

The Pomp of the Lavillettes, Volume 1.

Gilbert Parker

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THE POMP OF THE LAVILETTES

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

INTRODUCTION

I believe that 'The Pomp of the Lavillettes' has elements which justify consideration. Its original appearance was, however, not made under wholly favourable conditions. It is the only book of mine which I ever sold outright. This was in 1896. Mr. Lamson, of Messrs. Lamson & Wolfe, energetic and enterprising young publishers of Boston, came to see me at Atlantic City (I was on a visit to the United States at the time), and made a gallant offer for the English, American and colonial book and serial rights. I felt that some day I could get the book back under my control if I so desired, while the chances of the book making an immediate phenomenal sale were not great. There is something in the nature of a story which determines its popularity. I knew that 'The Seats of the Mighty' and 'The Right of Way' would have a great sale, and after they were written I said as much to my publishers. There was the element of general appeal in the narratives and the characters. Without detracting from the character-drawing, the characters, or the story in 'The Pomp of the Lavillettes', I was convinced that the book would not make the universal appeal. Yet I should have written the story, even if it had been destined only to have a hundred readers. It had to be written. I wanted to write what was in me, and that invasion of a little secluded French-Canadian society by a ne'er-do-well of the over-sea aristocracy had a psychological interest, which I could not resist. I thought it ought to be worked out and recorded, and particularly as the time chosen--1837--marked a large collision between the British and the French interests in French Canada, or rather of French political interests and the narrow administrative prejudices and nepotism of the British executive in Quebec.

It is a satisfaction to include this book in a definitive edition of my works, for I think that, so far as it goes, it is truthfully characteristic of French life in Canada, that its pictures are faithful, and that the character-drawing represents a closer observation than any of the previous works, slight as the volume is. It holds the same relation to 'The Right of Way' that 'The Trail of the Sword' holds to 'The Seats of the Mighty', that 'A Ladder of Swords' holds to 'The Battle of the Strong', that 'Donovan Pasha' holds to 'The Weavers'. Instinctively, and, as I believe, naturally, I gave to each ambitious, and--so far as conception goes--to each important novel of mine, an avant coureur. 'The Trail of the Sword, A Ladder of Swords, Donovan Pasha and The Pomp of the Lavillettes', are all very short novels, not exceeding in

any case sixty thousand words, while the novels dealing in a larger way with the same material--the same people and environment, with the same mise-en-scene, were each of them at least one hundred and forty thousand words in length, or over two and a half times as long. I do not say that this is a system which I devised; but it was, from the first, the method I pursued instinctively; on the basis that dealing with a smaller subject--with what one might call a genre picture first, I should get well into my field, and acquire greater familiarity with my material than I should have if I attempted the larger work at once.

This is not to say that the smaller work was immature. On the contrary, I believe that at least these shorter works are quite mature in their treatment and in their workmanship and design. Naturally, however, they made less demand on all one's resources, they were narrower in scope and less complicated, than the longer works, like 'The Seats of the Mighty', which made heavier call upon the capacities of one's art. The only occasion on which I have not preceded a very long novel of life in a new field, by a very short one, is in the writing of 'The Judgment House'. For this book, however, it might be said, that all the last twenty years was a preparation, since the scenes were scenes in which I had lived and moved, and in a sense played a part; while the ten South African chapters of the book placed in the time of the Natal campaign needed no pioneer narrative to increase familiarity with the material, the circumstances and the country itself. I knew it all from study on the spot.

From 'The Pomp of the Lavillettes', with which might be associated 'The Lane That Had no Turning', to 'The Right of Way', was a natural progression; it was the emergence of a big subject which must be treated in a large bold way, if it was to succeed. It succeeded to a degree which could not fail to gratify any one who would rather have a wide audience than a contracted one, who believes that to be popular is not necessarily to be contemptible--as the ancient Pistol put it, "base, common and popular."

THE POMP OF THE LAVILLETES

CHAPTER I

You could not call the place a village, nor yet could it be called a town. Viewed from the bluff, on the English side of the river, it was a long stretch of small farmhouses--some painted red, with green shutters, some painted white, with red shutters--set upon long strips of land, green, yellow, and brown, as it chanced to be pasture land, fields of grain, or "plough-land."

These long strips of property, fenced off one from the other, so narrow and so precise, looked like pieces of ribbon laid upon a wide quilt of level country. Far back from this level land lay the dark, limestone hills, which had rambled down from Labrador, and, crossing the River St. Lawrence, stretched away into the English province. The farmhouses and the long strips of land were in such regular procession, it might almost have seemed to the eye of the whimsical spectator that the houses and the ribbon were of a piece, and had been set down there, sentinel after sentinel, like so many toy soldiers, along the banks of the great river. There was one important break in the long line of precise settlement, and

that was where the Parish Church, about the middle of the line, had gathered round it a score or so of buildings. But this only added to the strength of the line rather than broke its uniformity. Wide stretches of meadow-land reached back from the Parish Church until they were lost in the darker verdure of the hills.

On either side of the Parish Church, with its tall, stone tower, were two stout-built houses, set among trees and shrubbery. They were low set, broad and square, with heavy-studded, old-fashioned doors. The roofs were steep and high, with dormer windows and a sort of shelf at the gables.

They were both on the highest ground in the whole settlement, a little higher than the site of the Parish Church. The one was the residence of the old seigneur, Monsieur Duhamel; the other was the Manor Casimbault, empty now of all the Casimbaults. For a year it had lain idle, until the only heir of the old family, which was held in high esteem as far back as the time of Louis Quinze, returned from his dissipations in Quebec to settle in the old place or sell it to the highest bidder.

Behind the Manor Casimbault and the Seigneurie, thus flanking the church at reverential distance, another large house completed the acute triangle, forming the apex of the solid wedge of settlement drawn about the church. This was the great farmhouse of the Lavillettes, one of the most noticeable families in the parish.

Of the little buildings bunched beside the church, not the least important was the post-office, kept by Papin Baby, who was also keeper of the bridge which was almost at the door of the office. This bridge crossed a stream that ran into the large river, forming a harbour. It opened in the middle, permitting boats and vessels to go through. Baby worked it by a lever. A hundred yards or so above the bridge was the parish mill, and between were the Hotel France, the little house of Doctor Montmagny, the Regimental Surgeon (as he was called), the cooper shop, the blacksmith, the tinsmith and the grocery shops. Just beyond the mill, upon the banks of the river, was the most notorious, if not the most celebrated, house in the settlement. Shangois, the travelling notary, lived in it--when he was not travelling. When he was, he left it unlocked, all save one room; and people came and went through the house as they pleased, eyeing with curiosity the dusty, tattered books upon the shelves, the empty bottles in the corner, the patchwork of cheap prints, notices of sales, summonses, accounts, certificates of baptism, memoranda, receipted bills--though they were few--tacked or stuck to the wall.

No grown-up person of the village meddled with anything, no matter how curious; for this consistent, if unspoken, trust displayed by Shangois appealed to their better instincts. Besides, they, like the children, had a wholesome fear of the disreputable, shrunken, dishevelled little notary, with the bead-like eyes, yellow stockings, hooked nose and palsied left hand. Also the knapsack and black bag he carried under his arms contained more secrets than most people wished to tempt or challenge forth. Few cared to anger the little man, whose father and grandfather had been notaries here before him.

Like others in the settlement, Shangois was the last of his race. He could put his finger upon the secret history and private lives of nearly every person in a dozen parishes, but most of all in Bonaventure--for such this long parish was called. He knew to a hair's breadth the social

value of every human being in the parish. He was too cunning and acute to be a gossip, but by direct and indirect ways he made every person feel that the Cure and the Lord might forgive their pasts, but he could never forget them, nor wished to do so. For Monsieur Duhamel, the old seigneur, for the drunken Philippe Casimbault, for the Cure, and for the Lavillettes, who owned the great farmhouse at the apex of that wedge of village life, he had a profound respect. The parish generally did not share his respect for the Lavillettes.

Once upon a time, beyond the memories of any in the parish, the Lavillettes of Bonaventure were a great people. Disaster came, debt and difficulty followed, fire consumed the old house in which their dignity had been cherished, and at last they had no longer their seigneurial position, but that of ordinary farmers who work and toil in the field like any of the fifty-acre farmers on the banks of the St. Lawrence River.

Monsieur Louis Lavilette, the present head of the house, had not married well. At the time when the feeling against the English was the strongest, and when his own fortunes were precarious, he had married a girl somewhat older than himself, who was half English and half French, her father having been a Hudson's Bay Company factor on the north coast of the river. In proportion as their fortunes and their popularity declined, and their once notable position as an old family became scarce a memory even, the pride of the Lavillettes increased.

Madame Lavilette made strong efforts to secure her place; but she was not of an old French family, and this was an easy and convenient weapon against her. Besides, she had no taste, and her manners were much inferior to those of her husband. What impression he managed to make by virtue of a good deal of natural dignity, she soon unmade by her lack of tact. She had no innate breeding, though she was not vulgar. She lacked sense a little and sensitiveness much.

The Casimbaults and the wife of the old seigneur made no friends of the Lavillettes, but the old seigneur kept up a formal habit of calling twice a year at the Lavillettes' big farmhouse, which, in spite of all misfortune, grew bigger as the years went on. Probably, in spite of everything, Monsieur Lavilette and his family would have succeeded better socially had it not been for one or two unpopular lawsuits brought by the Lavillettes against two neighbours, small farmers, one of whom was clearly in the wrong, and the other as clearly in the right.

When, after years had gone by, and the children of the Lavillettes had grown up, young Monsieur Casimbault came from Quebec to sell his property (it seemed to the people of Bonaventure like selling his birthright), he was greatly surprised to find Monsieur Lavilette ready with ten thousand dollars, to purchase the Manor Casimbault. Before the parish had time to take breath Monsieur Casimbault had handed over the deed, pocketed the money, and leaving the ancient heritage of his family in the hands of the Lavillettes, (who forthwith prepared to enter upon it, house and land), had hurried away to Quebec again without any pangs of sentiment.

It was a little before this time that impertinent peasants in the parish began to sing:

"O when you hear my little silver drum,
And when I blow my little gold trompette-a,
You must drop your work and come,

You must leave your pride at home,
And duck your heads before the Lavilette-a!"

Gatineau the miller, and Baby the keeper of the bridge, gave their own reasons for the renewed progress of the Lavillettes. They met in conference at the mill on the eve of the marriage of Sophie Lavilette to Magon Farcinelle, farrier, farmer and member of the provincial legislature, whose house lay behind the piece of maple wood, a mile or so to the right of the Lavillettes' farmhouse. Farcinelle's engagement to Sophie had come as a surprise to all, for, so far as people knew, there had been no courting. Madame Lavilette had encouraged, had even tempted, the spontaneous and jovial Farcinelle. Though he had never made a speech in the House of Assembly, and it was hard to tell why he was elected, save because everybody liked him, his official position and his popularity held an important place in Madame Lavilette's long-developed plans, which at last were to place her in a position equal to that of the old seigneur, and launch her upon society at the capital.

They had gone more than once to the capital, where their family had been well-known fifty years before, but few doors had been opened to them. They were farmers--only farmers--and Madame Lavilette made no remarkable impression. Her dress was florid and not in excellent taste, and her accent was rather crude. Sophie had gone to school at the convent in the city, but she had no ambition. She had inherited the stolid simplicity of her English grandfather. When her schooling was finished she let her school friends drop, and came back to Bonaventure, rather stately, given to reading, and little inclined to bother her head about anybody.

Christine, the younger sister, had gone to Quebec also, but after a week of rebellion, bad temper and sharp speaking, had come home again without ceremony, and refused to return. Despite certain likenesses to her mother, she had a deep, if unintelligible, admiration for her father, and she never tired looking at the picture of her great-grandfather in the dress of a chevalier of St. Louis--almost the only thing that had been saved from the old Manor House, destroyed so long before her time. Perhaps it was the importance she attached to her ancestry which made her impatient with their present position, and with people in the parish who would not altogether recognise their claims. It was that which made her give a little jerky bow to the miller and the postmaster when she passed the mill.

"Come, dusty-belly," said Baby, "what's all this pom-pom of the Lavillettes?"

The miller pursed out his lips, contracted his brows, and arranged his loose waistcoat carefully on his fat stomach.

"Money," said he, oracularly, as though he had solved the great question of the universe.

"La! la! But other folks have money; and they step about Bonaventure no more louder than a cat."

"Blood," added Gatineau, corrugating his brows still more.

"Bosh!"

"Both together--money and blood," rejoined the miller. Overcome by his exertions, he wheezed so tremendously that great billows of excitement

raised his waistcoat, and a perspiration broke out upon his mealy face, making a paste which the sun, through the open doorway, immediately began to bake into a crust.

"Pah, the airs they have always had, those Lavillettes!" said Baby. "They will not do this because it is not polite, they will not do that because they are too proud. They say that once there was a baron in their family. Who can tell how long ago! Perhaps when John the Baptist was alive. What is that? Nothing. There is no baron now. All at once somebody die a year ago, and leave them ten thousand dollars; and then--mais, there is the grand difference! They have save and save twenty years to pay their debts and to buy a seigneurie, like that baron who live in the time of John the Baptist. Now it is to stand on a ladder to speak to them. And when all's done, they marry Ma'm'selle Sophie to a farrier, to that Magon Farcinelle--bah!"

"Magon was at the Laval College in Quebec; he has ten thousand dollars; he is the best judge of horses in the province, and he's a Member of Parliament to boot," said the miller, puffing. "He is a great man almost."

"He's no better judge of horses than M'sieu' Nic Lavillette--eh, that's a bully bad scamp, my Gatineau!" responded Baby. "He's the best in the family. He is a grand sport; yes. It's he that fetched Ma'm'selle Sophie to the hitching-post. Voila, he can wind them all round his finger!"

Baby looked round to see if any one was near; then he drew the miller's head down by pulling at his collar, and whispered in his ear:

"He's hot foot for the Rebellion; that's one good thing," he said. "If he wipes out the English--"

"Hold your tongue," nervously interrupted Gatineau, for just then two or three loiterers of the parish came shambling around the corner of the mill.

Baby stopped short, and as they greeted the newcomers their attention was drawn to the stage-coach from St. Croix coming over the little hill near by.

"Here's M'sieu' Nic now--and who's with him?" said Baby, stepping about nervously in his excitement. "I knew there was something up. M'sieu' Nic's been writing long letters from Montreal."

Baby's look suggested that he knew more than his position as postmaster entitled him to know; but the furtive droop at the corner of his eyes showed also that his secretiveness was equal to his cowardice.

On the seat, beside the driver of the coach, was Nicolas Lavillette, black-haired, brown-eyed, athletic, reckless-looking, with a cast in his left eye, which gave him a look of drollery, in keeping with his buoyant, daring nature. Beside him was a figure much more noticeable and unusual.

Lean, dark-featured, with keen-glancing eyes, and a body with a faculty for finding corners of ease; waving hair, streaked with grey, black moustache, and a hectic flush on the cheeks, lending to the world-wise face a wistful look--that, with near six feet of height, was the picture of his friend.

"Who is it?" asked the miller, with bulging eyes. "An English nobleman," answered Baby. "How do you know?" asked Gattineau.

"How do I know you are a fat, cheating miller?" replied the postmaster, with cunning care and a touch of malice. Malice was the only power Baby knew.

CHAPTER II

In the matter of power, Baby, the inquisitive postmaster and keeper of the bridge, was unlike the new arrival in Bonaventure. The abilities of the Honourable Tom Ferrol lay in a splendid plausibility, a spontaneous blarney. He could no more help being spendthrift of his affections and his morals than of his money, and many a time he had wished that his money was as inexhaustible as his emotions.

In point of morals, any of the Lavillettes presented a finer average than their new guest, who had come to give their feasting distinction, and what more time was to show. Indeed, the Hon. Mr. Ferrol had no morals to speak of, and very little honour. He was the penniless son of an Irish peer, who was himself well-nigh penniless; and he and his sister, whose path of life at home was not easy after her marriageable years had passed, drew from the consols the small sum of money their mother had left them, and sailed away for New York.

Six months of life there, with varying fortune in which a well-to-do girl in society gave him a promise of marriage, and then Ferrol found himself jilted for a baronet, who owned a line of steamships and could give the ambitious lady a title. In his sick heart he had spoken profanely of the future Lady of Title, had bade her good-bye with a smile and an agreeable piece of wit, and had gone home to his flat and sobbed like a schoolboy; for, as much as he could love anybody, he loved this girl. He and the faithful sister vanished from New York and appeared in Quebec, where they were made welcome in Government House, at the citadel, and among all who cared to know the weight of an inherited title. For a time, the fact that he had little or no money did not temper their hospitality with niggardliness or caution. But their cheery and witty guest began to take more wine than was good for him or comfortable for others; his bills at the clubs remained unpaid, his landlord harried him, his tailors pursued him; and then he borrowed cheerfully and well.

However, there came an end to this, and to the acceptance of his I O U's. Following the instincts of his Irish ancestors, he then leagued with a professional smuggler, and began to deal in contraband liquors and cigars. But before this occurred, he had sent his sister to a little secluded town, where she should be well out of earshot of his doings or possible troubles. He would have shielded her from harm at the cost of his life. His loyalty to her was only limited by the irresponsibility of his nature and a certain incapacity to see the difference between radical right and radical wrong. His honour was a matter of tradition, such as it was, and in all else he had the inherent invalidity of some of his distant forebears. For a time all went well, then discovery came, and only the kind intriguing of as good friends as any man deserved prevented his arrest and punishment. But it all got whispered about; and while some ladies saw a touch of romance in his doing professionally and

wholesale what they themselves did in an amateurish way with laces, gloves and so on, men viewed the matter more seriously, and advised Ferrol to leave Quebec.

Since that time he had lived by his wits--and pleasing, dangerous wits they were--at Montreal and elsewhere. But fatal ill-luck pursued him. Presently a cold settled on his lungs. In the dead of winter, after sending what money he had to his sister, he had lived a week or more in a room, with no fire and little food. As time went on, the cold got no better. After sundry vicissitudes and twists of fortune, he met Nicolas Lavilette at a horse race, and a friendship was struck up. He frankly and gladly accepted an invitation to attend the wedding of Sophie Lavilette, and to make a visit at the farm, and at the Manor Casimbault afterwards. Nicolas spoke lightly of the Manor Casimbault, yet he had pride in it also; for, scamp as he was, and indifferent to anything like personal dignity or self-respect, he admired his father and had a natural, if good-natured, arrogance akin to Christine's self-will.

It meant to Ferrol freedom from poverty, misery and financial subterfuge for a moment; and he could be quiet--for, as he said, "This confounded cold takes the iron out of my blood."

Like all people stricken with this disease, he never called it anything but a cold. All those illusions which accompany the malady were his. He would always be better "to-morrow." He told the two or three friends who came from their beds in the early morning to see him safely off from Montreal to Bonaventure that he would be all right as soon as he got out into the country; that he sat up too late in the town; and that he had just got a new prescription which had cured a dozen people "with colds and hemorrhages." His was only a cold--just a cold; that was all. He was a bit weak sometimes, and what he needed was something to pull up his strength. The country would do this--plenty of fresh air, riding, walking, and that sort of thing.

He had left Montreal behind in gay spirits, and he continued gay for several hours, holding himself erect in the seat, noting the landscape, telling stories; but he stumbled with weakness as they got out of the coach for luncheon. He drank three full portions of whiskey at table, and ate nothing. The silent landlady who waited on them at last brought a huge bowl of milk, and set it before him without a word. A flush passed swiftly across his face and faded away, as, with quick sensitiveness, he glanced at Nicolas and another passenger, a fat priest. They took no notice, and, reassured, he said, with a laugh, that the landlady knew exactly what he wanted. Lifting the dish, he drained it at a gasp, though the milk almost choked him, and, to the apprehension of his hostess, set the bowl spinning on the table like a top. Another illusion of the disease was his: that he succeeded perfectly in deceiving everybody round him with his pathetic make-believe; and, unlike most deceivers, he deceived himself as well. The two actions, inconsistent as they were, were reconciled in him, as in all the race of consumptives, by some strange chemistry of the mind and spirit. He was on the broad, undiverging highway to death; yet, with every final token about him that he was in the enemy's country, surrounded, trapped, soon to be passed unceremoniously inside the citadel at the end of the avenue, he kept signalling back to old friends that all was well, and he told himself that to-morrow the king should have his own again--"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow!"

He was not very thin in body; his face was full, and at times his eyes

were singularly and fascinatingly bright. He had colour--that hectic flush which, on his cheek, was almost beautiful. One would have turned twice to see. The quantities of spirits that he drank (he ate little) would have killed a half-dozen healthy men. To him it was food, taken up, absorbed by the fever of his disease, giving him a real, not a fictitious strength; and so it would continue to do till some artery burst and choked him, or else, by some miracle of air and climate, the hole in his lung healed up again; which he, in his elation, believed would be "to-morrow." Perhaps the air, the food, and life of Bonaventure were the one medicine he needed!

But, in the moment Nicolas said to him that Bonaventure was just over the hill, that they would be able to see it now, he had a sudden feeling of depression. He felt that he would give anything to turn back. A perspiration broke out on his forehead and his cheek. His eyes had a wavering, anxious look. Some of that old sanity of the once healthy man was making a last effort for supremacy, breaking in upon illusive hopes and irresponsible deceptions.

It was only for a moment. Presently, from the top of the hill, they looked down upon the long line of little homes lying along the banks of the river like peaceful watchmen in a pleasant land, with corn and wine and oil at hand. The tall cross on the spire of the Parish Church was itself a message of hope. He did not define it so; but the impression vaguely, perhaps superstitiously, possessed him. It was this vague influence, perhaps (for he was not a Catholic), which made him involuntarily lift his hat, as did Nicolas, when they passed a calvary; which induced him likewise to make the sacred gesture when they met a priest, with an acolyte and swinging censer, hurrying silently on to the home of some dying parishioner. The sensations were different from anything he had known. He had been used to the Catholic religion in Ireland; he had seen it in France, Spain, Italy and elsewhere; but here was something essentially primitive, archaically touching and convincing.

His spirits came back with a rush; he had a splendid feeling of exaltation. He was not religious, never could be, but he felt religious; he was ill, but he felt that he was on the open highway to health; he was dishonest, but he felt an honest man; he was the son of a peer, but he felt himself brother to the fat miller by the roadway, to Baby, the postmaster and keeper of the bridge, to the Regimental Surgeon, who stood in his doorway, pulling at his moustache and blowing clouds of tobacco smoke into the air.

Shangois, the notary, met his eye as they dashed on. A new sensation--not a change in the elation he felt, but an instant's interruption--came to him. He asked who Shangois was, and Nicolas told him.

"A notary, eh?" he remarked gaily. "Well, why does he disguise himself? He looks like a ragpicker, and has the eye of Solomon and the devil in one. He ought to be in some Star Chamber--Palmerston could make use of him."

"Oh, he's kept busy enough with secrets here!" was Nicolas's laughing reply.

"It's only a difference of size in the secrets anyhow," was Ferrol's response in the same vein; and in a few moments they had passed the Seigneury, and were drawn up before the great farmhouse.

Its appearance was rather comfortable and commodious than impressive, but it had the air of home and undepreciating use. There was one beautiful clump of hollyhocks and sunflowers in the front garden; a corner of the main building was covered with morning-glories; a fence to the left was overgrown with grape-vines, making it look like a hedge; a huge pear tree occupied a spot opposite to the pretty copse of sunflowers and hollyhocks; and the rest of the garden was green, save just round a little "summer-house," in the corner, with its back to the road, near which Sophie had set a palisade of the golden-rod flower. Just beside the front door was a bush of purple lilac; and over the door, in copper, was the coat-of-arms of the Lavillettes, placed there, at Madame's insistence, in spite of the dying wish of Lavillette's father, a feeble, babbling old gentleman in knee-breeches, stock, and swallow-tailed coat, who, broken down by misfortune, age and loneliness, had gathered himself together for one last effort for becomingness against his daughter-in-law's false tastes--and had died the day after. He was spared the indignity of the coat-of-arms on the tombstone only by the fierce opposition of Louis Lavillette, who upon this point had his first quarrel with his wife.

Ferrol saw no particular details in his first view of the house. The picture was satisfying to a tired man--comfort, quiet, the bread of idleness to eat, and welcome, admiring faces round him. Monsieur Lavillette stood in the doorway, and behind him, at a carefully disposed distance, was Madame, rather more emphatically dressed than necessary. As he shook hands genially with Madame he saw Sophie and Christine in the doorway of the parlour. His spirits took another leap. His inexhaustible emotions were out upon cheerful parade at once.

The Lavillettes immediately became pensioners of his affections. The first hour of his coming he himself did not know which sister his ample heart was spending itself on most--Sophie, with her English face, and slow, docile, well-bred manner, or Christine, dark, petite, impertinent, gay-hearted, wilful, unsparing of her tongue for others--or for herself. Though Christine's lips and cheeks glowed, and her eyes had wonderful warm lights, incredulity was constantly signalled from both eyes and lips. She was a fine, daring little animal, with as great a talent for untruth as truth, though, to this point in her life, truth had been more with her. Her temptations had been few.

CHAPTER III

Mr. Ferrol seemed honestly to like the old farmhouse, with its low ceilings, thick walls, big beams and wide chimneys, and he showed himself perfectly at home. He begged to be allowed to sit for an hour in the kitchen, beside the great fireplace. He enjoyed this part of his first appearance greatly. It was like nothing he had tasted since he used, as a boy, to visit the huntsman's home on his father's estate, and gossip and smoke in that Galway chimney-corner. It was only when he had to face the too impressive adoration of Madame Lavillette that his comfort got a twist.

He made easy headway into the affections of his hostess; for, besides all other predilections, she had an adoring awe of the nobility. It rather surprised her that Ferrol seemed almost unaware of his title. He was quite without self-consciousness, although there was that little touch

of irresponsibility in him which betrayed a readiness to sell his dignity for a small compensation. With a certain genial capacity for universal blarney, he was at first as impressive with Sophie as he was attentive to Christine. It was quite natural that presently Madame Lavilette should see possibilities beyond all her past imaginations. It would surely advance her ambitions to have him here for Sophie's wedding; but even as she thought that, she had twinges of disappointment, because she had promised Farcinelle to have the wedding as simple and bourgeois as possible.

Farcinelle did not share the social ambitions of the Lavillettes. He liked his political popularity, and he was only concerned for that. He had that touch of shrewdness to save him from fatuity where the Lavillettes were concerned. He was determined to associate with the ceremony all the primitive customs of the country. He had come of a race of simple farmers, and he was consistent enough to attempt to live up to the traditions of his people. He was entirely too good-natured to take exception to Ferrol's easy-going admiration of Sophie.

Ferrol spoke excellent French, and soon found points of pleasant contact with Monsieur Lavilette, who, despite the fact that he had coarsened as the years went on, had still upon him the touch of family tradition, which may become either offensive pride or defensive self-respect. With the Cure, Ferrol was not quite so successful. The ascetic, prudent priest, with that instinctive, long-sighted accuracy which belongs to the narrow-minded, scented difficulty. He disliked the English exceedingly; and all Irishmen were English men to him. He resisted Ferrol's blarney. His thin lips tightened, his narrow forehead seemed to grow narrower, and his very cassock appeared to contract austerely on his figure as he talked to the refugee of misfortune.

When the most pardonable of gossips, the Regimental Surgeon, asked him on his way home what he thought of Ferrol, he shrugged his shoulders, tightened his lips again, and said:

"A polite, designing heretic."

The Regimental Surgeon, though a Frenchman, had once belonged to a British battery of artillery stationed at Quebec, and there he had acquired an admiration for the English, which betrayed itself in his curious attempts to imitate Anglo-Saxon bluffness and blunt spontaneity. When the Cure had gone, he flung back his shoulders, with a laugh, as he had seen the major-general do at the officers' mess at the citadel, and said in English:

"Heretics are damn' funny. I will go and call. I have also some Irish whiskey. He will like that; and pipes--pipes, plenty of them!"

The pipe he was smoking at the moment had been given to him by the major-general, and he polished the silver ferrule, with its honourable inscription, every morning of his life.

On the morning of the second day after Ferrol came, he was carried off to the Manor Casimbault to see the painful alterations which were being made there under the direction of Madame Lavilette. Sophie, who had a good deal of natural taste, had in the old days fought against her mother's incongruous ideas, and once, when the rehabilitation of the Manor Casimbault came up, she had made a protest; but it was unavailing, and it was her last effort. The Manor Casimbault was destined to be an example

of ancient dignity and modern bad taste. Alterations were going on as Madame Lavilette, Ferrol and Christine entered.

For some time Ferrol watched the proceedings with a casual eye, but presently he begged his hostess that she would leave the tall, old oak clock where it was in the big hall, and that the new, platter-faced office clock, intended for its substitute, be hung up in the kitchen. He eyed the well-scraped over-mantel askance and saw, with scarcely concealed astonishment, a fine, old, carved wooden seat carried out of doors to make room for an American rocking-chair. He turned his head away almost in anger when he saw that the beautiful brown wainscoting was being painted an ultra-marine blue. His partly disguised astonishment and dissent were not lost upon the crude but clever Christine. A new sense was opened up in her, and she felt somehow that the ultra-marine blue was not right, that the over-mantel had been spoiled, that the new walnut table was too noticeable, and that the American rocking-chair looked very common. Also she felt that the plush, with which her mother and the dressmaker at St. Croix had decorated her bodice, was not the thing. Presently this made her angry.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked a little maliciously, pointing to the rocking-chair in the salon.

"I prefer standing--with you," he answered, eyeing the chair with a sly twinkle.

"No, that isn't it," she rejoined sharply. "You don't like the chair." Then suddenly breaking into English--"Ah! I know, I know. You can't fool me. I see de leetla look in your eye; and you not like the paint, and you'd pitch that painter, Alcide, out into the snow if it is your house."

"I wouldn't, really," he answered--he coughed a little--"Alcide is doing his work very well. Couldn't you give me a coat of blue paint, too?"

The piquant, intelligent, fiery peasant face interested him. It had warmth, natural life and passion.

She flushed and stamped her foot, while he laughed heartily; and she was about to say something dangerous, when the laugh suddenly stopped and he began coughing. The paroxysm increased until he strained and caught at his breast with his hand. It seemed as if his chest and throat must burst.

She instantly changed. The flush of anger passed from her face, and something else came into it. She caught his hand.

"Oh! what can I do, what can I do to help you?" she asked pitifully. "I did not know you were so ill. Tell me, what can I do?"

He made a gentle, protesting motion of his free arm--he could not speak yet--while she held and clasped his other hand.

"It's the worst I ever had," he said, after a moment "the very worst!"

He sat down, and again he had a fit of coughing, and the sweat started out violently upon his forehead and cheek. When his head at last lay back against the chair, the paroxysm over, a little spot of blood showed and spread upon his white lips. With a pained, shuddering little gasp

she caught her handkerchief from her bosom, and, running one hand round his shoulder, quickly and gently caught away the spot of blood, and crumpled the handkerchief in her hand to hide it from him.

"Oh! poor fellow, poor fellow!" she said. "Oh! poor fellow!"

Her eyes filled with tears, and she looked at him with that look which is not the love of a woman for a man, or of a lover for a lover, but that latent spirit of care and motherhood which is in every woman who is more woman than man. For there are women who are more men than women.

For himself, a new fact struck home in him. For the first time since his illness he felt that he was doomed. That little spot of blood in the crumpled handkerchief which had flashed past his eye was the fatal message he had sought to elude for months past. A hopeless and ironical misery shot through him. But he had humour too, and, with the taste of the warm red drop in his mouth still, his tongue touched his lips swiftly, and one hand grasping the arm of the chair, and the fingers of the other dropping on the back of her hand lightly, he said in a quaint, ironical tone:

"Dead for a ducat!"

When he saw the look of horror in her face, his eyes lifted almost gaily to hers, as he continued:

"A little brandy, if you can get it, mademoiselle."

"Yes, yes. I'll get some for you--some whiskey!" she said, with frightened, terribly eager eyes.

"Alcide always has some. Don't stir. Sit just where you are." She ran out of the room swiftly--a light-footed, warm-spirited, dramatic little thing, set off so garishly in the bodice with the plush trimming; but she had a big heart, and the man knew it. It was the big-heartedness which was the touch of the man in her that made her companionable to him.

He said to himself when she left him:

"What cursed luck!" And after a pause, he added: "Good-hearted little body, how sorry she looked!" Then he settled back in his chair, his eyes fixed upon her as she entered the room, eager, pale and solicitous. A half-hour later they two were on their way to the farmhouse, the work of despoiling going on in the Manor behind them. Ferrol walked with an easy, half-languid step, even a gay sort of courage in his bearing. The liquor he had drunk brought the colour to his lips. They were now hot and red, and his eyes had a singular feverish brilliancy, in keeping with the hectic flush on his cheek. He had dismissed the subject of his illness almost immediately, and Christine's adaptable nature had instantly responded to his mood.

He asked her questions about the country-side, of their neighbours, of the way they lived, all in an easy, unintrusive way, winning her confidence and provoking her candour.

Two or three times, however, her face suddenly flushed with the memory of the scene in the Manor, and her first real awakening to her social insufficiency; for she of all the family had been least careful to see herself as others might see her. She was vain; she was somewhat of a

barbarian; she loved nobody and nobody's opinion as she loved herself and her own opinion. Though, if any people really cared for her, and she for them, they were the Regimental Surgeon and Shangois the notary.

Once, as they walked on, she turned and looked back at the Manor House, but only for an instant. He caught the glance, and said:

"You'll like to live there, won't you?"

"I don't know," she answered almost sharply. "But if the Casimbaults liked it, I don't see why we shouldn't."

There was a challenge in her voice, defiance in the little toss of her head. He liked her spirit in spite of the vanity. Her vanity did not concern him greatly; for, after all, what was he doing here? Merely filling in dark days, living a sober-coloured game out. He had one solitary hundred dollars--no more; and half of that he had borrowed, and half of it he got from selling his shooting-traps and his hunting-watch. He might worry along on that till the end of the game; but he had no money to send his sister in that secluded village two hundred miles away. She had never known how really poor he was; and she had lived in her simple way without want and without any unusual anxiety, save for his health. More than once he had practically starved himself to send money to her. Perhaps also he would have starved others for the same purpose.

"I'll warrant the Casimbaults never enjoyed the Manor as much as I've done that big kitchen in your house," he said, "and I can't see why you want to leave it. Don't you feel sorry you are going to leave the old place? Hadn't you got your own little spots there, and made friends with them? I feel as if I should like to sit down by the side of your big, warm chimney-corner, till the wind came along that blows out the candle."

"What do you mean by 'blowing out the candle'?" she asked.

"Well," he answered, "it means, shut up shop, drop the curtain, or anything you like. It means X Y Z and the grand finale!"

"Oh!" she said, with a little start, as the thing dawned upon her. "Don't speak like that; you're not going to die."

"Give me your handkerchief," he answered. "Give it to me, and I'll tell you--how soon."

She jammed her hand down in her pocket. "No, I won't," she answered. "I won't!"

She never did, and he liked her none the less for that. Somehow, up to this time, he had always thought that he would get well, and to-morrow he would probably think so again; but just for the moment he felt the real truth.

Presently she said (they spoke in French):

"Why is it you like our old kitchen so much? It isn't nearly as nice as the parlour."

"Well, it's a place to live in, anyhow; and I fancy you all feel more at home there than anywhere else."

"I feel just as much at home in the parlour as there," she retorted.

"Oh, no, I think not. The room one lives in the most is the room for any one's money."

She looked at him in a puzzled way. Too many sensations were being born in her all at once; but she did recognise that he was not trying to subtract anything from the pomp of the Lavillettes.

He belonged to a world that she did not know--and yet he was so perfectly at home with her, so idly easygoing.

"Did you ever live in a castle?" she asked eagerly. "Yes," he said, with a dry little laugh. Then, after a moment, with the half-abstracted manner of a man who is recalling a long-forgotten scene, he added: "I lived in the North Tower, looking out on Farcalladen Moor. When I wasn't riding to the hounds myself I could see them crossing to or from the meet. The River Stavely ran between; and just under the window of the North Tower is the prettiest copse you ever saw. That was from one side of the tower. From the other side you looked into the court-yard. As a boy, I liked the court-yard just as well as the moor; for the pigeons, the sparrows, the horses and the dogs were all there. As a man, I liked the moor better. Well, I had jolly good times in Castle Stavely--once upon a time." "Yet, you like our kitchen!" she again urged, in a maze of wonderment.

"I like everything here," he answered; "everything--everything, you understand!" he said, looking meaningly into her eyes.

"Then you'll like the wedding--Sophie's wedding," she answered, in a little confusion.

A half-hour later, he said much the same sort of thing to Sophie, with the same look in his eyes, and only the general purpose, in either case, of being on easy terms with them.

CHAPTER IV

The day of the wedding there was a gay procession through the parish of the friends and constituents of Magon Farcinelle. When they came to his home he joined them, and marched at the head of the procession as had done many a forefather of his, with ribbons on his hat and others at his button-hole. After stopping for exchange of courtesies at several houses in the parish, the procession came to the homestead of the Lavillettes, and the crowd were now enough excited to forget the pride which had repelled and offended them for many years.

Monsieur Lavillette made a polite speech, sending round cider and "white wine" (as native whiskey was called) when he had finished. Later, Nicolas furnished some good brandy, and Farcinelle sent more. A good number of people had come out of curiosity to see what manner of man the Englishman was, well prepared to resent his overbearing snobbishness--they were inclined to believe every Englishman snobbish. But Ferrol was so entirely affable, and he drank so freely with everyone that came to say "A votre sante, M'sieu' le Baron," and kept such a steady head in spite of all those quantities of white wine, brandy and cider, that they

were almost ready to carry him on their shoulders; though, with their racial prejudice, they would probably have repented of that indiscretion on the morrow.

Presently, dancing began in a paddock just across the road from the house; and when Madame Lavilette saw that Mr. Ferrol gave such undisguised countenance to the primitive rejoicings, she encouraged the revellers and enlarged her hospitality, sending down hampers of eatables. She preened with pleasure when she saw Ferrol walking up and down in very confidential conversation with Christine. If she had been really observant she would have seen that Ferrol's tendency was towards an appearance of confidential friendliness with almost everybody. Great ideas had entered Madame's head, but they were vaguely defining themselves in Christine's mind also. Where might not this friendship with Ferrol lead her?

Something occurred in the midst of the dancing which gave a new turn to affairs. In one of the pauses a song came monotonously lilting down the street; yet it was not a song, it was only a sort of humming or chanting. Immediately there was a clapping of hands, a flutter of female voices, and delighted exclamations of children.

"Oh, it's a dancing bear, it's a dancing bear!" they cried.

"Is it Pito?" asked one.

"Is it Adrienne?" cried another.

"But no; I'll bet it's Victor!" exclaimed a third. As the man and the bear came nearer, they saw it was neither of these. The man's voice was not unpleasant; it had a rolling, crooning sort of sound, a little weird, as though he had lived where men see few of their kind and have much to do with animals.

He was bearded, but young; his hair grew low on his forehead, and, although it was summer time, a fur cap was set far back, like a fez, upon his black curly hair. His forehead was corrugated, like that of a man of sixty who had lived a hard life; his eyes were small, black and piercing. He wore a thick, short coat, a red sash about his waist, a blue flannel shirt, and a loose red scarf, like a handkerchief, at his throat. His feet were bare, and his trousers were rolled half way up to his knee. In one hand he carried a short pole with a steel pike in it, in the other a rope fastened to a ring in the bear's nose.

The bear, a huge brown animal, upright on his hind legs, was dancing sideways along the road, keeping time to the lazy notes of his leader's voice.

In front of the Hotel France they halted, and the bear danced round and round in a ring, his eyes rolling savagely, his head shaking from side to side in a bad-tempered way.

Suddenly some one cried out: "It's Vanne Castine! It's Vanne!"

People crowded nearer: there was a flurry of exclamations, and then Christine took a few steps forward where she could see the man's face, and as swiftly drew back into the crowd, pale and distraite.

The man watched her until she drew away behind a group, which was

composed of Ferrol, her brother and her sister Sophie. He dropped no note of his song, and the bear kept jiggling on. Children and elders threw coppers, which he picked up, with a little nod of his head, a malicious sort of smile on his lips. He kept a vigilant eye on the bear, however, and his pole was pointed constantly towards it. After about five minutes of this entertainment he moved along up the road. He spoke no word to anybody though there were some cries of greeting, but passed on, still singing the monotonous song, followed by a crowd of children. Presently he turned a corner, and was lost to sight. For a moment longer the lullaby floated across the garden and the green fields, then the cornet and the concertina began again, and Ferrol turned towards Christine.

He had seen her paleness and her look of consternation, had observed the sulky, penetrating look of the bear-leader's eye, and he knew that he was stumbling upon a story. Her eye met his, then swiftly turned away. When her look came to his face again it was filled with defiant laughter, and a hot brilliancy showed where the paleness had been.

"Will you dance with me?" Ferrol asked.

"Dance with you here?" she responded incredulously.

"Yes, just here," he said, with a dry little laugh, as he ran his arm round her waist and drew her out upon the green.

"And who is Vanne Castine?" he asked as they swung away in time with the music.

The rest stopped dancing when they saw these two appear in the ring-through curiosity or through courtesy.

She did not answer immediately. They danced a little longer, then he said:

"An old friend, eh?"

After a moment, with a masked defiance still, and a hard laugh, she answered in English, though his question had been in French:

"De frien' of an ol frien'."

"You seem to be strangers now," he suggested. She did not answer at all, but suddenly stopped dancing, saying: "I'm tired."

The dance went on without them. Sophie and Farcinelle presently withdrew also. In five minutes the crowd had scattered, and the Lavillettes and Mr. Ferrol returned to the house.

Meanwhile, as they passed up the street, the droning, vibrating voice of the bear-leader came floating along the air and through the voices of the crowd like the thread of motive in the movement of an opera.

CHAPTER V

That night, while gaiety and feasting went on at the Lavillettes', there

was another sort of feasting under way at the house of Shangois, the notary.

On one side of a tiny fire in the chimney, over which hung a little black kettle, sat Shangois and Vanne Castine. Castine was blowing clouds of smoke from his pipe, and Shangois was pouring some tea leaves into a little tin pot, humming to himself snatches of an old song as he did so:

"What shall we do when the King comes home?
What shall we do when he rides along
With his slaves of Greece and his serfs of Rome?
What shall we sing for a song--
When the King comes home?"

"What shall we do when the King comes home?
What shall we do when he speaks so fair?
Shall we give him the house with the silver dome
And the maid with the crimson hair
When the King comes home?"

A long, heavy sigh filled the room, but it was not the breath of Vanne Castine. The sound came from the corner where the huge brown bear huddled in savage ease. When it stirred, as if in response to Shangois's song, the chains rattled. He was fastened by two chains to a staple driven into the foundation timbers of the house. Castine's bear might easily be allowed too much liberty!

Once he had killed a man in the open street of the City of Quebec, and once also he had nearly killed Castine. They had had a fight and struggle, out of which the man came with a lacerated chest; but since that time he had become the master of the bear. It feared him; yet, as he travelled with it, he scarcely ever took his eyes off it, and he never trusted it. That was why, although Michael was always near him, sleeping or waking, he kept him chained at night.

As Shangois sang, Castine's brow knotted and twitched and his hand clinched on his pipe with a sudden ferocity.

"Name of a black cat, what do you sing that song for, notary?" he broke out peevishly. "Nose of a little god, are you making fun of me?"

Shangois handed him some tea. "There's no one to laugh--why should I make fun of you?" he asked, jeeringly, in English, for his English was almost as good as his French, save in the turn of certain idioms. "Come, my little punchinello, tell me, now, why have you come back?"

Castine laughed bitterly.

"Ha, ha, why do I come back? I'll tell you." He sucked at his pipe. "Bon'venture is a good place to come to--yes. I have been to Quebec, to St. John, to Fort Garry, to Detroit, up in Maine and down to New York. I have ride a horse in a circus, I have drive a horse and sleigh in a shanty, I have play in a brass band, I have drink whiskey every night for a month--enough whiskey. I have drink water every night for a year--it is not enough. I have learn how to speak English; I have lose all my money when I go to play a game of cards. I go back to de circus; de circus smash; I have no pay. I take dat damn bear Michael as my share--yes. I walk trough de State of New York, all trough de State of Maine to Quebec, all de leetla village, all de big city--yes. I learn dat damn

funny song to sing to Michael. Ha, why do I come to Bon'venture? What is there to Bon'venture? Ha! you ask that? I know and you know, M'sieu' Shangois. There is nosing like Bon'venture in all de worl'.

"What is it you would have? Do you want nice warm house in winter, plenty pork, molass', patat, leetla drop whiskey 'hind de door in de morning? Ha! you come to Bon'venture. Where else you fin' it? You want people say: 'How you do, Vanne Castine--how you are? Adieu, Vanne Castine; to see you again ver' happy, Vanne Castine.' Ha, that is what you get in Bon'venture. Who say 'God bless you' in New York! They say 'Damn you!--yes, I know.

"Where have you a church so warm, so ver' nice, and everybody say him mass and God-have-mercy? Where you fin' it like that leetla place on de hill in Bon'venture? Yes. There is anoser place in Bon'venture, ver' nice place--yes, ha! On de side of de hill. You have small-pox, scarlet fev', difthere; you get smash your head, you get break your leg, you fall down, you go to die. Ha, who is there in all de worl' like M'sieu' Vallier, the Cure? Who will say to you like him: 'Vanne Castine, you have break all de commandments: you have swear, you have steal, you have kill, you have drink. Ver' well, now, you will be sorry for dat, and say your prayer. Perhaps, after hunder fifty tousen' years of purgator', you will be forgive and go to Heaven. But first, when you die, we will put you way down in de leetla warm house in de ground, on de side of de hill, in de Parish of Bon'venture, because it is de only place for a gipsy like Vanne Castine.'

"You ask me--ah! I see you look at me, M'sieu' le Notaire, you look at me like a leetla dev'. You t'ink I come for somet'ing else"--his black eyes flashed under his brow, he shook his head, and his hands clinched--"You ask me why I come back? I come back because there is one thing I care for mos' in all de worl'. You t'ink I am happy to go about with a damn brown bear and dance trough de village? Moi?--no, no, no! What a Jack I look when I sing--ah, that fool's song all down de street! I come back for one thing only, M'sieu' Shangois.

"You know that night--ah, four, five years ago? You remember, M'sieu' Shangois? Ah! she was so beautiful, so sweet; her hair it fall down about her face, her eyes all black, her cheeks like the snow, her lips, her lips!--You rememb' her father curse me, tell me to go. Why? Because I have kill a man! Eh bien, what if I kill a man! He would have kill me: I do it to save myself. I say I am not guilty; but her father say I am a sc'undrel, and turn me out de house.

"De girl, Christine, she love me. Yes, she love Vanne Castine. She say to me, 'I will go with you. Go anywhere, and I will go!'

"It is night and it is all dark. I wait at de place, an' she come. We start to walk to Montreal. Ah! dat night, it is like fire in my heart. Well, a great storm come down, and we have to come back. We come to your house here, light a fire, and sit just in de spot where I am, one hour, two hour, three hour. Saprie, how I love her! She is in me like fire, like de wind and de sea. Well, I am happy like no other man. I sit here and look at her, and t'ink of to-morrow-for ever. She look at me; oh, de love of God, she look at me! So I kneel down on de floor here beside her and say, 'Who shall take you from me, Christine, my leetla Christine?'

"She look at me and say: 'Who shall take you from me, my big Vanne?'

"All at once the door open, and--"

"And a little black notary take her from you," said Shangois, dryly, and with a touch of malice also. "You, yes, you lawyer dev', you take her from me! You say to her it is wicked. You tell her how her father will weep and her mother's heart will break. You tell her how she will be ashamed', and a curse will fall on her. Then she begin to cry, for she is afraid. Ah, where is de wrong? I love her; I would go to marry her--but no, what is that to you! She turn on me and say, 'I will go back to my father.' And she go back. After that I try to see her; but she will not see me. Then I go away, and I am gone five years; yes."

Shangois came over, and with his thin beautiful hand (for despite the ill-kept finger nails, it was the one fine feature of his body-long, shapely, artistic) tapped Castine's knee.

"I did right to save Christine. She hates you now. If she had gone with you that night, do you suppose she would have been happy as your wife? No, she is not for Vanne Castine."

Suddenly Shangois's manner changed; he laid his hand upon the other's shoulder.

"My poor, wicked, good-for-nothing Vanne Castine, Christine Lavilette was not made for you. You are a poor vaurien, always a poor vaurien. I knew your father and your two grandfathers. They were all vauriens; all as handsome as you can think, and all died, not in their beds. Your grandfather killed a man, your father drank and killed a man. Your grandfather drove his wife to her grave, your father broke your mother's heart. Why should you break the heart of any girl in the world? Leave her alone. Is it love to a woman when you break all the commandments, and shame her and bring her down to where you are--a bad vaurien? When a man loves a woman with the true love, he will try to do good for her sake. Go back to that crazy New York--it is the place for you. Ma'm'selle Christine is not for you."

"Who is she for, m'sieu' le dev'?"

"Perhaps for the English Irishman," answered Shangois, in a low suggestive tone, as he dropped a little brandy in his tea with light fingers.

"Ah, sacre! we shall see. There is vaurien in her too," was the half-triumphant reply.

"There is more woman," retorted Shangois; "much more."

"We'll see about that, m'sieu'!" exclaimed Castine, as he turned towards the bear, which was clawing at his chain.

An hour later, a scene quite as important occurred at Lavilette's great farmhouse.

CHAPTER VI

It was about ten o'clock. Lights were burning in every window. At a

table in the dining-room sat Monsieur and Madame Lavilette, the father of Magon Farcinelle, and Shangois, the notary. The marriage contract was before them. They had reached a point of difficulty. Farcinelle was stipulating for five acres of river-land as another item in Sophie's dot.

The corners tightened around Madame's mouth. Lavilette scratched his head, so that the hair stood up like flying tassels of corn. The land in question lay next a portion of Farcinelle's own farm, with a river frontage. On it was a little house and shed, and no better garden-stuff grew in the parish than on this same five acres.

"But I do not own the land," said Lavilette. "You've got a mortgage on it," answered Farcinelle. "Foreclose it."

"Suppose I did foreclose; you couldn't put the land in the marriage contract until it was mine."

The notary shrugged his shoulder ironically, and dropped his chin in his hand as he furtively eyed the two men. Farcinelle was ready for the emergency. He turned to Shangois.

"I've got everything ready for the foreclosure," said he. "Couldn't it be done to-night, Shangois?"

"Hardly to-night. You might foreclose, but the property couldn't be Monsieur Lavilette's until it is duly sold under the mortgage."

"Here, I'll tell you what can be done," said Farcinelle. "You can put the mortgage in the contract as her dot, and, name of a little man! I'll foreclose it, I can tell you. Come, now, Lavilette, is it a bargain?" Shangois sat back in his chair, the fingers of both hands drumming on the table before him, his head twisted a little to one side. His little reflective eyes sparkled with malicious interest, and his little voice said, as though he were speaking to himself:

"Excuse, but the land belongs to the young Vanne Castine--eh?"

"That's it," exclaimed Farcinelle.

"Well, why not give the poor vaurien a chance to take up the mortgage?"

"Why, he hasn't paid the interest in five years!" said Lavilette.

"But--ah--you have had the use of the land, I think, monsieur. That should meet the interest." Lavilette scowled a little; Farcinelle grunted and laughed.

"How can I give him a chance to pay the mortgage?" said Lavilette. "He never had a penny. Besides, he hasn't been seen for five years."

A faint smile passed over Shangois's face. "Yesterday," he said, "he had not been seen for five years, but to-day he is in Bonaventure."

"The devil!" said Lavilette, dropping a fist on the table, and staring at the notary; for he was not present in the afternoon when Castine passed by.

"What difference does that make?" snarled Farcinelle. "I'll bet he's got nothing more than what he went away with, and that wasn't a sou

markee!"

A provoking smile flickered at the corners of Shangois's mouth, and he said, with a dry inflection, as he dipped and redipped his quill pen in the inkhorn:

"He has a bear, my friends, which dances very well." Farcinelle guffawed. "St. Mary!" said he, slapping his leg, "we'll have the bear at the wedding, and I'll have that farm of Vanne Castine's. What does he want of a farm? He's got a bear. Come, is it a bargain? Am I to have the mortgage? If you don't stick it in, I'll not let my boy marry your girl, Lavilette. There, now, that's my last word."

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, nor his wife, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is his," said the notary, abstractedly, drawing the picture of a fat Jew on the paper before him.

The irony was lost upon his hearers. Madame Lavilette had been thinking, however, and she saw further than her husband.

"It amounts to the same thing," she said. "You see it doesn't go away from Sophie; so let him have it, Louis."

"All right," responded monsieur at last, "Sophie gets the acres and the house in her dot."

"You won't give young Vanne Castine a chance?" asked the notary. "The mortgage is for four hundred dollars and the place is worth seven hundred!"

No one replied. "Very well, my Israelites," added Shangois, bending over the contract.

An hour later, Nicolas Lavilette was in the big storeroom of the farmhouse, which was reached by a covered passage from the hall between the kitchen and the dining-room. In his off-hand way he was getting out some flour, dried fruit and preserves for the cook, who stood near as he loaded up her arms. He laughingly thrust a string of green peppers under her chin, and added a couple of sprigs of summer-savoury, then suddenly turned round, with a start, for a peculiar low whistle came to him through the half-open window. It was followed by heavy stertorous breathing.

He turned back again to the cook, gaily took her by the shoulders, and pushed her to the door. Closing it behind her, he shot the bolt and ran back to the window. As he did so, a hand appeared on the windowsill, and a face followed the hand.

"Ha! Nicolas Lavilette, is that you? So, you know my leetla whistle again!"

Nicolas's brow darkened. In old days he and this same Vanne Castine had been in many a scrape together, and Vanne, the elder, had always borne the responsibility of their adventures. Nicolas had had enough of those old days; other ambitions and habits governed him now. He was not exactly the man to go back on a friend, but Castine no longer had any particular claims to friendship. The last time he had heard Vanne's whistle was a night five years before, when they both joined a gang of river-drivers, and made a raid on some sham American speculators and

surveyors and labourers, who were exploiting an oil-well on the property of the old seigneur. The two had come out of the melee with bruised heads, and Vanne with a bullet in his calf. But soon afterwards came Christine's elopement with Vanne, of which no one knew save her father, Nicolas, Shangois and Vanne himself. That ended their compact, and, after a bitter quarrel, they had parted and had never met nor seen each other till this very afternoon.

"Yes, I know your whistle all right," answered Nicolas, with a twist of the shoulder.

"Aren't you going to shake hands?" asked Castine, with a sort of sneer on his face.

Nicolas thrust his hands down in his pockets. "I'm not so glad to see you as all that," he answered, with a contemptuous laugh.

The black eyes of the bear-leader were alive with anger.

"You're a damn' fool, Nic Lavilette. You think because I lead a bear--eh? Pshaw! you shall see. I am nothing, eh? I am to walk on! Nic Lavilette, once he steal the Cure's pig and--"

"See you there, Castine, I've had enough of that," was the half-angry, half-amused interruption. "What are you after here?"

"What was I after five years ago?" was the meaning reply.

Lavilette's face suddenly flushed with fury. He gripped the window with both hands, and made as if he would leap out; but beside Castine's face there appeared another, with glaring eyes, red tongue, white vicious teeth, and two huge claws which dropped on the ledge of the window in much the same way as did Lavilette's.

There was a moment's silence as the man and the beast looked at each other, and then Castine began laughing in a low, sneering sort of way.

"I'll shoot the beast, and I'll break your neck if ever I see you on this farm again," said Lavilette, with wild anger.

"Break my neck--that's all right; but shoot this leetla Michael! When you do that you will not have to wait for a British bullet to kill you. I will do it with a knife--just where you can hear it sing under your ear!"

"British bullet!" said Lavilette, excitedly; "what about a British bullet--eh--what?"

"Only that the Rebellion's coming quick now," answered Castine, his manner changing, and a look of cunning crossing his face. "You've given your name to the great Papineau, and I am here, as you see."

"You--you--what have you got to do with the Revolution? with Papineau?"

"Pah! do you think a Lavilette is the only patriot! Papineau is my friend, and--"

"Your friend--"

"My friend. I am carrying his message all through the parishes. Bon'venture is the last--almost. The great General Papineau sends you a word, Nic Lavilette--here."

He drew from his pocket a letter and handed it over. Lavilette tore it open. It was a captain's commission for M. Nicolas Lavilette, with a call for money and a company of men and horses.

"Maybe there's a leetla noose hanging from the tail of that, but then--it is the glory--eh? Captain Lavilette--eh?" There was covert malice in Castine's voice. "If the English whip us, they won't shoot us like grand seigneurs, they will hang us like dogs."

Lavilette scarcely noticed the sneer. He was seeing visions of a captain's sword and epaulettes, and planning to get men, money and horses together--for this matter had been brooding for nearly a year, and he had been the active leader in Bonaventure.

"We've been near a hundred years, we Frenchmen, eating dirt in the country we owned from the start; and I'd rather die fighting to get back the old citadel than live with the English heel on my nose," said Lavilette, with a play-acting attempt at oratory.

"Yes, an' dey call us Johnny Pea-soups," said Castine, with a furtive grin. "An' perhaps that British Colborne will hang us to our barn doors--eh?"

There was silence for a moment, in which Lavilette read the letter over again with gloating eyes. Presently Castine started and looked round.

"What's that?" he said in a whisper. "I heard nothing."

"I heard the feet of a man--yes."

They both stood moveless, listening. There was no sound; but, at the same time, the Hon. Mr. Ferrol had the secret of the Rebellion in his hands.

A moment later Castine and his bear were out in the road. Lavilette leaned out of the window and mused. Castine's words of a few moments before came to him:

"That British Colborne will hang us to our barn doors--eh?"

He shuddered, and struck a light.

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Ferrol slept in the large guest-chamber of the house. Above it was Christine's bedroom. Thick as were the timbers and boards of the floor, Christine could hear one sound, painfully monotonous and frequent, coming from his room the whole night--the hacking, rending cough which she had heard so often since he came. The fear of Vanne Castine, the memories of the wild, half animal-like love she had had for him in the old days, the excitement of the new events which had come into her life; these kept her awake, and she tossed and turned in feverish unrest. All that had

happened since Ferrol had arrived, every word that he had spoken, every motion that he had made, every look of his face, she recalled vividly. All that he was, which was different from the people she had known, she magnified, so that to her he had a distant, overwhelming sort of grandeur. She beat the bedclothes in her restlessness. Suddenly she sat up straight in bed.

"Oh, if I hadn't been a Lavilette! If I'd only been born and brought up with the sort of people he comes from, I'd not have been ashamed of myself or him of me."

The plush bodice she had worn that day danced before her eyes. She knew how horribly ugly it was. Her fingers ran over the patchwork quilt on her bed; and although she could not see it, she loathed it, because she knew it was a painful mess of colours. With a little touch of dramatic extravagance, she leaned over and down, and drew her fingers contemptuously along the rag-carpet on the floor. Then she cried a little hysterically:

"He never saw anything like that before. How he must laugh as he sits there in that room!"

As if in reply, the hacking cough came faintly through the time-worn floor.

"That cough's going to kill him, to kill him," she said.

Then, with a little start and with a sort of cry, which she stopped by putting both hands over her mouth, she said to herself, brokenly:

"Why shouldn't he--why shouldn't he love me! I could take care of him; I could nurse him; I could wait on him; I could be better to him than any one else in the world. And it wouldn't make any difference to him at all in the end. He's going to die before long--I know it. Well, what does it matter what becomes of me afterwards? I should have had him; I should have loved him; he should have been mine for a little while anyway. I'd be good to him; oh, I'd be good to him! Who else is there? He'll get worse and worse; and what will any of the fine ladies do for him then, I'd like to know. Why aren't they here? Why isn't he with them? He's poor--Nic says so--and they're rich. Why don't they help him? I would. I'd give him my last penny and the last drop of blood in my heart. What do they know about love?"

Her little teeth clinched, she shook her brown hair back in a sort of fury.

"What do they know about love? What would they do for it? I'd have my fingers chopped off one by one for it. I'd break every one of the ten commandments for it. I'd lose my soul for it.

"I've got twenty times as much heart as any one of them, I don't care who they are. I'd lie for him; I'd steal for him; I'd kill for him. I'd watch everything that he says, and I'd say it as he says it. I'd be angry when he was angry, miserable when he was miserable, happy when he was happy. Vanne Castine--what was he! What was it that made me care for him then? And now--now he travels with a bear, and they toss coppers to him; a beggar, a tramp--a dirty, lazy tramp! He hates me, I know--or else he loves me, and that's worse. And I'm afraid of him; I know I'm afraid of him. Oh, how will it all end? I know there's going to be

trouble. I could see it in Vanne's face. But I don't care, I don't care, if Mr. Ferrol--"

The cough came droning through the floor.

"If he'd only--ah! I'd do anything for him, anything; anybody would. I saw Sophie look at him as she never looked at Magon. If she did-- if she dared to care for him--"

All at once she shivered as if with shame and fright, drew the bedclothes about her head, and burst into a fit of weeping. When it passed, she lay still and nerveless between the coarse sheets, and sank into a deep sleep just as the dawn crept through the cracks of the blind.

CHAPTER VIII

The weeks went by. Sophie had become the wife of the member for the country, and had instantly settled down to a quiet life. This was disconcerting to Madame Lavilette, who had hoped that out of Farcinelle's official position she might reap some praise and pence of ambition. Meanwhile, Ferrol became more and more a cherished and important figure in the Manor Casimbault, where the Lavillettes had made their home soon after the wedding. The old farmhouse had also secretly become a rendezvous for the mysterious Nicolas Lavilette and his rebel comrades. This was known to Mr. Ferrol. One evening he stopped Nic as he was leaving the house, and said:

"See, Nic, my boy, what's up? I know a thing or so--what's the use of playing peek-a-boo?"

"What do you know, Ferrol?"

"What's between you and Vanne Castine, for instance. Come, now, own up and tell me all about it. I'm British; but I'm Nic Lavilette's friend anyhow."

He insinuated into his tone that little touch of brogue which he used when particularly persuasive. Nic put out his hand with a burst of good-natured frankness.

"Meet me in the store-room of the old farmhouse at nine o'clock, and I'll tell you. Here's a key." Handing over the key, he grasped Ferrol's hand with an effusive confidence, and hurried out. Nic Lavilette was now an important person in his own sight and in the sight of others in Bonaventure. In him the pomp of his family took an individual form.

Earlier than the appointed time, Ferrol turned the key and stepped inside the big despoiled hallway of the old farmhouse. His footsteps sounded hollow in the empty rooms. Already dust had gathered, and an air of desertion and decay filled the place in spite of the solid timbers and sound floors and window-sills. He took out his watch; it was ten minutes to nine. Passing through the little hallway to the store-room, he opened the door. It was dark inside. Striking a match, he saw a candle on the window-sill, and, going to it, he lighted it with a flint and steel lying near. The window was shut tight. From curiosity only he tried to open the shutter, but it was immovable. Looking round, he saw another candle

on the window-sill opposite. He lighted it also, and mechanically tried to force the shutters of the window, but they were tight also.

Going to the door, which opened into the farmyard, he found it securely fastened. Although he turned the lock, the door would not open.

Presently his attention was drawn by the glitter of something upon one of the crosspieces of timber halfway up the wall. Going over, he examined it, and found it to be a broken bayonet--left there by a careless rebel. Placing the steel again upon the ledge, he began walking up and down thoughtfully.

Presently he was seized with a fit of coughing. The paroxysm lasted a minute or more, and he placed his arm upon the window-sill, leaning his head upon it. Presently, as the paroxysm lessened, he thought he heard the click of a lock. He raised his head, but his eyes were misty, and, seeing nothing, he leaned his head on his arm again.

Suddenly he felt something near him. He swung round swiftly, and saw Vanne Castine's bear not fifteen-feet away from him! It raised itself on its hind legs, its red eyes rolling, and started towards him. He picked up the candle from the window-sill, threw it in the animal's face, and dashed towards the door.

It was locked. He swung round. The huge beast, with a loud snarl, was coming down upon him.

Here he was, shut within four solid walls, with a wild beast hungry for his life. All his instincts were alive. He had little hope of saving himself, but he was determined to do what lay in his power.

His first impulse was to blow out the other candle. That would leave him in the dark, and it struck him that his advantage would be greater if there were no light. He came straight towards the bear, then suddenly made a swift movement to the left, trusting to his greater quickness of movement. The bear was nearly as quick as he, and as he dashed along the wall towards the candle, he could hear its breath just behind him.

As he passed the window, he caught the candle in his hands, and was about to throw it on the floor or in the bear's face, when he remembered that, in the dark, the bear's sense of smell would be as effective as eyesight, while he himself would be no better off.

He ran suddenly to the centre of the room, the candle still in his hand, and turned to meet his foe. It came savagely at him. He dodged, ran past it, turned, doubled on it, and dodged again. A half-dozen times this was repeated, the candle still flaring. It could not last long. The bear was enraged. Its movements became swifter, its vicious teeth and lips were covered with froth, which dripped to the floor, and sometimes splattered Ferrol's clothes as he ran past. No matador ever played with the horns of a mad bull as Ferrol played his deadly game with Michael, the dancing bear. His breath was becoming shorter and shorter; he had a stifling sensation, a terrible tightness across his chest. He did not cough, however, but once or twice he tasted warm drops of his heart's blood in his mouth. Once he drew the back of his hand across his lips mechanically, and a red stain showed upon it.

In his boyhood and early manhood he had been a good sportsman; had been quick of eye, swift of foot, and fearless. But what could fearlessness

avail him in this strait? With the best of rifles he would have felt himself at a disadvantage. He was certain his time had come; and with that conviction upon him, the terror of the thing and the horrible physical shrinking almost passed away from him. The disease, eating away his life, had diminished that revolt against death which is in the healthy flesh of every man. He was levying upon the vital forces remaining in him, which, distributed naturally, might cover a year or so, to give him here and now a few moments of unnatural strength for the completion of a hopeless struggle.

It was also as if two brains in him were working: one busy with all the chances and details of his wild contest, the other with the events of his life.

Pictures flashed before him. Some having to do with the earliest days of his childhood; some with fighting on the Danube, before he left the army, impoverished and ashamed; some with idle hours in the North Tower in Stavely Castle; and one with the day he and his sister left the old castle, never to return, and looked back upon it from the top of Farcalladen Moor, waving a "God bless you" to it. The thought of his sister filled him with a desire, a pitiful desire to live.

Just then another picture flashed before his eyes. It was he himself, riding the mad stallion, Bolingbroke, the first year he followed the hounds: how the brute tried to smash his leg against a stone wall; how it reared until it almost toppled over and backwards; how it jibbed at a gate, and nearly dashed its own brains out against a tree; and how, after an hour's hard fighting, he made it take the stiffest fence and water-course in the county.

This thought gave him courage now. He suddenly remembered the broken bayonet upon the ledge against the wall. If he could reach it there might be a chance--chance to strike one blow for life. As his eye glanced towards the wall he saw the steel flash in the light of the candle.

The bear was between him and it. He made a feint towards the left, then as quickly to the right. But doing so, he slipped and fell. The candle dropped to the floor and went out. With a lightning-like instinct of self-preservation he swung over upon his face just as the bear, in its wild rush, passed over his head. He remembered afterwards the odour of the hot, rank body, and the sprawling huge feet and claws. Scrambling to his feet swiftly, he ran to the wall. Fortune was with him. His hand almost instantly clutched the broken bayonet. He whipped out his handkerchief, tore the scarf from his neck, and wound them around his hand, that the broken bayonet should not tear the flesh as he fought for his life; then, seizing it, he stood waiting for the bear to come on. His body was bent forwards, his eyes straining into the dark, his hot face dripping, dripping sweat, his breath coming hard and laboured from his throat.

For a minute there was absolute silence, save for the breathing of the man and the savage panting of the beast. Presently he felt exactly where the bear was, and listened intently. He knew that it was now but a question of minutes, perhaps seconds. Suddenly it occurred to him that if he could but climb upon the ledge where the bayonet had been, there might be safety. Yet again, in getting up, the bear might seize him, and there would be an end to all immediately. It was worth trying, however.

Two things happened at that moment to prevent the trial: the sound of knocking on a door somewhere, and the roaring rush of the bear upon him. He sprang to one side, striking at the beast as he did so. The bayonet went in and out again. There came voices from the outside; evidently somebody was trying to get in.

The bear roared again and came on. It was all a blind man's game. But his scent, like the animal's, was keen. He had taken off his coat, and he now swung it out before him in a half-circle, and as it struck the bear it covered his own position. He swung aside once more and drove his arm into the dark. The bayonet struck the nose of the beast.

Now there was a knocking and a hammering at the window, and the wrenching of the shutters. He gathered himself together for the next assault. Suddenly he felt that every particle of strength had gone out of him. He pulled himself up with a last effort. His legs would not support him; he shivered and swayed. God, would they never get that window open!

His senses were abnormally acute. Another sound attracted him: the opening of the door, and a voice--Vanne Castine's--calling to the bear.

His heart seemed to give a leap, then slowly to roll over with a thud, and he fell to the floor as the bear lunged forwards upon him.

A minute afterwards Vanne Castine was goading the savage beast through the door and out to the hallway into the yard as Nic swung through the open window into the room.

Castine's lantern stood in the middle of the floor, and between it and the window lay Ferrol, the broken bayonet still clutched in his right hand. Lavilette dropped on his knees beside him and felt his heart. It was beating, but the shirt and the waistcoat were dripping with blood where the bear had set its claws and teeth in the shoulder of its victim.

An hour later Nic Lavilette stood outside the door of Ferrol's bedroom in the Manor Casimbault, talking to the Regimental Surgeon, as Christine, pale and wildeyed, came running towards them.

CHAPTER IX

"Is he dead? is he dead?" she asked distractedly. "I've just come from the village. Why didn't you send for me? Tell me, is he dead? Oh, tell me at once!"

She caught the Regimental Surgeon's arm. He looked down at her, over his glasses, benignly, for she had always been a favourite of his, and answered:

"Alive, alive, my dear. Bad rip in the shoulder--worn out--weak--shattered--but good for a while yet--yes, yes--certainement!"

With a wayward impulse, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the cheek. The embrace disarranged his glasses and flushed his face like a schoolgirl's, but his eyes were full of embarrassed delight.

"There, there," he said, "we'll take care of him--!" Then suddenly he

paused, for the real significance of her action dawned upon him.

"Dear me," he said in disturbed meditation; "dear me!"

She suddenly opened the bedroom door and went in, followed by Nic. The Regimental Surgeon dropped his mouth and cheeks in his hand reflectively, his eyes showing quaintly and quizzically above the glasses and his fingers.

"Well, well! Well, well!" he said, as if he had encountered a difficulty. "It--it will never be possible. He would not marry her," he added, and then, turning, went abstractedly down the stairs.

Ferrol was in a deep sleep when Christine and her brother entered the chamber. Her face turned still more pale when she saw him, flushed, and became pale again. There were leaden hollows round his eyes, and his hair was matted with perspiration. Yet he was handsome--and helpless. Her eyes filled with tears. She turned her head away from her brother and went softly to the window, but not before she had touched the pale hand that lay nerveless upon the coverlet.

"It's not feverish," she said to Nic, as if in necessary explanation of the act.

She stood at the window for a moment, looking out, then said:

"Come here, Nic, and tell me all about it."

He told her all he knew: how he had come to the old house by appointment with Ferrol; had tried to get into the store-room; had found the doors bolted; had heard the noise of a wild animal inside; had run out, tried a window, at last wrenched it open and found Ferrol in a dead faint. He went to the table and brought back the broken bayonet.

"That's all he had to fight with," he said. "Fire of a little hell, but he had grit--after all!"

"That's all he had to fight with!" she repeated, as she untwisted the handkerchief from the hilt end. "Why did you say he had true grit--'after all'? What do you mean by that 'after all'?"

"Well, you don't expect much from a man with only one lung--eh?"

"Courage isn't in the lungs," she answered. Then she added: "Go and fetch me a bottle of brandy--I'm going to bathe his hands and feet in brandy and hot water as soon as he's awake."

"Better let mother do that, hadn't you?" he asked rather hesitatingly, as he moved towards the door.

Her eyes snapped fire. "Nic--mon Dieu, hear the nice Nic!" she said. "The dear Nic, who went in swimming with--"

She said no more, for he had no desire to listen to an account of his misdeeds, which were not a few,--and Christine had a galling tongue.

When the door was shut she went to the bed, sat down on a chair beside it, and looked at Ferrol earnestly and sadly.

"My dear! my dear, dear, dear!" she said in a whisper, "you look so handsome and so kind as you lie there--like no man I ever saw in my life. Who'd have fought as you fought--and nearly dead! Who'd have had brains enough to know just what to do! My darling, that never said 'my darling' to me, nor heard me call you so. Suppose you haven't a dollar, not a cent, in the world, and suppose you'll never earn a dollar or a cent in the world, what difference does that make to me? I could earn it; and I'd give more for a touch of your finger than a thousand dollars; and more for a month with you than for a lifetime with the richest man in the world. You never looked cross at me, or at any one, and you never say an unkind thing, and you never find fault when you suffer so. You never hurt any one, I know. You never hurt Vanne Castine--"

Her fingers twitched in her lap, and then clasped very tight, as she went on:

"You never hurt him, and yet he's tried to kill you in the most awful way. Perhaps you'll die now--perhaps you'll die to-night--but no, no, you shall not!" she cried in sudden fright and eagerness, as she got up and leaned over him. "You shall not die; you shall live--for a while--oh! yes, for a while yet," she added, with a pitiful yearning in her voice; "just for a little while--till you love me, and tell me so! Oh, how could that devil try to kill you!"

She suddenly drew herself up.

"I'll kill him and his bear too--now, now, while you lie there sleeping. And when you wake I'll tell you what I've done, and you'll--you'll love me then, and tell me so, perhaps. Yes, yes, I'll--"

She said no more, for her brother entered with the brandy.

"Put it there," she said, pointing to the table. "You watch him till I come. I'll be back in an hour; and then, when he wakes, we'll bathe him in the hot water and brandy."

"Who told you about hot water and brandy?" he asked her, curiously.

She did not answer him, but passed through the door and down the hall till she came to Nic's bedroom; she went in, took a pair of pistols from the wall, examined them, found they were fully loaded, and hurried from the room.

About a half-hour later she appeared before the house which once had belonged to Vanne Castine. The mortgage had been foreclosed, and the place had passed into the hands of Sophie and Magon Farcinelle; but Castine had taken up his abode in the house a few days before, and defied anyone to put him out.

A light was burning in the kitchen of the house. There were no curtains to the window, but an old coat had been hung up to serve the purpose, and light shone between a sleeve of it and the window-sill. Putting her face close to the window, the girl could see the bear in the corner, clawing at its chain and tossing its head from side to side, still panting and angry from the fight.

Now and again, also, it licked the bayonet-wound between its shoulders, and rubbed its lacerated nose on its paw. Castine was mixing some tar and oil in a pan by the fire, to apply to the still bleeding wounds of

his Michael. He had an ugly grin on his face.

He was dressed just as in the first day he appeared in the village, even to the fur cap; and presently, as he turned round, he began to sing the monotonous measure to which the bear had danced. It had at once a soothing effect upon the beast.

After he had gone from the store-room, leaving Ferrol dead, as he thought, it was this song alone which had saved himself from peril; for the beast was wild from pain, fury and the taste of blood. As soon as they had cleared the farmyard, he had begun this song, and the bear, cowed at first by the thrusts of its master's pike, quieted to the well-known ditty.

He approached the bear now, and, stooping, put some of the tar and oil upon its nose. It sniffed and rubbed off the salve, but he put more on; then he rubbed it into the wound of the breast. Once the animal made a fierce snap at his shoulder, but he deftly avoided it, gave it a thrust with a sharp-pointed stick, and began the song again. Presently he rose and came towards the fire.

As he did so he heard the door open. Turning round quickly, he saw Christine standing just inside. She had a shawl thrown round her, and one hand was thrust in the pocket of her dress. She looked from him to the bear, then back again to him.

He did not realise why she had come. For a moment, in his excited state, he almost thought she had come because she loved him. He had seen her twice since his return; but each time she would say nothing to him further than that she wished not to meet or to speak to him at all. He had pleaded with her, had grown angry, and she had left him. Who could tell--perhaps she had come to him now as she had come to him in the old days. He dropped the pan of tar and oil. "Chris!" he said, and started forward to her.

At that moment the bear, as if it knew the girl's mission, sprang forward, with a growl. Its huge mouth was open, and all its fierce lust for killing showed again in its wild lunges. Castine turned, with an oath, and thrust the steel-set pike into its leg. It cowered at the voice and the punishment for an instant, but came on again.

Castine saw the girl raise a pistol and fire at the beast. He was so dumfounded that at first he did not move. Then he saw her raise another pistol. The wounded bear lunged heavily on its chain--once--twice--in a devilish rage, and as Christine prepared to fire, snapped the staple loose and sprang forward.

At the same moment Castine threw himself in front of the girl, and caught the onward rush. Calling the beast by its name, he grappled with it. They were man and servant no longer, but two animals fighting for their lives. Castine drew out his knife, as the bear, raised on its hind legs, crushed him in its immense arms, and still calling, half crazily, "Michael! Michael! down, Michael!" he plunged the knife twice in the beast's side.

The bear's teeth fastened in his shoulder; the horrible pressure of its arms was turning his face black; he felt death coming, when another pistol shot rang out close to his own head, and his breath suddenly came back. He staggered to the wall, and then came to the floor in a heap as

the bear lurched downwards and fell over on its side, dead.

Christine had come to kill the beast and, perhaps, the man. The man had saved her life, and now she had saved his; and together they had killed the bear which had maltreated Tom Ferrol.

Castine's eyes were fixed on the dead beast. Everything was gone from him now--even the way to his meagre livelihood; and the cause of it all, as he in his blind, unnatural way thought, was this girl before him--this girl and her people. Her back was towards the door. Anger and passion were both at work in him at once.

"Chris," he said, "Chris, let's call it even-eh? Let's make it up. Chris, ma cherie, don't you remember when we used to meet, and was fond of each other? Let's make it up and leave here--now--to-night-eh?"

"I'm not so poor, after all. I'll be paid by Papineau, the leader of the Rebellion--" He made a couple of unsteady steps towards her, for he was weak yet. "What's the good--you're bound to come to me in the end! You've got the same kind of feelings in you; you've--"

She had stood still at first, dazed by his words; but she grew angry quickly, and was about to speak as she felt, when he went on:

"Stay here now with me. Don't go back. Don't you remember Shangois's house? Don't you remember that night--that night when--ah! Chris, stay here--"

Her face was flaming. "I'd rather stay in a room full of wild beasts like that"--she pointed to the bear" than be with you one minute--you murderer!" she said, with choking anger.

He started towards her, saying:

"By the blood of Joseph! but you'll stay just the same; and--"

He got no further, for she threw the pistol in his face with all her might. It struck between his eyes with a thud, and he staggered back, blind, bleeding and faint, as she threw open the door and sped away in the darkness.

Reaching the Manor safely, she ran up to her room, arranged her hair, washed her hands, and came again to Ferrol's bedroom. Knocking softly she was admitted by Nic. There was an unnatural brightness in her eyes. "Where've you been?" he asked, for he noticed this. "What've you been doing?"

"I've killed the bear that tried to kill him," she answered.

She spoke louder than she meant. Her voice awakened Ferrol.

"Eh, what?" he said, "killed the bear, mademoiselle,--my dear friend," he added, "killed the bear!" He coughed a little, and a twinge of pain crossed over his face.

She nodded, and her face was alight with pleasure. She lifted up his head and gave him a little drink of brandy. His fingers closed on hers that held the glass. His touch thrilled her.

"That's good, that's easier," he remarked.

"We're going to bathe you in brandy and hot water, now--Nic and I," she said.

"Bathe me! Bathe me!" he said, in amused consternation.

"Hands and feet," Nic explained.

A few minutes later as she lifted up his head, her face was very near him; her breath was in his face. Her eyes half closed, her fingers trembled. He suddenly drew her to him and kissed her. She looked round swiftly, but her brother had not noticed.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Illusive hopes and irresponsible deceptions
She lacked sense a little and sensitiveness much
To be popular is not necessarily to be contemptible
Who say 'God bless you', in New York! they say 'Damn you!'

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