

# A GOLDEN DREAM.

By G. Manville Fenn,

Author of "A Mint of Money," "Black Blood," "The Master of the Ceremonies," &c.

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## CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

A sensation of giddiness assailed Aube for the moment, but recovering herself by an effort she clung to the old Superior.

"Mamma! My mother! Sister Elise; she is dead?"

"No, no, my child," cried the old lady, excitedly. "No, no; don't think that. There is her letter. She is alive and well. But do you not see my child? It is what I have been dreading so long."

"She has sent for me—to come?" cried Aube, joyously.

"Yes," said the old lady, gazing at her sadly; and there was a suggestion of pain and reproach in the tone. "Yes, and you are glad to see her once again—after all these years."

The tears were coursing down Aube's cheeks, and the eagerness had gone out of her voice as her arms stole round the old lady's neck, and her warm soft lips were pressed passionately to her brow, her eyes, her cheeks.

"No, no, you have been my mother so long," she cried. "Don't think me ungrateful and glad to leave you—you—alone. Sister Elise, I have been so happy. It will break my heart."

She burst into a passion of sobbing now, and clung wildly to the old lady, growing moment by moment more hysterical till the Superior half drew, half carried her to the couch, where she sat down. Aube sinking on her knees beside her, to cling to her still, and hide her convulsed face in the old lady's breast.

Then silence once more reigned in the dim, peaceful room, and Luce stood near the door, the tears stealing silently down her cheeks as she watched the group where Aube's bosom still heaved and fell, and a sob escaped from time to time as, scarcely less agitated, Sister Elise held the weeping girl tightly to her, and her pale old cheek upon the rich dark clustering hair.

"Hush, hush, my darling!" she seemed to soothe over Aube. "It will be a bitter parting for us all; but we must not murmur. It is quite right, and I am glad now you have sent a sweet feeling of joy through my heart, for I know how dearly you love us all. There will be many tears shed today, Aube; but my joy will be their's as well. For it is right and good and holy. There have been times when in spite of the ample funds your dearest mother has sent so regularly all these long years, I have dared to think that she could not love you very much, to leave you so long among strangers, but now I know. She tells me in her letter, in which all a mother's passionate love stands out, how she has borne and wept and mourned to be separated so long, but that it was your father's wish, almost his dying command, that you, Aube, should be sent to his native land to be educated and taught, as you could not be in that half savage place. She says, too, something that from her generous payments I could never have imagined, that she is comparatively poor, and she has been compelled to work and struggle for that income to make you the lady of whom her dear husband would have been proud."

"Ah!" exclaimed Aube, raising her face at this revelation, and looking wonderingly in the old lady's face.

"It was this necessity which kept her from coming to see you again and again. If she had done so, she says, she could not have kept you here."

"My mother!" sighed Aube, with her eyes dilating; and the Superior went on in the same low sweet voice:—

"She says now, Aube, that you are a woman grown, and that she can bear the separation no longer. That her heart yearns for you—that she cannot rest until she clasps to her breast all that is left to her of that dear husband who was to her as a god—I give you her own words, my child; and I ought to utter words of reproof on the vanity—the wickedness of a woman giving herself up so wholly to such a love, but—but—but, my darling, I cannot say them now. For it touches me to the heart, Aube, and I can only see the sweet loving widowed mother there, all those thousands of miles away—stretching out her trembling hands, my darling, her long eyes strained yearningly to me, as she says, I have done my duty—I have worked, and watched, and waited—I have done all that he would have had me do, and now that my long penance is fulfilled, give me back my child."

The solemn silence was broken now by Luce's sobs, as she sank into a chair, and laid her head upon its arm.

"Yes, my dearest one," continued the superior, "we poor women here, devoted as we are, have never known a mother's love; but as I read that letter, Aube, I seemed to realise it. Between its lines there stand forth in burning words all that your poor, patient woman tried to express, and suffer as I may at having to part with you, I know it is your duty to go to her—to go, as she says, at once, for life is short, and I can send you to her, glad in my heart, with the blessings of all here, and say we now send you back the infant you confided to us, a woman now, and as sweet and true and pure as ever knelt before her God."

"Sister Elise! Mother!" sobbed Aube. "My child!"

There was another long pause, and then smiling on her pupil the superior took the letter, and placed it in Aube's hands.

"Take it and read it dear," she said calmly now—"it is the letter of a mother, of whom you may say 'Thank heaven, I am her child!' It is a terrible experience, for it is a long voyage, and to a land of which till now I have heard naught but evil. Now I know that there is one there whom I should be glad to call sister, and now there will be one whom I am glad to call my spiritual daughter. Hayti cannot be all bad, Aube, so now wipe away these tears for the pangs are past, and it is a day of joy—the day on which the first steps are taken to rejoin two such hearts as yours."

"But mother—am I to go soon?"

"In a day or two at most. The consul brought me the letter. He had received one as well, and his orders were to find some good family returning to the island in whose charge you could make the voyage. This might have been months Aube, but heaven smiles upon the project, and consul tells me of a widow lady who

has been in Paris a year with her daughter about your age. She too lost her husband it seems in the war when your father died. This Madame Saintone will be glad to be your chaperone, my child, her daughter your companion, but—"

"But what, mother?" whispered Aube, who seemed half stunned.

"The mail steamer leaves Havre within a day or two, I hear, and our parting will be very soon."

Aube gazed at her wildly.

"No, no, my darling, no more tears," whispered the Superior kissing her. "Go to your room now, and rest and pray. Then read your letter as I would have you read it. Go my child. Your true, loving mother, who must have passed through a martyrdom for your sake, waits to press you to her heart—Luce, my child."

Luce started from the chair, to run forward with her face swollen and convulsed with weeping to lead her companion to the room they shared.

As the door closed Aube flung her arms about her friend and sobbed out:

"Luce! Luce! is all true?"

"Luce was silent, only gazed at her wildly as Aube raised the folded letter to her lips and kissed it passionately.

"Yes, mother," she said, gazing before her with a wild far-off look, "yes, mother, I come."

"Aube?" rang out in a wild cry.

"Luce, darling, what are you thinking?" cried Aube, startled by the agony in her friend's eyes.

"I was thinking you must not, shall not go."

Aube shrank from her with the letter pressed to her lips once more, and she stood blanched, hard and strange looking, as if she had been turned to stone.

"Aube, darling, what will poor Paul say?"

CHAPTER V.—"WHAT WILL IT COST?"

"You're a fool, Jules Defrard."

"You're a gentleman, Etienne Saintone."

"There, I beg your pardon, man, but you make me angry. Have you no ambition?"

"Of course I have: to become your brother-in-law. What day will the steamer arrive?"

"How should I know? I'm in no hurry: place has been right enough without the old lady."

"Dull enough without Antoinette."

"Rubbish. What a sentimental lover you are," cried the first speaker, as he lazily tilted back the cane chair in which he balanced himself so as to reach a cigar from a little table, placing one in his lips and throwing another to his *ris-à-vis*.

They were two well enough looking young men—dark, tall, and well-dressed, after the fashion of the Creole of the south. They were seated in the broad verandah of a good house, slightly elevated and overlooking the town of Port au Prince, and over it, away to sea, with its waters of deep and dazzling blue.

"Now then, light up. I want to talk to you. Have some 'rack'?"

"No; had enough. Talk away."

"Well, look here then," said Saintone, lowering his voice, after a glance around to see that they were not likely to be overheard. "I've quite made up my mind to join the Vaudoux."

"And I've made up my mind not to," replied Defrard, tilting back his chair. "I'm going to be very good now, and marry your sister."

"Tchah!"

"Ah, you may talk and sneer, but what would she say?"

"That you are as I say a fool. Who's going to tell her what we do. Suppose I should go and tell my mother as soon as she gets back?"

"But what do you want to join them for—to go to their feasts and dances? Pah! I fancy I can smell the niggers here."

"To go to their feasts man? Where are your brains?" cried Saintone bending toward his friend, "Can't you see, boy, that I mean to take a big place in the government."

"Yes; you are always talking about it."

"Well, to get there, I must have votes."

"Of course."

"Black votes are as good as colored man."

"You'll get yourself mixed up with some political rising, and be shot as your father was."

"Well, that's my business. Now look here; if I belong to the Vaudoux sect, and came out pretty liberally to the Papaloi—"

"Papaloi?" interrupted Defrard. "How did they get that word?"

"Papa roi, stupid. Father King," said Saintone, impatiently.

"Ah! I see; their way of sounding the r—roi—loi."

"These priests will influence the people on my behalf, and I am safe to be elected."

"Well, yes, I suppose so; but—"

"Hang your buts! Don't hesitate so. Look here, Defr, you want to marry Antoinette."

"Of course."

"Well, then, I expect my brother to support me in everything, so you'll have to join once for all with me."

"What, the Vaudoux?"

"Yes, and I mean to be initiated at once."

"And you want me to be initiated, too?"

"Of course."

"Oh, very well—that is if you will back me up with your sister and mother."

"Trust me for that; you shall have her."

"I'm ready, then; but I don't like it. Hang it all, one hears all kinds of horrors about them."

"Old women's tales. There, I'm going through the town. You can walk with me part of the way."

"Going over to the priest to see—ahem!"

"Mind your own business. I'm going to take the first steps towards our initiation, so be ready to go any night I warn you."

"But—"

"No hanging back, now; you have promised."

"Yes, and so have you," said the young man, getting up languidly; "but I say, will there be anything to pay? Isn't it something like the foreigners' free-masonry?"

"Nothing to pay, but some bottles of rum, and I'll see to them. Now come along."

They strolled off together down the shaded road leading to the town, passing plenty of sulky, defiant-looking mulattoes and quadroons, and heavy-jawed, independent, full-blooded negroes, who generally favored them with a broad grin; but no sooner had they reached the far side of the town, and Defrard had taken off his straw hat to wipe his streaming brow, than Saintone said in a laughing, contemptuous way:—

"There! Go home and cool yourself. Be a good boy, and the steamer will soon be here and you can go courting to your 'lady's content.'"

"I don't like this Vaudoux business," grumbled Defrard to himself, as he went one way.

"I can make the fool useful," said Saintone, with a sneering laugh, and he went in the other direction, away towards where the slovenly plantations and the country began with its luxuriant growth, amongst hidden here and there peeped out the cottages of the blacks, with their overgrown gardens full of melons running wild, yams, and broad flat-leaved bananas, looking like gigantic hart's-tongue ferns.

Etienne Saintone was so devoted to the object he had in view that he paid no heed to a gigantic-looking black whom he encountered in the narrow track or lane running in and out among squalid cottages, in front of which nearly nude black children basked in the broad sunshine. But the black turned and looked after him curiously, and taking up an old and battered straw hat he gave his peculiarly knotted hair a rub, frowned, and slowly followed in the young man's steps as he went on for quite a quarter of a mile, the cottages growing less frequent and superior in aspect, more hidden, too, among the trees.

All at once Saintone looked sharply round, as if to see whether he was observed; but as if expecting this, the black had thrown himself down beneath a rough fence, and if in his hasty glance Saintone saw anything, it was that common object of the country, a black basking in the sun.

His glance round satisfied him, and he turned off sharply to the left; and as he disappeared among the trees, the black rolled over three or four times, by this means crossing the track and reaching the shelter of the over-hanging foliage, among which he, too, plunged and disappeared.

At the end of about hundred yards Saintone stepped over the rough fence of a solitary cottage, at whose door a mulatto girl was seated, idly twisting together some thin shavings of cane, to form a plait. She had seen the white jacket of the young man approaching, and had uttered a silent laugh, as her eyes closed till only a glimpse of her dark pupils could be seen, as she watched the track in a sidelong way, and began to hum over a wild, weird dirty, one well-known among the Haytian blacks, an air probably brought by some of their race from their native Africa.

"Ah, Genie, dear," cried Saintone, as he caught sight of the woman in the dark shadow interior.

"Mass' Saintone?" she replied, with an affected start and look of wonder.

"Yes," he said, laying his hand upon her shoulder. "How pretty you look to-day. Didn't you see me coming?"

"No, sah. I was busy here. What do you want?"

"What do I want? Why I've come to see you, dear."

"Oh," said the girl, coldly. "Mass' Saintone could have come last week—two weeks—three weeks ago—but he never came. Thought you never come again."

"Oh, nonsense! I've been so busy."

"Yes," said the woman, quietly. "Mass' Saintone's always very busy; but he came every day."

"Yes, and I'm coming every day again, dear," he said, as he threw his arm round her and tried to draw her to him.

As he did so there was a faint sound as of a hissing breath at the back of the place and Saintone looked sharply round.

"What's that?" he said.

"Snake or little lizard," said the woman, coldly, freeing herself from his arm.

"Oh, come, don't do that," said Saintone, laughing, as he tried again to catch her in his arms; but she eluded him, and her eyes opened wildly now.

"No; go and make love to the new lady," she said, spitefully.

"What new lady?" he cried. "Why, you silly, jealous girl, I never loved anyone but you."

"Lies!" said the woman, vindictively.

"It's true," he cried, angrily. "Come, Genie, don't be so foolish."

"It is not foolish. That is all over. Go to her."

"Why you silly thing; I tell you I have been too busy to come."

"Yes, too busy to send a boy to say mass' can't come. All lies."

"Genie?"

"I know. I am not a fool," she said scornfully.

"Sit down silly girl," he said. "There, I will not try to touch you; I'll smoke a cigar. Look here," he continued, as he lit the little roll of tobacco, "I'll now prove to you how true I am. Do you know why I came today?"

"Because you said Genie is a fool, and will believe all I say."

"No," he said, in a low voice, as he leaned towards her. "I came up because I want you to help me, dear. I want to be more as if I were one of you."

The woman shook her head, and half closed her eyes; but he had moved her, and she watched him intently, as she stood shaking her head.

"You understand me," he whispered.

"The Vaudoux, I want to join—to be one of you. There, do you believe I love you now?"

"No," she said, panting. "Don't know what you mean."

"You do," he whispered. "You need not try and hold me off. I know you are one of them."

"One of—the Vaudoux—you?"

"Yes. You can take me to one of your priests, and let me join at the first meeting."

"The Vaudoux?" she said, opening her eyes widely now. "Ah, yes, I know what you mean. Oh, no; you could not join them. They say it is all very dreadful and secret. No one knows who they are or what they do."

"Yes," he said, laughing, "you do for one, and you could take me to join them."

"Oh, no," she cried, with an eager movement of her hands, as if she disclaimed all such knowledge. "It is only the blacks who know of that."

"You are trifling with me," he said. "You are offended because I have been away so long. Now I have come and want to be nearer to you than ever, you refuse."

"What can I do?"

"Take me to one of their meetings tonight."

"I?" cried the woman, shaking her head. "You play with me now. How could I know?"

"You mean you will not," he said, fuming.

"Eugenie will not do what she cannot," replied the woman, coldly.

"All very well," he said in a cavalier way. "I daresay I can find someone else who will take me to a meeting; or, I don't know, it does not matter. I daresay I shall give it up. Well, I must be off back."

"Going?" said the woman, coldly.

"Yes, I'm going now. A bit disappointed, of course, but it doesn't matter. Good-bye."

He turned and strode out of the doorway, smoking carelessly, leaped over the low fence, and went slowly back along the track.

"She knows," he thought, "and will call me back directly. Bit put out. Well, I have neglected her, but —"

He laughed to himself and went on, longing to look back, but no voice recalled him.

Had he turned his head he would have seen nothing, for Genie had drawn back further into the back of the room, and watched him from there.

"Why does he want that," she said, thoughtfully, and she shook her head as she watched till Saintone was out of sight, nothing being farther from her thoughts than the intention of calling him back.

Meanwhile Saintone walked slowly on, with an angry feeling growing in his breast.

"She is one of them. She as good as owned to it one day. Then she has a reason for refusing and being so cold. Well, perhaps I can manage without her after all; but what does she mean?"

He went thoughtfully back to the town, making the discovery suddenly that he was hot and thirsty, and on the strength of this he turned off and went straight to his friend's house in search of the refreshment he needed.

Defrard was lying asleep in the shaded room when Saintone entered, and started up on being rudely shaken.

"Rum and some water," said Saintone, throwing himself into a chair, and as soon as he had partaken of a hearty drink from the glass brought in by a negress he lit a fresh green cigar.

"Well," said Defrard, drowsily: "found out all you wanted?"

"No."

"Wouldn't she take you?"

"Turned sulky because I hadn't been to see her. Pretended she knew nothing. I'm sure she goes to their meetings, and I'll find out somehow if it's only to meet her. Now, what shall I do? They keep it all so quiet among them that it's harder than I thought."

"Pay one of the nigger priests, he'll let you into it."

"I don't know," said Saintone, thoughtfully; "besides, how am I to find out one? Their meetings are forbidden by the law, and as soon as I begin to make inquiries they'll grow suspicious."

"I know. Try fat Malmé out yonder at the store."

"What does she know?"

"More than you think. She's mixed up with them. Finds them in rum for their feasts. I believe that, quiet as she is, she is one of them—sort of priestess. At any rate she's a regular confidante of all the blacks about here. They go to her and meet at her place, and hatch half their schemes there. I believe nearly all the bits of devilry started under her roof."

"No harm in trying her," said Saintone thoughtfully. "She must know at all events where they meet. Yes, I think you are right; but she wouldn't speak. Too much mixed up with them."

"Open her mouth with the golden key."

"Right, I will. Come along."

"I?" said Defrard, shrinking.

"Yes; come on at once. She shall take us to one of their feasts, and we'll see what it's like. I'm told that it's worth the trouble."

"But—" began Defrard.

"Come on," cried Saintone, and tossing off the remainder of his refreshing draught, he literally dragged his host out into the road, down which they walked away into a suburb of cottages which had sprung up, and was continued to where Dulau's home had once stood, the pretty erection being superseded now by a plain, business-looking place, about which and under the shade of the trees quite a little crowd of blacks were loitering and idling about, some smoking, some drinking, and all the rest doing nothing after the fashion of a free negro with all his might.

To a close observer the result of their appearance was amusing. The negroes, who had been laughing and chattering together like so many children, became silent, their faces grew stolid and sleepy, and all appeared to be utterly ignorant of the approach of the two Creoles.

Saintone knew their ways too well to notice this more than to feel convinced that Defrard was right, and that this assumed ignorance was the childish cloak for something they wished to hide. He walked right on up toward the open door, from which a showy-looking negress of two or three-and-thirty came to meet them, and pointed to seats in the broad verandah, by a long, rough table.

"No," said Saintone, carelessly, "too hot out here. We'll come inside."

He walked into a long, low room, half general shop, half cabaret, where a broad counter stretched across one end in clumsy imitation of the French fashion. Behind it, seated on a raised cushioned chair was a stout good-looking, middle-aged woman, fair enough for a quadroon. She was showily dressed, and wore, half hidden in the thick folds of her neck, a great necklace; several rings were embedded in her fat fingers, and rather tastily twisted turban fashion about her slightly grey locks was a gorgeous red and yellow silk kerchief.

As the two young men entered, she felt herself bound to rise from her seat to wel-

come guests of a better class than those to which she was accustomed, smiling and bowing as they raised their straw hats; but she sat down again directly, an example followed by the visitors at a table close to the end of the buffet, a glance round showing them that the place was quite empty save that a big, broad shouldered negro sat in one corner with his arms upon the table and his head down, apparently asleep. In fact his hue harmonized so well with the gloom of the place with its two small windows, shaded by blinds, that Defrard did not realize his presence.

"Hot day for walking, madam," said Saintone. "Give us two cool drinks."

"Yes; too hot for gentlemen to walk," was the reply, as the two plump hands busied themselves with a bottle, glasses, and a great pitcher of cold water. "Here! where is that girl?"

"No, no, don't call her," said Saintone, rising. "I'll take them. Madame is quite well."

As he spoke he leaned towards her, pointed quickly at the negro in the corner, and signed toward the door.

The hostess grasped his meaning quickly enough, as she replied with politeness that she was never better than she was now, when a real gentleman condescended to honor her with a visit to rest and refresh himself. Then she looked sharply toward the corner and said a few words sharply in one of the West African dialects.

The result was that the negro grew suddenly wide awake, there was a gleam of white teeth, the flash of a pair of opal eye-balls, and then a big slouching broad-shouldered figure was seen framed in the doorway, and they were alone.

"Monsieur Saintone has had something stolen, and he wants Malmé to try and get it back?" said the woman.

"Hah! delicious!" said Saintone, setting down his glass half empty, Defrard uttering a sigh of satisfaction over his, as he sat holding it in his hand.

"The water is just cold and fresh from the spring," said the woman, offering cigars. Then, as they were taken, and she struck a light to offer it in turn, she continued, "Monsieur may speak now. There