outrageous. He had never liked mocking-birds since—but no matter!

He arose with an angry ejaculation, and looked out of the window. The offender, as he had instantly divined, was swinging in a huge cage.—Maybin could see the outlines of it plainly—in the dormer-window opposite. He slammed his own blinds ostentatiously and went to bed, work for that night being impossible.

Work at any time was out of the question, or so, at least, the irritated lawyer decided, during the days which followed. The mocking-bird, first on the ground, was evidently there to stay—and to conquer. His exasperating performances began with unfailing regularity a little before nightfall each day, and continued throughout the livelong night, now enveloped in the effulgent glory of a waxing moon; while Maybin's hard-sought notes accumulated the legal cap gathered dust, and dust only, on its pristine purity; and his always-impetuous temper steadily rose.

At length, after some four or five days of constant feeding, the temper reached a white heat. Move? Never! He liked his quarters, he had a most important brief to write, he needed at least ordinary quiet—that infernal bird should be hushed!

Rich, successful, imperious, Mr. Kenneth Maybin was unused to being balked in his desires. One morning he descended his stair, crossed the street, and rang at the enemy's door. So far as he knew, the enemy was in sole possession; he had never caught so much as a glimpse of any other inmate of the dormer-windowed room, or of the house itself.

His ring was answered by a fat old negress with a shrewd, good-humored face.

"How do you do, Auntie?" began Maybin with easy familiarity. "I wish to see the lady of the house." He handed her his visiting-card as he spoke.

"Yes, suh," she bobbed an old-time plantation "curchy," "U'm de lady of de house. Mis' July Anna Baxter, suh." She had the rich, unctuous voice of the plantation darky.

"Oh!" Maybin gasped for breath. "Then I suppose, Mrs.—eh—Baxter, that the bird on the top floor is yours?"

"No, suh. I keeps roomers. Dat mockin'-bird is de propitty o' one o' my roomers.

"Very well, Mrs. Baxter. Please present my compliments to the roomer—a lady? I thought so—and tell her that the bird's noise is extremely annoying to me. I shall be infinitely obliged if she will remove bird and cage to another part of the house."

Mrs. July Ann Baxter opened her lips to speak, but Maybin was already recrossing the street. She looked after him, shaking her head indignantly.

"Hump!" she ejaculated, "dat's a mighty high-jinted pusson. Mek lak he de marster. But he ain't marsterin' July Ann Baxter. An' I ain't gwine ter tell her nothin'! Hump!"

And so it befell that the mocking-bird sang on unmolested in his geranium bower, while his baffled foe ramped and roared in vain for a day or two longer; then the lawyer sent over to the invisible roomer a note couched in the politest language, but setting forth plainly the grievance of the writer. He watched the messenger hand this to Mrs. Baxter herself, and saw the portly form of that high-turbaned dame disappear, with stride majestic, down the corridor, as if conscious of the importance of her errand.

Absolute inaction on the part of the roomer, with increased volubility on the part of the bird.

A second note, frigid, stiff, peremptory, threatening. Result, the same; which is to say, no result at all.

Maybin by this time had worked himself into a frenzy which amounted almost to madness. A fellow-lawyer, listening to the recital of his wrongs, laughed:

"Have 'em arrested, man! Bring the whole kit and caboodle into court!"

The laugh was provoking; it proved to be the last straw, the surcharging feather, the turning hair. For the second time in his life Mr. Kenneth Maybin lost his head.

"Madam, you are charged here with violating an ordinance prohibiting the keeping of a mocking-bird," said Recorder Nolan a day or two later. He looked from the affidavit in his hand to the colored lady dressed in guine-blue calico, with a white waist, apron, and a plaid chignon—Mrs. July Ann Baxter, in short, who sat on a bench in the crowded court-room, balancing a large bird cage on her knee. "What have you to plead to the charge?"

Mrs. Baxter stood up, resting the cage upon her hip; the mocking-bird within, thus haled to the bar of justice, maintained a discreet silence.

"'Fo' de Lawd, Jedge, I ain' guilty!" said Mrs. Baxter, visibly flustered. "I been raise' in Copiah County, Mis-ippi, mongs de quality; an' I' clar' ter goodness I'll drap in my tracks ef I hatter go to jail. You ain' gwine ter sen' me ter jail, is you, Jedge? Dish yer mockin'-bird ain' my propitty, nohow. 'Sides, ef any biggaty, high-jinted, masterin' pusson"—she cast a withering glance at Maybin — "doan' lak music, whyn't he change his bo'din'-house? Why, Jedge, honey," Mrs. Baxter's rich voice became tenderly persuasive, "dish yer mockin'-bird kin sing fitten ter lif' up yo' soul when you gits low in de vallew o' sorrer an' tribullatium."

"The bird is not yours?" interrupted Recorder Nolan.

"No, suh. Hit b'longs ter one o' my roomers. I rippresent her in dish yer case, I'm ler garjeen. She ain' been able ter come ter co'te——"

"Why?" demanded the Judge gravely.

"Becaze, in de fust place, she's a ole pusson. An' she's lame in bofe her laige an' she's blin' in befe her eyes. 'Sides, she's a lady bawn, dat's what she is, an' she ain' gwine ter be drug ter co'te by no common, low-down ly'ars—'scusin' o' you, Jedge, honey!"

The onlookers roared; Maybin himself joined in the laugh at his own expense. His fury was fast melting in the humor of the situation. He stepped forward to withdraw the charge; but the Judge waved him back and proceeded solemnly in the exposition of the ordinance. This, he declared, said nothing about mocking-birds, except as might or might not be constructively construed.

To Be Continued.

INHERITED DISEASES.

Many Supposed Hereditary Maladies Are Really Acquired.

The question of heredity, or the transmission of certain mental traits or physical characteristics from parents to children, is one that has been much studied, but of which as yet too little is known. Formerly the inheritance of disease was believed in implicitly, by physicians as well as laymen, and the list of maladies to which children were supposed to be almost inevitably condemned by the accident of birth was a very long one.

Among these hereditary diseases were reckoned consumption and scrofula, leprosy, gout, rheumatism, goutre, cancer, insanity, epilepsy and many other nervous affections.

As we learn more about these maladies, however, one after another of them is removed wholly or in part from this category and placed among the acquired diseases.

Undoubtedly some diseases are really inherited, but their number is certainly not large. Many diseases run in families, but are not on that account necessarily hereditary.

Consumption, for example, was only recently regarded as one of the most surely inherited diseases, and is still believed by many to be so. But we now know that it is a germ disease which, while not "catching" in the ordinary sense of the word, is readily transmitted from the sick to the well when the invalid is careless in his habits, especially as regards expectoration. It is also acquired more readily by those of delicate constitution than by the robust.

The children of consumptive parents are seldom robust, and so are predisposed to any of the germ diseases, and living constantly in a house where the germs of consumption are necessarily abundant, they are very likely to become victims of that disease.

This is an important fact. It teaches us that since, as a rule, only the predisposition to the family disease is inherited, and not the disease itself, the chances of the younger generation escaping, if proper care is used, are very great.

The bringing up of a child in a consumptive family should be of a specially hygienic character. The best of food, floods of fresh air and sunlight, not too much study, long hours of sleep in a well ventilated room and, as far as possible, avoidance of exposure to the contagion of the family malady—these are the weapons by which the malign influence of inherited weakness of constitution may be overcome and many precious lives saved.

AN IRISHMAN'S WEIGH.

An Irishman, on weighing his pig, exclaimed, It does not weigh so much as I expected, and I never thought it would.

BETTER THAN MARRIAGE.

Married yet, old man?

No; but I'm engaged, and that's as good as married.

It's better, if you only knew it.