

Doctor? A doctor would cost money. She had to get home. She had wasted too much time already, daydreaming at the square, and if her daydreaming were to cost her parents money, too . . . Oh, how very cross Maman would be!

Marie-Claire looked again out the window of the carriage. Fine stone houses sat far back from the street. Their grounds were big enough to hold several more houses, even with all their trees. Did the people in whose carriage she was riding live in a fine stone home like those they were passing? She had never seen this street before. How much farther were they going?

“We are dreadfully sorry for what happened,” the English woman was saying. “Our horse has never run off like that before. How fortunate for all of us that the carter was able to stop him when he did. My dear girl, you might have been killed!”

Recalling the hooves and the wheels so close, Marie-Claire began to tremble, in spite of the warm fur spread over her. She held her sore arm close to her side.

The carriage turned up a broad driveway and stopped. Up the stone walls of the huge house grew masses of ivy—around its front door and all the way to its third-storey windows.

Marie-Claire tried to stand. Her knees wobbled. She had to allow the man named John to carry her into what was truly a mansion. Oh, Maman would not like her putting anyone to so much trouble, and especially such rich people as these.

Inside, the house was even more magnificent than out. There was an entrance hall. A six-flame chandelier hung from its ceiling. The first room past which she was carried had to be as big as her whole house. Beautiful carpets covered its floor. Paintings crammed its walls. Around the room were padded chairs and many tables cluttered with ornaments, candles, books. On one table sat a tree—a tree inside the house!—covered with little candles and ornaments. On its very top was a beautiful gold angel.

Before Marie-Claire had time to take in anything more, she was being carried up a grand

staircase. So quiet this huge house was, with rugs muffling the sound of footsteps even on the stairs.

“Where shall I take her?” the man named John said.

“To Laura’s room,” his wife said. “Céleste has not yet cleaned the guest room. I will send Céleste up to assist her before the doctor arrives.”

Guest room? A whole separate room just for guests?

Who is Laura? Marie-Claire wanted to ask.
Who is Céleste?

But suddenly she felt dizzy again and could only close her eyes.