

MADAME CARON

Reformed?

WIDOW

Yes—from acting like that. Signed the pledge.

MOTHER LEROUX

The pledge?

WIDOW

Yes. Agreed to break himself. He told my first husband—no, not the first. Another one. Pierre. — Well, it was one of the early ones, anyway. Yes, he told him —

MADAME AUDRIENNE

Dearie, how old are you?

WIDOW

Twenty-five.

MADAME BATHILDE

And had so much experience. It is wonderful. Have you had any children?

WIDOW

(Indifferently.)

Slathers.

MADAME AUDRIENNE

(Dazed—aside.)

Slathers.

MADAME BATHILDE

(Dazed—aside.)

Slathers.

MADAME CARON

(Dazed—aside.)

Slathers.

MOTHER LEROUX

(Dazed.)

Talks just as a rabbit might.

WIDOW

Seven in two years.

ALL

Seven!

WIDOW

Some in the spring, some in the fall, others along here and there—

ALL

My!

WIDOW

According to the weather.

MADAME CARON

(To MADAME BATHILDE, privately.)

I do believe her mind's touched.

MADAME BATHILDE

By another Irishman?

MADAME CARON

A whole colony of them.

MADAME AUDRIENNE

Did they all live?

WIDOW

(Handkerchief.)

Alas, none of them.

ALL

Poor thing!

WIDOW

All my poor nine darlings—

MOTHER LEROUX

Nine, dear? You said seven.

WIDOW

(Weeping.)

I speak of another vintage.

MADAME BATHILDE

What a singular name for it.

WIDOW

I remember, now, there were several. Edmond—poor dear little Edmond—he made a brave struggle. He remained longest. Ah, the sweetest angel. The pick of the first litter.

MOTHER LEROUX

(Aside.)

Talks *just* as a rabbit might.

MADAME CARON

(Aside.)

Nothing can ever persuade me that her mind isn't touched.

MOTHER LEROUX

Were they—

WIDOW

Boys and girls? Some of them—yes.

MOTHER LEROUX

Some of them? Weren't they all?

WIDOW

Many thought so.

MADAME AUDRIENNE

What did *you* think?

WIDOW

At this late date I could not be certain, of course. Still, I think there was considerable variety.

MADAME CARON

(To MADAME BATHILDE.)

She is certainly touched in her mind. It is not safe for her to be alone. One of us must sleep with her to-night.

MADAME BATHILDE

You are perfectly right. Will you propose it?

MADAME CARON

You never can tell what a person in her condition will do. Like as not just take a freak and object.

MADAME BATHILDE

Quite right—best to just act, and say nothing.

MADAME CARON

I think so. I wonder -- do you think she could become violent?

MADAME BATHILDE

I think not, but there's no telling. Perhaps I'd better come, too.

MADAME CARON

If you would be so kind. We could arrange with her agent, young Chicago, to let us in, and we needn't disturb her; we could spread blankets here on this floor--

MADAME BATHILDE

Good--and we should hear any noise that came from her room. We better come early.

MADAME CARON

(Nods approval.)

It's my opinion she's always been touched, and her brother didn't like to expose it. We were all saying to-day that he had never mentioned that he *had* a sister.

(Been growing dark.)

MADAME BATHILDE

I remember. That explains it all.

(Looking at watch.)

Night's coming on.

(Knock R.)

CHICAGO

(Entering, L.)

Coming!

(Speaking off at R.)

Cheque-book? All right. Go around the back way. You can't come in here.

(Returning, is intercepted by MESDAMES CARON and BATHILDE. Dumb show of talk.)

(Aside.)

It's just too divine!

(Aloud.)

Ah how kind of you. Would you be kind enough to speak to her about it?

MADAME CARON

You think it best?

CHICAGO

To speak to her? Yes, I think so. But at present, you know, she is full of whims, and if she should take the notion to object, it's best to humor her.

MADAME BATHILDE

No doubt your judgment is right—come Madame Caron.

(They precede CHICAGO to the WIDOW.)

MADAME CARON

Dear Madame Tillou would you like several of us to come and sleep with you to-night?

WIDOW

(Looks from one to the other speechless. Then aside.)

That's Chicago's work—I'll drown that fellow, yet.

(In CHICAGO's ear.)

Get me out of this scrape—and go hang yourself.

CHICAGO

(Delivers check-book to WIDOW.)

(To MESDAMES CARON and BATHILDE privately.)

It seems to disturb her; I wouldn't push it. It's just as I told you, she's full of the strangest whims. (Exit, L.)

MOTHER LEROUX

(To WIDOW.)

But as I was saying, dear, he was so prostrated by this trouble that I had to leave him at home in care of the girls. And poor Marie so wanted to come here with us! You will love her straightway when you see her, I know—for his sake.

WIDOW

(Aside.)

For her own, too.

(Aloud.)

Tell me—let me get a clean, concise idea of the situation. To begin with, what is your husband's first name?

MOTHER LEROUX

Pierre. Your poor brother must have—

WIDOW

Mentioned him in letters? He never wrote any—except a line now and then to tell me of his health and enclose me a little money to live on. Dearly as we loved each other there was a coolness. He couldn't get over it because I didn't name all the children after him. I did name eleven of them for him—

MADAME CARON

(Aside.)

There, her mind's wandering again.

WIDOW

Then I quit. I said it was no use—he had an unappeasable appetite that way. Now then, go on and tell me in three words the amount of this debt, when it is due, the man's name, and—

MOTHER LEROUX

Fifteen thousand francs. He gave us till to-day. His name is André—Bastien André—picture-dealer and usurer.

WIDOW

It is a cruel and shameful thing. And you were old particular friends of my poor brother?

MADAME LEROUX

Oh, yes.

WIDOW

This must be looked into.

MOTHER LEROUX

Ah, if you only *could* persuade him to extend the time! Oh, if you only can!

WIDOW

(Touches bell—CHICAGO appears.)

Write a note to Mr. Erastus Anderson—

MOTHER LEROUX

Bastien André—

WIDOW

Pardon,—to Mr. Bastien André, horse-dealer—

MOTHER LEROUX

—Picture-dealer.

WIDOW

Picture-dealer, and say I wish to see him on a small matter which—

(Knock R.)

CHICAGO

(At door.)

It's the man himself.

WIDOW

Admit him.

(Enter ANDRÉ.)

ANDRÉ

(Aside.)

The Widow, I guess. Stunner! and just like her brother.

(To MOTHER LEROUX.)

Madame, I have just left the bedside of your husband, who says he is unable to pay. Now I have come to serve personal notice upon you that I allow you just—

(Looking at watch.)

WIDOW

(With aristocratic lassitude.)

Wait, please. You are disturbing my nerves. And your manner toward this valued old friend of my brother is uncourteous to her and an affront to me. One should not get excited over a pecuniary trifle—

ANDRÉ

Trifle, madam! When you come to know the amount you—

WIDOW

Peace! I know all about it.

(To CHICAGO—lazily.)

Draw this person a cheque for ———um ——— ah, I remember, now—
hundred and fifteen thousand francs—

CHICAGO

(Admiringly. Aside.)

'George, he's an artist!

MOTHER LEROUX

No! no! no! *Fifteen* thousand!

WIDOW

(To ANDRÉ, with austere severity.)

Fifteen thousand francs? Is that all it is?

ANDRÉ

(Humbly.)

That is all, Madam.

WIDOW

(To CHICAGO.)

Draw the cheque. Write a receipt in full for this person to sign.

MOTHER LEROUX (*Weeping; with French
passion repeatedly kisses
the hem of the WIDOW's
garment.*)

WIDOW

(To ANDRÉ—pause—inspecting him critically.)

Is it the custom of people in your line of business to go around in person to
collect financial chicken-feed like this?

(Aside, to CHICAGO,—taking pen:)

What's my name?

CHICAGO

(Whispering.)

Daisy. Here's the sample-signature.

WIDOW

(Signs two cheques, per sample—gives them to ANDRÉ; gives the receipt to MOTHER LEROUX.)

My brother owed you some money. Here it is. I don't want a receipt—the cheque-stub will answer. And here are the 15,000.

(Seriously.)

I wish to say a word to you,—then you may go. I ought to put it in strong language; but I am a lady and that privilege is denied me. From these friends I know your history. You are a man without pity—a man whose lust for money has withered every kindly impulse you were born with. You found my brother and his poor young artist-friends struggling honestly and manfully for their bread against hunger and misery, and you have traded upon their poverty;

(Gradually rising excitement.)

you have bought their pictures for francs, and sold them for Louis d'or, you have hidden their talents, such as they were, from the world,

(Rising from seat.)

you have beguiled them into debt and robbed them in a hundred mean and pitiful ways; and yonder, stretched upon his bed lies that blameless old man whom your deceptions, your inhumanities, your pitiless brutalities have brought there—

PAPA LEROUX

(Tottering in R. feeble, excited—appealingly.)

Ah, beg him to have mercy!

WIDOW

(With vehemence.)

I am a lady, and I know the limitations that are upon me, but this I *will* say—that from head to heel, from heart to marrow, from pallet to midriff you are a mean, cowardly, contemptible, base-begotten damned scoundrel!—oh!

(Turns away embarrassed.)

(Curtain descending.)

MADAME AUDRIENNE

(Reverently.)

Beau-tiful as a prayer!

MADAME CARON

(To herself.)

Mind's as sound as a nut.

ANDRÉ

I will have the pictures—I refuse the cheque.

(Tears it up and throws the pieces on the floor.)

Curtain.