

"OPEN SESAME!"

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"Open Sesame!" by Mrs. Baillie Reynolds

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MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS

"OPEN SESAME!"

1904
"OPEN SESAME!"

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"The Daughter Pays,"
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“OPEN, SESAME!”

I

THE sun-rays were beginning to slope westwards across the ramparts and towers of the ancient city of Fort d'Olonne, in Southern France. The *Lycée* for girls was closing its doors, and the pupils were drifting out across the road in twos and threes.

As they went they cast glances, shy or mischievous, at a young man in civilian clothes who stood leaning upon a stick; gazing with elaborate unconcern into the window of a little shop where they sold rosaries, plaster saints, and picture postcards.

“There,” they whispered, “is Monsieur le Marquis—once again, waiting for the English mademoiselle who boards with his mother.”

“*Tiens!*” said everybody, in varying tones; and Valérie Marlot added, with a toss of her head:

“True, Fort d'Olonne in war-time is as dull as a convent! It is perhaps a relief to the monotony even to escort Miss Waldron home.”

“Let us dawdle in the Rue des Montagnes,” suggested Aliette Roseau, “and watch them pass.”

They strolled, giggling and chattering, into the steep street where were the principal shops—a street which stood as it were on end, having been taught centuries

ago by its Roman makers to climb, and to look sharp about it. It reared itself up against the flank of Mont d'Olonne, a foot-hill of the Pyrenees, with an abruptness which never failed to startle strangers.

The patience of the *Lycée* girls was presently rewarded by the spectacle of the advancing couple—Alain de Bérault, Marquis de la Rochequisouve, limping actively along, and at his side a slender girl in a linen suit, with a wide-brimmed hat shading her resolute blue eyes.

Ismay Waldron was almost a native of Fort d'Olonne, her father having been chaplain to the English community there ever since the noted baths had been exploited and the place became a fashionable resort.

When war broke out the visitors melted like snow in summer; and the chaplain, being no longer needed there, accepted an invitation to take up an appointment in Spain, and crossed the border with his wife, leaving Ismay, who had just been appointed teacher of English at the *Lycée*, in the care of their old friend, Madame de la Rochequisouve.

It was now many months since Alain, the young Marquis, had been invalided home by the French War Office authorities, the injury to his leg being thought to be incurable. He was to have a few weeks of *permission*, and then go to sedentary Government duty in Paris. At the end of his *permission*, however, his native air had worked such wonders for the mangled limb that his leave was extended; and so again, and yet again. His limp now hardly impeded his activity, and hopes of once more seeing his regiment danced before him.

How much of the cure might be laid to his state of mind, who shall say?

If her only son had fallen in love, madame his mother remained as ignorant of it as though she had been

rp a child. Such a catastrophe was out of her power to
nt conceive.

pt Ismay was not noble, and this, in the eyes of Alain's
re mother, was final. Alain could not by any possibility
— have serious intentions towards a girl who was not
sp noble, unless she had chanced to be a great heiress,
a which poor Ismay emphatically was not.

10- Perhaps Valérie was right in supposing that the pre-
vailing dullness made even Miss Waldron a break in
the monotony. The girl who taught English did not
Dl appeal to her pupils as one to inspire a *grande passion*.
sh She had the dun-coloured hair and eyebrows, the faintly
n tinted skin, of the clean-bred upper-class English girl.
w Her lips were neither full nor scarlet, and her glance
d was rather direct and purposeful than smiling or allur-
e ing. The talk of the two as they wended their way up-
ward showed rather the friendliness of long intercourse
; than any disturbing consciousness of one another.

r "Such a curious thing happened to-day," she was
s telling him. "I went to the Pâtisserie Clément for my
; lunch—it was so hot I felt as if I must have an ice,
: whatever it cost. The place was fuller than I have seen
t it since war began, a good many Spanish, and some
- Americans. There was the usual babel of voices, when
1 there occurred, as you know happens sometimes, one of
3 those complete silences—only momentary—but for
l some unexplained reason, everyone suddenly stopped
l talking, and across the hush there floated to my ear—
; what do you think? A bit of a sentence *spoken in*
l *German!*"

"German? Impossible!"

f "I assure you it was so. You don't speak German.
I'll give you the meaning of the words—'the secret of
the tunnel would be ours.' I started, as did several
people near where I sat. Heads were turned, but I saw
nobody who looked German, and nobody who looked

conscious. Then a voice said, with a strong American intonation, 'Why, sure, someone spoke German then?' His companion laughed and replied, 'Some nerve the beggar must have—what?' 'What were they saying?' the first speaker wanted to know. 'Caan't tell you that. Don't speak the lingo myself,' was the answer.

"Odd," said the Marquis thoughtfully. "I have always supposed we were safe from spies. So far from Germany, and so insignificant." . . . He broke off, for they had reached the base of the toy-like funicular railway, whose road ran up an almost perpendicular slope.

Having paid their helpenny, they were carried up aloft into the glorious air, the liquid gold of the sunset, and the spicy fragrance of the pines. Below them lay the ancient city, her mediæval fortress dominating the scene, and out to their right the large new cordite works made raw-looking flecks of red and white with their small, isolated sheds dotted against the mountain's foot.

The two leaned, side by side, over the stone wall which guarded the angle of the mountain road, turning sharply upon itself in a hairpin bend. Ismay was looking outward, her usually sober expression tinged with enthusiasm, as though her soul saluted the loveliness around.

Her companion's soul saluted the loveliness of the face so close to his. What, he wondered, was it which gave the key to her curious charm? The cloudiness of the dun-coloured hair? Or the clear cutting of her too closely guarded mouth? He sometimes wanted to hold her fast and kiss that mouth, coaxingly, urgently, until he kissed the lips apart.

"Beautiful," she murmured, "so beautiful—and all your own! The Marquis de la Rochequisouve ought to be a proud man."